Tracts written to influence public opinion could have been published as soon as reading became a common accomplishment. They were certainly circulating in the time of Saint Paul, who is still the most widely read of pamphleteers. Since then the economics of pamphlet publishing have changed more slowly than is generally realized. Pamphlets have always had to be produced about as cheaply as today's magazines in order to spread a message widely. Under Augustus scribes already could turn out short works in editions of a thousand in a fortnight or so, which seems to compare not unfavorably with the speed of printing with movable type a millennium and a half later. In 1505 at Florence printers of Savonarola's sermons contracted to strike off a minimum of one sheet printed on both sides (almanco uno foglo intero, or eight octavo leaves) in a thousand copies each working day. The slowness of the payments seems to show, however, that the printers could not maintain this speed. For small editions of short works, indeed, scribes had the edge over printers, since they could go into production with less preparation and less overhead. Where scribes were strongly organized and had built up a big stockpile of manuscripts, as in mediæval Paris, their competition actually retarded the introduction of printing.

Since scribes were able to supply a sizeable reading public the invention of printing cannot be a major reason why Savonarola's and Luther's utterances made such a wide and lasting impression compared with the homilies of other vernacular preachers who swarmed in the century or so before them. These earlier reformers may have moved men only briefly and locally because their sermons reached readers without effective illustrations. While words can be written almost as accurately as dictation is heard, pictures, or even diagrams, are deformed after a few copyings by hand. It was for this reason that Pliny said in his Botany that he would describe plants in such detail as to make illustrations unnecessary. Illustration by hand, moreover, was too slow and costly to help the early pamphleteers.

The first tract printed with a picture portended a change as deep as did the first cannon shot. Picture-printing made it possible to reproduce an illustration indefinitely and identically. It enabled the pamphleteer to drive home his invective with telling draughtsmanship and helped him to project his message across countries and centuries to people who hardly read his language. The political power of pictures can be realized by imagining the Daily Worker without its biting cartoons, or the British press without Low's graphic commentaries. Illustrations helped to give Savonarola's and Luther's tracts such force of persuasion among towns-men—sensitized to art by a familiarity denied to peasants—that the ensuing uproar broke western Christendom asunder. It remains to be seen if broadcasting and the atom bomb, the last inventions of the unnamed age that has just ended, will, in the long run, prove more unsettling than printing and gunpowder, the last inventions of the Middle Ages.

Though Savonarola did not live in Florence until he was thirty, preached there for barely thirteen years, and published for only eight, his awareness of the arts as a political force helped him to make an impact on the city almost as deep as Dante's. Even if he had not sensed the power of printed pictures he probably would have used the press, for priests and nuns had printed and published in Florence almost since printing was introduced there, eleven years or so before he first arrived. But he could have profited by so brief a chance to fasten his hold on that center of the Renaissance only by being
an instigator of the arts in general and of book illustration in particular. He started publishing at a happy moment, for his first dated tract appeared in 1491, a year or so after the first book illustrated with a Florentine woodcut had marked the turn in Florence from costly, limited, and occasional illustration by engravings to the inexpensive mass production of woodcuts.

Savonarola’s subtle understanding of art appears in many things that he said. Long before Morelli and Berenson, with the aid of modern photography, had popularized the idea of an artist’s style as a personal unity Savonarola realized that “Every painter portrays himself. When he makes images of lions, horses, men and women, he portrays himself, not as a man, but as a painter. However varied his works, each one is stamped by his thought.” He showed his awareness of the healthy emotional release that comes from making a work of art by urging some Sienese nuns to illuminate manuscripts and the friars of his monastery of San Marco to work as architects, sculptors, and painters. The ten artists, among them Fra Bartolommeo, who became monks in San Marco during Savonarola’s brief ascendency were drawn there by his rare understanding of their problems. So
great was his hold over artists that the shock of his execution stopped Fra Bartolommeo from painting for several years. It was not to destroy art, but to magnetize it toward salvation, that Savonarola’s famous carnival bonfires of vanities were heaped with everything from false hair and ivory chessmen to the worldly pictures of Botticelli.

When he preached on the Art of Dying in 1496 Savonarola gave specific instructions for using pictures to a good purpose. The contemporary edition is illustrated with three woodcuts: Death offering a man the choice between Heaven and Hell, Death knocking at a sick man’s chamber door, and Death claiming the dying man as he makes a last grasp at salvation. The woodcuts of the pamphlet are drawn to the reformer’s specifications to serve as patterns for campaign posters. A good Christian, Savonarola says, should have each of these subjects painted on a paper. “Keep the paper in thy chamber where it be before thine eyes, though not so constantly that seeing it becomes a habit and ceases to move thee. Look closely on this picture to dwell with death; look where thou wouldst go: Up, to Heaven? Or down, to Hell?”

During the decade after he started to publish in Florence, Florentine book illustrations show Savonarola’s commanding presence as plainly as his disciple Botticelli’s, impossible though it is to document a direct connection of either man with the woodcutters. The partnership of preacher and painter needlel the Florentine woodcuts of the 1490’s with a young poignancy that is never again so intense in all printmaking. These wonderful illustrations helped to speed Savonarola’s tracts to reprints in Venice, France, the Netherlands, and widely in Germany. They traveled so fast that his exposition of Psalm 51, “Have mercy on me, O God,” appeared in Latin and German at Alost, Augsburg, Magdeburg, and Nuremberg a year or two after he wrote it in Florence.

Luther said nothing so subtle as Savonarola on the arts, but he regularly used them as weapons for attack. He anticipated the Jesuits in his campaign methods of driving home the word of God “by singing and speaking, rhyming and preaching, writing and reading, painting and drawing.” Many of his letters and
Woodcuts from the “Antithesis figurata vitæ Christi et Anthichristi,” Wittenberg, (1521). Left, the title page. Right, the Fall of the Papacy. Attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder. Rogers Fund, 1919
publications show his grasp of the value of book illustrations for persuasion. While translating the Bible into German he sketched the furnishings of Solomon's Temple on the margins of his manuscript and scribbled indications for the illustrator. He even supervised the drawing of the woodcuts to make sure that the artist confined himself to illustrating the text with literal simplicity and with no "schmiren" of any "unnutz Ding." He composed an allegorical frontispiece to set forth the gist of one of his pamphlets, and once sent a friend a woodcut of a satirical coat-of-arms for the Pope, saying "I drew this, or had it drawn for me." Even in the thick of his enormous activity he wrote, "I wish I had time to direct the printers' use of illustrations, type, ink and paper."

Luther probably supervised the illustration of the little picture book *Antithesis of Christ and Antichrist*, printed at Wittenberg in 1521, for he wrote that the woodcuts made "the book good for laymen." The success of these cuts, which are attributed to the leading local painter, Lucas Cranach the Elder, must have been in Luther's mind a year or so later when he established a press in Wittenberg to publish the good word, for he chose Cranach to run the press in partnership with a goldsmith (goldsmiths often cut type or woodblocks). Luther evidently regarded the painter as more important than the goldsmith, for he constantly wrote to his secretary "have Lucas print this on his press, which is idle," or "ask my Lucas to send a hundred copies."

Not only did Luther find eager readers for a hundred and twenty separate tracts written in one year, but the Wittenberg presses turned out at least twelve hundred editions of his works during his lifetime—about a third of the total German production of Reformation tracts. It
Savonarola writing in his cell in San Marco. Woodcut from his “Semplicita della vita christiana,” Florence, Morgiani for Pacini, 31 October, 1496. Dick Fund, 1925

Savonarola preaching in the cathedral of Florence. Woodcut from “Compendio di revelatione,” Florence, Pacini, 23 April, 1496. Dick Fund, 1925
has been estimated that in spite of the sweeping powers of censorship given to the Church by the Diet of Worms, in 1521, Germany printed twelve times more books in 1523 than ten years before. Since three quarters of this huge increase was Lutheran, printers demanded a subsidy for printing anything against the Reformation. Woodcuts certainly played a part in creating such a voracity for pamphlets that the Germans, according to Erasmus, bought only Lutheran books, and in France the Sorbonne, in 1523, petitioned the king to forbid the diabolical art of printing altogether.

The resemblance in format and layout of Savonarola’s and Luther’s tracts is too striking to be accidental. Either the Italian tracts were familiar enough in Germany to serve as models, or the reformers hit on similar means because both addressed themselves to middle-class city dwellers. Savonarola and Luther, or their printers, knew the basic requirements for getting publications into the hands of busy readers. Their pamphlets measure about the size of Reader’s Digest or Coronet and fit as readily into a pocket. Both display the title plainly on the cover, though with one characteristic difference: Luther’s titles ramble down most of the page in several sizes of black letter, for he wrote, as he spoke, in torrents; while Savonarola stated his case in a line or two of plain Roman. He said that “writing is one thing and preaching quite another”; the preacher must expand to allow for the congregation’s daydreaming or forgetting, while the writer can condense for rereading.

Both reformers enlivened their title pages, and sometimes their back covers, with striking woodcuts. The reappearance of the woodcuts on various works served to advertise the series, like a distinctive cover on a magazine. When anyone saw a familiar cut on a bookstall across the street, or sticking out of a man’s pocket, or in the hand of some reader in a tavern or on muleback, he knew that the latest by the Frate or Luther had been put on sale.

The subjects of the woodcuts display differences as characteristic as the typography of the titles. Luther, the rough and ready challenger, decorated his pamphlets with rich borders that often had no connection with the contents—or even with a Christian subject. In the illustrations his raging satire proclaimed his aim as total war for the extinction of the Papacy, root and branch. Savonarola’s covers show an earnest woodcut that is eloquent but never satirical. He said that “books should be inexpensive and printed [not written] without illuminations, silken ties, gilt leaves or other decoration. Let them be correct, but not ornate.” There could be no better description of the sober elegance and the striking restraint of the Florentine press during its great decade.

Savonarola’s cover picture often shows the various ways he chose to give his message to mankind. In one woodcut he is talking with quiet, human concentration to a group of nuns. Savonarola and Luther, or their printers, knew the basic requirements for getting publications into the hands of busy readers. Their pamphlets measure about the size of Reader’s Digest or Coronet and fit as readily into a pocket. Both display the title plainly on the cover, though with one characteristic difference: Luther’s titles ramble down most of the page in several sizes of black letter, for he wrote, as he spoke, in torrents; while Savonarola stated his case in a line or two of plain Roman. He said that “writing is one thing and preaching quite another”; the preacher must expand to allow for the congregation’s daydreaming or forgetting, while the writer can condense for rereading.

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