The Crisis Media Plan: A.D. 1625

A multinational organization must address crisis with a powerful media plan. The Catholic Church knew this fact 400 years ago as it waged the Counter-Reformation against Protestantism.

An international organization of enormous power finds its historic dominance threatened. Widely accused of complacency, arrogance, and corruption, the organization is losing the trust and relevance it has treasured since its inception. A communications plan is ordered that will crystallize the organization’s positive message and transmit it to the public. Media produced by the greatest creative talent will carry the message, using groundbreaking visuals that will captivate and amaze viewers.

The organization’s goals are uncompromising: halt the gains of its competition; continue the acquisition of wealth; uphold its political influence; and secure the loyalty and very souls of people around the world.

This appears to be another mass media power play, a phenomenon repeatedly seen and analyzed over recent decades. New media projecting heightened realism aptly describes virtual reality and interactive technologies. A global quest for allegiance conjures Orwellian visions of subliminal messaging and thought control. But what has been presented above is not a twenty-first-century media onslaught amalgamating electronic and digital systems with behavioral science. This campaign occurred 400 years ago.

During The Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestantism assaulted the Catholic Church’s religious, political, and cultural supremacy. Acting as today’s corporations or governments do in crisis, the Catholic Church fought to regain public favor. Echoing contemporary practice, the Church crafted a communications plan, a media outreach to mold
popular opinion, disseminate messages, and win back “share,” its claim of the populace. A corporation wants customers. Elected officials want votes. The Catholic Church sought the devout, the share it was losing as Protestantism swept Europe. The Church of four centuries past subscribed to a modern crisis methodology defined by PR professor and executive Kurt Stocker as “the preparation and applications of strategies and tactics that can prevent or modify the impact of major events on the company or organization” (189).

Reaffirming its long-standing identification through aesthetics, the Catholic Church developed the most powerful media of the day to carry its counter-message to Protestantism: Baroque art, a dynamic visual movement encompassing painting, sculpture, and architecture. Well in advance of McLuhan’s declaration “The Medium is the Message,” Baroque in its very construct symbolized the Catholic Church’s power, mysticism, opulence, and certitude of righteousness. Baroque was grandiose. It was enthralling. It was the heart of a calculated, heavily funded media plan.

1. The Media Plan: Lasswell’s Model, Borne of Twentieth-Century Warfare, Applicable to the War that was The Counter-Reformation

Organizations seeking public change through communications follow a process. For over 50 years, Lasswell’s Model has stood as a media structure identifying the steps in creating, transmitting, and receiving mass communication. Harold D. Lasswell was a political scientist known for analysis of wartime mass communications. His 1927 book, Propaganda and the World War, assessed the messaging and images that shaped public opinion during the First World War. In 1933, soon after the Nazi ascendency, he produced The Psychology of Hitlerism, cited by Arnold Rogow as “the best short psychological treatment of Nazism that has ever been
published” (134). Lasswell’s scholarship in politics and communications continued to be valued during the Second World War and the Cold War.

Lasswell’s Model is a string of questions, the answer to each a crucial link in the communications chain:

- **Who?** The sender, the originator of the communication.
- **Says what?** The sender’s message, the communication’s content.
- **In which channel?** The means of transmitting the message, the chosen media.
- **To whom?** The audience receiving the communication.
- **With what effect?** Reaction and consequence regarding the audience’s intake of the communication (Underwood, screen 1).

Lasswell’s Model serves both as a template for communicators formulating a media effort and as a deductive system for researchers assessing communication that has already occurred, much as Lasswell himself dissected the seminal propaganda of the First World War a decade after the conflict. To Harold D. Lasswell and those who have accepted and built on his teachings, communications must follow the model. The Catholic Church’s campaign of Baroque art did.

2. **Who Says What: The Catholic Church Responds to The Reformation with the Council of Trent, Crafting a Message and a Media Plan**

   In 1517, German friar Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses, a list of criticisms against the religion he served, the Roman Catholic Church. This marked the beginning of The Reformation, the Protestant revolt against the orthodoxy, centralization, and methods of Catholicism. Money was basic to the controversy as Luther’s theses condemned indulgences, payments to the Church that substituted for penance, a lucrative income considered by the
masses to be “insurance on salvation” (Simon 36). The Ninety-Five Theses went public during
an indulgence jubilee raising funds for the construction of St. Peter’s basilica.

Factions organized within the Church had called for reforms as well. Attracting clerical and
secular dignitaries over the years, the conciliar movement had convened meetings only to be
thwarted by the threatened papacy. However, as Protestantism took root in Germany and
Northern Europe in the 1500s, a new conclave was demanded of the Church to clarify dogma
and institute true change. The reform-minded Pope Paul III issued a Bull of Convocation in
1542, summoning attendees to a location negotiated with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V:
the city of Trent in northern Italy.

War between Charles V and Francis I of France delayed the first Council meeting until
1545. Two decades ensued, producing three assemblies of the Council punctuated by papal
suspensions of the proceedings and the intrigues of European rulers. While there was hope in
some quarters that the Council of Trent would reconcile Catholic and Protestant theologies, the
assemblies instead certified existing Catholic belief, “[...] in clear and authoritative statements
that put clear water between the Catholic and the new Protestant Churches” (Mullett, par. 5).

The Council of Trent did achieve reform including controlling the sale of indulgences,
improving theological education, and demanding actual residency and greater participation from
bishops in their dioceses. Other developments were far less liberal. The Church refused to reduce
the number of sacraments as proposed in the teachings of Luther. The Index of Prohibited Books
was expanded and reinforced. Also ensuring the gulf between Catholicism and Protestantism was
a stronger papacy realized in the control that the concluding pontiff, Pius IV, exerted over the
proceedings (Burns 55).
Ultimately, the Council was creating a message. In The Counter Reformation, Edward McNall Burns describes the spirit of Trent as “autocracy, repression, and domination” (56). Along with its assertion of a powerful pope and unbending doctrine, the Council of Trent confirmed a media plan to carry its message, a preferred channel which itself was a source of conflict with Protestants: art.

3. In Which Channel: Art is Reaffirmed as the Church’s Means of Messaging, Leading to Counter-Reformation Baroque

Art was a tangible, emotional division in Catholic and Protestant thinking. Many Protestant factions denounced the Church’s artwork as idolatry, a totemic substitution for God. Catholic houses of worship in Protestant areas were ransacked, with stained glass windows and statues destroyed. Even pipe organs were pulled out when austere Protestants struck the musical as well as the visual trappings of the Catholic Church (Chadwick 438, 439). In addition, the hated indulgences had financed the ornate and ostentatious from the Vatican to parish churches—another negative linkage to art.

However, the Catholic Church’s use of art was not merely for the purpose of aesthetics or self-glorification. Early in its history, the Church realized a fundamental fact about its constituents: most were illiterate. Art was the means to communicate religious lessons and Church ideals to the population who could not read. In this, Catholicism practiced the very modern concept of understanding a target audience and determining the channel—the medium or media—that would best reach them.

Less than 200 years after the fall of the Roman Empire, an early pope, St. Gregory the Great, voiced the Catholic Church’s art mandate: “What books are to those who can read, that is
a picture to the ignorant who look at it; in a picture even the unlearned may see what example
they should follow; in a picture they who know no letters may yet read” (qtd. in Fortescue,
screen 1).

4. The Counter-Reformation Validation of Art: The Twenty-Fifth Session of the Council of Trent

The Twenty-Fifth Session of the Council of Trent was held at the very end of the
proceedings, December, 1563. The Church’s closing pronouncements included On Sacred
Images, articulating the position regarding art:

The holy council commands all bishops and others who hold the office of teaching
[…] above all instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and
invocation of the saints, the veneration of relics, and the legitimate use of images
[…] Moreover, let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the
mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the
people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne
in mind and constantly reflected upon […] so that they may give God thanks for
those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be
moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety […] (qtd. in Council of Trent and
Religious Art)

Art’s benefit to the illiterate was restated along with the admonishment that pictures
themselves were not divine but merely a means to worship the divine. High moral standards were
to be maintained in Church art, a temperament that would lead to clothes being painted onto
Michelangelo’s nudes in the Sistine Chapel:
And if at times it happens, when this is beneficial to the illiterate, that the stories and narratives of the Holy Scriptures are portrayed and exhibited, the people should be instructed that not for that reason is the divinity represented in picture as if it can be seen with bodily eyes or expressed in colors or figures. Furthermore, in the invocation of the saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, all superstition shall be removed, all filthy quest for gain eliminated, and all lasciviousness avoided […]
(qtd. in Council of Trent and Religious Art)

Clerical supervision and central control would dictate Church art with a chain of command leading straight to Rome:

But if any doubtful or grave abuse is to be eradicated, or if indeed any graver question concerning these matters should arise, the bishop, before he settles the controversy, shall await the decision of the metropolitan and of the bishops of the province in a provincial synod; so, however, that nothing new or anything that has not hitherto been in use in the Church, shall be decided upon without having first consulted the most holy Roman pontiff. (qtd. in Council of Trent and Religious Art)

The plan was clear: art would be used in its historic role to impart Church teachings to the masses under strict guidelines and the ultimate authority of the pope. As it did with Trent’s other major canons and decrees, the Catholic Church accentuated the divide with Protestantism when it reaffirmed art as its means of communication. A new art movement would evolve to fulfill this commitment.
5. Defining Baroque

Illusion can be defined as the appearance of reality created from the unreal. Media of the past century constitute a progress of illusion, the increasing manufacture of reality from unreal elements to draw the audience into a pre-arranged world. Thomas Edison’s 1903 film *The Great Train Robbery* took theatergoers to the still-existent Wild West where an outlaw fired a six-shooter in their collective face. Radio dropped a virtual Blitz into American living rooms as Edward R. Murrow announced “This is London” with bomb and siren accompaniment. Today, computer technology challenges viewers to determine what is real and is not, from the charging dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*, to the televisions-turned-cockpits of PlayStation 2.

Modern media’s arsenal has spanned celluloid to pixels. The imaging tools of the Counter-Reformation were canvas, paint, stone, and metal. Still, the illusions were no less enveloping for audiences of the era. In *Baroque and Rococo*, A.C. Sewter summarizes: “Illusion, whether at the service of theatrical sense of decoration, or of religious emotion, is an essential element of the Baroque style” (31).

The word “baroque” is derived from a Portuguese term for a large, irregularly shaped pearl. “Large” became “grandiose” and “irregular” became “grotesque” as harsher synonyms arose for Baroque in the years following its peak. The Baroque is big, overwhelming, designed for impact. The movement encompasses painting, sculpture, and architecture, and has musical and literary exponents as well. In visual expression, Baroque’s illusory power comes from key techniques that convey the vaults of heaven, the darkness of the damned, and placement of the everyman at ground-zero in the battle between good and evil.
Baroque works present a scene to be absorbed in its entirety. Individual characters and elements are not visually isolated; they are devoted to a balanced, harmonious effect (West 253). Action is often poised at a decisive instant, a visual tension reminiscent of a modern freeze-frame. Fabric and flesh bunch in the pause, storing energy for imminent release. Motion and power come from the viewer’s sense of the picture’s inevitable outcome.

Tension is also created from contrast between light and dark. Chiaroscuro is shading through gradations from brightness to dimness. Baroque is known for a heightened version of this shading called tenebrism, which again suggests the presence of a modern technology—a klieg light casting an intense beam into the setting. With tenebrism’s radical shifts, dazzling sheens and dense shadows vividly alternate.

Perspective is aggressively manipulated to create drama and depth. Foreshortening, a condensed scale of proportion, deepens the sense of distance. Trompe l’oeil, “trick the eye” effects, create three-dimensionality particularly evident in wall and ceiling treatments that seem to stretch into the infinity of heaven.

Juxtaposed with Baroque’s exaggerative techniques is naturalism—human subjects given a rough and commonplace appearance. Knotted muscles, bulging veins, and furrowed skin are evident in naturalist depictions. Realistic characters “straight from the streets” (West 253) are thrust into the turbulence, the history, the divine occasion—another device to connect the viewer to the work.


At the dawn of the seventeenth century, the Baroque became the realization of the Council of Trent’s artistic decree. The driving factors were creative innovations that established
Baroque’s stylistic tenets and Church patronage that came from upper tiers of the Church hierarchy as well as their wealthy relatives and supporters.

Member of a prominent artistic family from Bologna, Annibale Carracci was a pioneer in Baroque’s illusory techniques and its commanding use in frescos and ceiling works. In 1595, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese summoned Carracci to Rome to decorate the galleries of the Farnese family palace. Carracci resurrected the images and heroes of the Greek myths, surrounding his characters with the painted illusion that the very architecture of the room was opening into a mythological world. Carracci’s painting also simulated picture frames, sculpture, and bronze ornamentation (Langdon 210, 211).

After his initial successes on the walls of the Farnese palace, Carracci turned to the ceiling with The Love of the Gods, depicting the interplay of earthly and heavenly love. Continuing the use of trompe l’oeil and a classical cast, Carracci’s overhead masterpiece has been compared to the tableaus of Raphael and Michelangelo (West 324).

The warmth of Carracci’s signature work contrasted with the starkness found in that of another pivotal Baroque artist, Michelango Merisi da Caravaggio. The extremes in Caravaggio’s painting reflect his personal life. He was known for violent behavior that included killing a tennis opponent over a disputed match score. Born in 1573, Caravaggio apprenticed in Milan and Rome. As an artist on his own in his twenties, he caught the eye of Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte.

Caravaggio was placed in residence at the Palazzo Madama where Cardinal Del Monte maintained a salon and gallery. Music, science, and the arts were celebrated and supported in the Cardinal’s world, giving Caravaggio valuable lessons and interactions (Langdon 97). Cardinal
Del Monte was an enthusiast of naturalistic painting as seen in Venetian works and Flemish landscapes (Langdon 103). Naturalism would be a Caravaggio trademark. Scientific study may have played a role in Caravaggio’s development, as biographer Helen Langdon cites Perspectivae, a treatise on perspective projection that was likely discussed at the Palazzo Madama (113, 114).

Caravaggio achieved his breakthrough with a commission to paint for San Luigi dei Francesi, an important church serving Rome’s French population. Caravaggio’s efforts would be devoted to the Contrarelli Chapel, painting scenes from the life of Saint Matthew. Before his death, Cardinal Contrarelli, the chapel benefactor, had left specific instructions on the eventual depiction of Matthew, his name saint (Langdon 170).

Caravaggio created a series of paintings for the Contrarelli Chapel: The Calling of Saint Francis, The Inspiration of Saint Francis, and The Martyrdom of Saint Francis. Tenebrism is potently employed, the rich colors and varied textures of subjects’ garments set off by the darkness that surrounds them. Naturalism empowers the message of Saint Francis’ martyrdom as Langdon likens Caravaggio’s treatment to a murder scene that might have been witnessed on the streets of Rome during the painter’s lifetime (177, 178).

Patronage was crucial to establishing Baroque as an artistic movement and a communication channel. The Catholic Church had one supreme patron: the pope, verified by the Council of Trent as the final authority on artistic matters. The Renaissance had seen a peak in papal dominion over the arts, not just in determining correctness, but also in stimulating output and dictating style. The pope during the emergence of Carracci and Caravaggio, Clement VIII, presided over a Roman milieu of “dull biblical scenes and personifications of the Virtùes”
Two decades later, the Catholic Church would have a leader who would secure the prominence of Baroque art.

7. The Barberini/Bernini Alliance

Papal biographer Christopher Hibbert calls Pope Urban VIII an impresario (107). Promoter, manager, sponsor: these equivalent terms describe the pontiff identified with Baroque’s maximum role in the Counter-Reformation. Urban VIII was born Maffeo Barberini to a wealthy family from Florence. Highly cultured, he wrote poetry in Italian, Latin, and Greek (Haskell 40). An admirer of science, he offered a pre-papacy defense of the controversial Galileo only to condemn the scientist during his reign, the reversal triggered by an insulting roman à clef treatment of Urban VIII in a Galileo-penned play (Hibbert 199).

As a cardinal, Barberini was confirmed a premier promulgator of Catholic doctrine when Pope Gregory XV named him to the newly institutionalized Sacred Congregation of Propaganda in 1622 (Benigni, screen 1). This papal office—whose term for “propagation” became historically synonymous with actions to sway public opinion—was charged with the spread of Catholicism.

In 1623, Barberini now Pope Urban VIII enacted nepotism in the time-honored tradition. His brother and nephews became assorted cardinals and royalty. Art patronage was due for a similar overhaul. In Patrons and Painters, Francis Haskell describes the patronage phenomenon that accompanied a pope’s election:

[...] new families moulded the patterns of art patronage. As successive popes came to the throne they surrounded themselves with a crowd of relatives, friends and clients who poured into Rome from all over Italy to seize the many lucrative posts
that changed with each change of government. These men at once began to build palaces, chapels and picture galleries. As patrons they were highly competitive, anxious to give expression to their riches and power as quickly as they could and also to discomfort their rivals. (4)

As the determiner of artistic taste, Urban VIII’s choice of artists carried enormous weight. One in particular held his favor, an extraordinary talent he had cultivated while still a cardinal: sculptor/architect/artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The son of a sculptor, Bernini was a child prodigy, deemed the future Michelangelo by Pope Paul V. The future pope Cardinal Barberini noted young Bernini’s genius as well, praising his talent in written verse, even assisting him in the carving of a statue of David. Barberini held a mirror to allow Bernini to emulate his own features in the statue’s face (Hibbert 108).

Urban VIII’s patronage made Bernini the premier artist in Rome, the personification of Baroque. The pinnacle of the Barberini/Bernini alliance is the Baldacchino, a massive canopy of bronze and gilt astride the high altar and tomb of Saint Peter. The monument stretches 100 feet into the dome of Saint Peter’s, its twisting columns the essence of Baroque’s illusion and movement. Angels, climbing plants, and bees—the symbol of the Barberini family—are integrated into the Baldacchino. Bernini required seven years and a team of assistants to complete the project.

To supply bronze for the Baldacchino, Urban VIII authorized the plunder of girders supporting the roof of the Pantheon. The pope’s physician accorded the audacious act with a wordplay: “Quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt barberini” ‘What the barbarians dared not do,
the Barberini have done’, noting that the Pantheon which had survived the fall of the Roman
Empire could not withstand the pontificate of Urban VIII (Hibbert 120).

Bernini’s work reached a more intimate, human level through his sculpted figures. The
Ecstasy of Saint Theresa is a multimedia melding of sculpture, architecture, and painting (Sewter
138). Placed in a columned altar in the Cornaro Chapel of the church Santa Maria della Vittoria,
the central sculpture depicts a noted religious experience of Saint Theresa, a Spanish Carmelite
nun whose visions and emotional seizures were considered contact with the divine (Burns 33).
The Complete Works of Saint Theresa chronicles such an encounter with a cherubic angel:

    In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a
    point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it
    penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out
    with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so
    sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness
    caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one’s soul
    be content with anything less than God. (qtd. in Burns 113)

Bernini captures Saint Theresa’s testimonial in white stone. The smiling angel hovers
above the nun with a slender, gold-tipped spear in his poised hand. Saint Theresa is sprawled on
a cloud, her robes draped over the heavenly surface, the garment’s undulations conveying a
trembling body and spirit. Saint Theresa’s face registers the simultaneous arrival of complete
pleasure and pain; many observers have drawn sexual connotations. Heaven’s light pours down
in golden shafts splayed above the figures.
Urban VIII’s death in 1644 did not stop Bernini’s high-level patronage. Successor popes Innocent X and Alexander VII sustained the master’s service to the Vatican (Duffy 185). Lavish fountains, papal tombs, the colonnade in the plaza outside Saint Peter’s, and the enshrined throne The Chair of Saint Peter highlighted Bernini’s production after Urban VIII. In total, Bernini’s career with the Church spanned half-a-century, solidifying Baroque’s primacy in seventeenth-century art.

8. To Whom: The Dissemination of Baroque Art

Rome was the heart of Catholicism, both politically and geographically. People safely in the fold saw the Baroque art that flooded the city. The true Counter-Reformation campaign for hearts and minds pressed outward across Europe. As the Church sought to broadcast its message, the communications channel that was Baroque art expanded. Baroque architecture and art spread northward from Italy to Austria and Southern Germany and eastward to Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary (Wright 238).

The Baroque art of the Counter-Reformation has been called as “the Jesuit Style” (de Lavergnee, par. 1). Among their considerable array of techniques to spur and secure Catholicism, the Jesuits—The Society of Jesus—applied the Church’s artistic mandate to its international efforts, visually adorning its churches in the Baroque. The pious Bernini attended Jesuit devotional exercises for four decades, indicative of the great influence the order had in his life and work (Fulop-Miller 423). Bernini’s affiliation with the Society of Jesus underscores the bond between Baroque, the designated media the fight against Protestantism, and the Jesuits, the order representing “the main instruments of the Counter-Reformation” (Pollen, screen 1).
Many authors have termed the Jesuits “shock troops” for the Church, dauntlessly pursuing the Vatican’s goals from the Protestant epicenter of Germany to the forbidding worlds of Asia and the Americas. The combat analogy originates from the history of Jesuit founder Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish officer who underwent a religious conversion while recovering from a battle-shattered leg. Ignatius transferred his militancy to his new calling, writing the *Spiritual Exercises*, an eventual manifesto for the highly disciplined Jesuit order. Ignatius recruited members to “the company of Jesus,” embracing reform, vows of poverty, and deep spirituality. Pope Paul III recognized and dispatched Ignatius’ Jesuits in 1540, two years before convening the Council of Trent.

René Fulop-Miller cites a Protestant pamphlet that complained how the Jesuits “attach themselves to persons of distinguished or humble position” (345). As agents of the Church, the Jesuits targeted a comprehensive spectrum of the European population. They served as confessors to royalty throughout Europe, ensuring their influence on government policies. They organized renowned schools and produced charitable works to benefit lower levels of society. Anchoring Jesuit activities were the Jesuit churches—sanctuaries, places of worship, broadcast centers for the visual message.

9. Il Gesù: The Model Jesuit Church

Fulop-Miller reinforces the importance of Baroque art to Jesuit churches:

The Society of Jesus, through its numerous building and painting commissions, as well as by its friendly relations with many great masters, has closely allied itself to the baroque and used this on every possible occasion in the service of the Counter-Reformation. Its intention was that people all over the world should, by magnificent...
churches, altars flooded with light, gilded sacred pictures, statues, confessionals and ceiling paintings with their perspectives reaching up towards heaven, be torn again and again from the sphere of everyday interests and directed toward things divine.

(425)

As it erected new churches and enacted the Church’s artistic mandate, the Jesuits relied on a model for its Counter-Reformation outposts: Il Gesù, the order’s central church in Rome. At close to 80, Michelangelo had solicited Ignatius of Loyola for the commission to design the Jesuits’ Roman center, but died before action could be taken (Fulop-Miller 422). The architect Vignola began Il Gesù in the 1560s, with work completed after his death by della Porta.

Clad in a somewhat restrained façade, Il Gesù invokes the grandeur and emotionalism of Baroque with its interior. Dramatic illumination creates a physical tenebrism from the filtered light in side chapels to the bright rays emitted from the cupola toward the high altar. Fulop-Miller describes the ability of Il Gesù’s interior to “throw the mind into a rapture of faith” (425). In sequencing shadow and luminance, Il Gesù embodies a key quality of Baroque and demonstrates the movement’s interconnection between architecture, sculpture, and painting.

A century after its construction, Il Gesù received frescos from artist Giovanni Battista Gaulli that furthered the illusionist effects of the interior. Painted and sculpted figures intermingle in scenes that migrate into the parishioners’ space, a stunning example of Baroque’s quest to draw in the viewer (de Lavergnee, par. 15).

10. With What Effect: The Symbiosis of Baroque and Its Society

Chesebro and Bertlesen assess communication technologies as “technocultural dramas,” the interaction of a technology and a culture “to create a system in which they mutually define
the nature of the human experience” (77). Maravall validates Baroque in the model of technocultural drama when he deems the movement “a concept of epoch that in principle extends to all the manifestations making up this epoch’s culture” (6).

The seventeenth century witnessed the beginnings of mass culture, with shifts toward urbanization and clustered populations. Maravall notes Europe’s demographic change and ties it to Baroque’s goal to move viewers, “making the spectators themselves participants in the work, which succeeded in making the spectators almost its accomplices” (75). Maravall designates the seventeenth century as the first era of the mass society and Baroque as “the first culture to make use of expedients to produce mass effects” (102). As the author confirms throughout The Culture of the Baroque, such expedients are the emotion-provoking and opinion-shaping components of Baroque art, establishing its historic role as communicative and persuasive media.

Contemporary accounts substantiate the purpose and impact of Baroque. Goethe observes in Italian Journey:

[Jesuit churches had] something great and complete about them [which secretly inspired all people with reverence]. As decoration, gold, silver, metal and polished stone are heaped up in such splendour and profusion that it must dazzle the devout of all classes. In places, there are even things in bad taste, which might be calculated to propitiate and attract humanity. This is, indeed, characteristic of the Catholic genius in the external service of God. (qtd. in Fulop-Miller 426)

Even the Catholic Church’s adversaries could absorb the Baroque effect. In Discourse of Rome, English Protestant Grey Brydges, 5th Lord Chandos, describes Catholic houses of worship:
Wherein is inserted all possible inventions, to catch mens affections, and to ravish their understanding: as first, the gloriousness of their Altars, infinit number of images, priestly ornaments, and divers actions they use in that service; besides the most excellent and exquisite Musicke of the world, that surpizes our eares. So that whatsoever can be imagined, to expresse either Solemnitie, or Devotion, is by them used (qtd. in Haskell 63).

11. Outcome of the Counter-Reformation; Assessment of The Catholic Church’s Crisis Media Plan

The conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism exceeded matters of faith and religious observance. Politics more than piety decided the Reformation’s outcome, securing the existence of Christianity’s new denominations and diminishing the power of the papacy.

In the mid 1500s, the Peace of Augsburg established a truce between the Protestant and Catholic states of Germany. By the early 1600s, conflict reignited as German Protestant states formed the Evangelical Union to address local Catholic militarism. States loyal to Rome responded with The German Catholic League. In 1618, Protestant nobles threw imperial administrators from castle windows—the Defenestration of Prague—and installed Frederick V as ruler of Bohemia in a break with Austria. This revolt brought Jesuit-educated Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand II into the fray, officially commencing the Thirty Years War.

After a series of gains by Ferdinand and his allies, Sweden’s Gustavus Adolphus joined the Protestant side to contain the Catholic Hapsburgs. The Hapsburgs also saw opposition from fellow Catholic power France, who assisted Sweden in a religiously contradictory but
strategically sensible move. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia declared the final demarcation between Catholic and Protestant Europe.

With the Vatican having urged a crusade to crush Protestantism, Pope Innocent X issued a bull that sought to “condemn, reprove, quash, and annul” the conciliatory treaty. European leaders ignored Innocent X’s denunciation (Duffy 183). Rulers on both sides of the schism were eager to reduce Vatican involvement with national affairs. Putting country before church, France’s Cardinal Richelieu summarized the Pope’s demotion to figurehead: “We must kiss his feet, and bind his hands” (Duffy 183).

The Catholic Church was autocratic in religious, political, and cultural matters. Despite instigating certain reforms, the Council of Trent communicated that there would be no deviation from existing Catholic precepts, no tolerance of Protestantism’s remake of Christianity. Given this message from the Church, Baroque art was a brilliant and accurate communication channel. It captured Catholic dogma and effectively transmitted it to the viewer. Baroque embodied the control of thought and action that the Vatican demanded.

In parallel, Protestantism harnessed a communication channel emblematic of its own core philosophies: print media. Austerity and decentralization were Protestant fundamentals. The output of the printing press matched these qualities, another technocultural drama as a communication technology and its society mirrored and shaped each other. The nascent information age thrived with the dissemination of works by Luther and other Protestant thinkers and the production of Bibles that transformed scripture from alien Latin to the people’s vernacular.
Baroque’s power and inventiveness are unquestionable. Centuries before multimedia presentation, virtual reality, and demographic analysis, Baroque unified artistic disciplines and converted two dimensions into three for the eyes of a carefully targeted and well-understood audience. Nevertheless, Baroque was at most a channel, a conduit for a message. The content and relevance of that message—the Catholic Church’s complex and unyielding definition of religious faith—comprise the ultimate issue. When populations rejected the Church’s message and sought a new spirituality, when rulers disregarded the message to maintain Europe’s balance of power, The Reformation gained and held ground.

As corporations, politicians, and other entities seeking public favor have learned in modern times, an expensive, exquisitely crafted media campaign is no guarantor of success. Less than a century after the Council of Trent, Protestantism was permanent and the Catholic Church’s European sphere was approximately halved, its political presence rolled back. Catholicism would still be a powerful influence in millions of lives. But the Vatican superstate—a continental nucleus of unchallengeable, absolute will—would become a church relic.
Works Cited


