

# Johannes Villicus, *Concerning the Source and Origin of Monks* (1545)

## Abstract

The broadsheet “On the Sources and Origin of Monks” highlights the importance and impact of pamphlet propaganda in the Age of Reform. This image from the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Younger addresses a common target of Protestant complaint, monks, who along with priests, drew particular attention from both the reformers and their propagandists. Monks emerge birthed from the excrement of the devil who sits upon a gallows. The accompanying text reinforces the connection between the devil and the monks as the devil gleefully admires the evil he has created in the monks and scatters them to do his bidding.

## Source



Concerning the Source and Origin of Monks

Pluto (the devil) bore a pregnancy with great discomfort

His gut was full of poisonous dung

When finally it poured out, erupting, his belly distended

It was not a load of a simple substance.

For, from his shredded anus, hooded brothers

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Sprung forth, diverse in vestment, color, disposition.

Pluto marveled at such a portent from his womb,

Marveled that he had begotten such evil:

And at the same time, inspecting his offspring with turned face

Common and unusual, his new progeny:

“I see that, truly not in vain, my innards

were stirred up with such torment a short while ago” he recalled

“Behold! I have given birth to an evil that supersedes in guilt the ghosts

And all whom the palace of the ruler of the Styx holds.

Alas for me if [they are] together in one order, at the same time

Let me divide them, I myself will expel them from my kingdoms.”

He said and, laughing, scattered onto all the planet

So many monks, the guilt and destruction of the world.

Translation: Christina Moss

Source: *De ortu et origine monachorum*, broadsheet with woodcut by the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Younger, text by Johannes Villicus, Wittenberg, c. 1545. Staatsbibliothek Berlin, YA 850kl

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