



## CHAPTER 1

# Propaganda Poisoning

Pope Gregory XV established a company of Cardinals in 1622, called “Sacra Congregatio de **propaganda** fide”.<sup>1</sup> Translated into English, this Latin phrase means “Sacred Congregation for **propagating** the faith”. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, propaganda served an evangelical purpose for the glory of God. Over time, its role shifted from propagating the truth about God to promoting a deceitful political agenda or biased point of view.

With life-transforming power, followers of Christ propagate the truth about God as they convey His message. They speak it, write it, play it, sing it, dance it, paint it, sculpt it, act it, pray it, and they live it. Nonetheless, both federal and state law in the United States prohibits non-profit organizations such as churches, from engaging in propaganda. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Publication 557 states three times, “No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda...”.<sup>2</sup> As of 2020 however, laws have not stopped politicians, news agencies, social media, or big tech from deliberately deceiving the masses.

Peddlers of modern propaganda manipulate what people think and say, in order to control what they do. They brainwash nations through fraud, deceit, rumor, innuendo, and lies, spreading “derogatory information, especially of a biased or misleading nature”.<sup>3</sup> Beside spreading disinformation, they also repress the truth through censorship to harm and destroy adversaries or to strengthen favored individuals, institutions, or causes.<sup>4</sup>

Historian Albert Marrin credits Napoleon Bonaparte as the father of modern propaganda. In “Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars”, He states:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com> (Accessed 6-29-12)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p557/ar02.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english](http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english) (Accessed 5-10-13)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda> (Accessed 11-5-08)

For him [Napoleon], as for the twentieth-century dictators who perfected his methods, truth was unimportant. “It is not the truth that counts,” he said, “but what people think is true.”<sup>5</sup>

Marrin describes how Napoleon shut down 60 of the 73 newspapers published in Paris at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Censor officials scrutinized, “every newspaper, book, pamphlet, play, sermon, advertisement, and poster” for Napoleon’s approval. According to Marrin,

All rulers had tried to shape public opinion at certain times. Napoleon however, went further. He was the first to use **the full power of government to “brainwash” a nation.**<sup>6</sup>

Revolutionary dictator Vladimir Lenin ruled Russia with an iron fist from 1917 to 1924. He asserted, “A lie told often enough becomes truth”.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Public Enlightenment for Hitler’s Third Reich from 1933 to 1945 added, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” He went on to say, “It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”<sup>8</sup> Before and during the Holocaust, Goebbels elevated, and others mastered the art of audiovisual propaganda through staged videography.

### **Infodemic Deception**

An infodemic refers to information overload, unleashed during a serious crisis or controversy. Coined during the 2020 COVID pandemic, it spams our brain with both true and false data and confuses our mind with verified and unverified conclusions. Circulated with haste at the speed of social media, bulk data-dumps target curious minds craving solutions. Despite inaccurate assessments based on limited analysis, they spark intrigue profitable for news outlets. They also obscure the facts and fuel fear, dread, and speculation. Polluted streams of disinformation spawn impulsive reactions and overreactions, which worsen the initial crisis.

Through globalized propaganda, infodemics breed weapons of mass deception. While sinister media moguls promote fake news and coordinate hidden (or

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Marrin, *Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars*, The Penguin Group, New York, NY, 1991, page 99, bold emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, page 99, bold emphasis mine.

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir\\_Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) and [answers.com](http://answers.com) (Accessed 3-26-10)

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Goebbels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Goebbels) and [wiki.answers.com](http://answers.com) (Accessed 3-26-10)

not-so-hidden) agendas, tech monsters generate algorithms to filter unwelcome statements and unwanted reports. Cyber search engines, mobile news feeds, and social media apps employ artificial intelligence (AI) to impose preset censorship and precalculated bias. Infodemic handlers have mastered the art and science of making an insidious lie sound like the truth.

High Tech propaganda confirms Paul's end time warning that *"evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived"*.<sup>9</sup> Paul's letter to the Ephesian church inspires us to attain the character of mature, well-equipped believers that are not *"easily shaken by trouble, nor led astray by novel teachings or by the false doctrines of deceivers who teach clever lies"*.<sup>10</sup> He urges us to *"remain strong and always sincere in our love as we express the truth"*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Mind-Molding Sorcery**

Describing the final fall of Babylon, a mighty angel declared, *"all the nations were deceived by your sorcery"*.<sup>12</sup> The term sorcery comes from the Greek word *pharmakeia*, which means the use or the administration of drugs; it can also mean poisoning. Metaphorically, sorcery refers to the deceptions and seductions associated with idolatry, i.e., the worship of an idol.<sup>13</sup> By definition, sorcerers derive their power to deceive from evil spirits.<sup>14</sup> They pervert reality with pejorative force to denigrate, desecrate, and defame the truth about God. They also spin the facts to shape counterfeit deities. Like mind-altering drugs, sorcerers sway public opinion to brainwash nations.



The Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation expose Satan as a liar and the father of lies who deceives the nations.<sup>15</sup> Satan uses sorcery with mind-molding precision. He teams up with evil spirits and complicit humans to form a sinister alliance. Satan is not a fictitious character conjured up by political pundits or religious commentators. This evil spirit poisons the world with an intoxicating mix of deviant arts and slanderous accusations. Also called the devil, the dragon, and the

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 3:13 NIV

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:13-14 TPT

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:15 TPT

<sup>12</sup> Rev 18:23 NAS

<sup>13</sup> Biblestudytools.com /Lexicons/Greek/NAS (Accessed 11-6-11)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sorcery> (Accessed 6-10-13)

<sup>15</sup> John 8:44 and Revelation 20:3, 8; Biblestudytools.com/Greek/NAS (Accessed 2-9-11)

accuser, Satan operates on earth as our adversary.<sup>16</sup> More importantly however, Satan operates in defeat as God's indisputable subordinate.

## **Fake Gods**

False messiahs will mark the end of this age with dramatic fanfare. Flaunting fallacious signs and unreliable wonders, they will promote bogus claims in a flurry of deception. Aided by misleading miracles, false prophets and fraudulent saviors will conspire to exchange the truth about God with a lie. Jesus warns that "*false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.*"<sup>17</sup>

Being covert and strategic, Satan promotes well-behaved deities and prompts well-intentioned idolators. Inferior substitutes know their place beneath the steeple and behind the altar of civilized religion. Confined to a makeshift crèche, a domesticated Christ child plays right into the script. Relegating Jesus to a decorative manger poses little threat to Satan's mendacity; neither does confining Him to an embellished cross. In and of themselves, religious icons have no power.

According to *Merriam-Webster*, mendacious means, given to deception or characterized by falsehood.<sup>18</sup> As the "*father of lies*", Satan personifies mendacity.<sup>19</sup> He spreads myths and circulates rumors to subvert the truth and undermine our relationship with God. Proficient in propaganda poisoning, Satan operates as a thief and murderer. He comes to "*steal and kill and destroy*".<sup>20</sup> Satan reinforces false assumptions with slander and suspicion to steal our faith, kill our hope, and destroy our love. Such propaganda and sorcery are no match for the Word of Life, which prevails triumphantly as it fills the earth with accurate knowledge regarding God's glory.<sup>21</sup>

Using religious fallacy and cozen rhetoric, Satan frames God in an unfavorable light. He dumps half-truths in vats of cynical reason to trick and cheat the world. In an attempt to poison our faith, Satan dopes individuals with gourmet guile and vintage doubt. He uses propaganda to portray God as a disposable myth or an incompetent fable.

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<sup>16</sup> Revelation 12:9-10

<sup>17</sup> Mark 13:22 NAS

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mendacious>. (Accessed 2-7-11)

<sup>19</sup> John 8:44

<sup>20</sup> John 10:10 ESV, NAS, NIV

<sup>21</sup> Habakkuk 2:14

Each dose of toxic deception exacts a blinding side effect. Nations of people refuse to take God seriously because their flawed perception underestimates the value of His inseparable love and invincible mercy. As sorcerers dispense state-of-the-art propaganda, fake gods appear like clever works of art—blending into society. In a culture rife with moral relativism and selective tolerance, the light of Christ shines especially bright. For those paying attention, His stellar intensity reveals the truth about God, the truth about us, and the truth about Satan.

### **Pervasive Propaganda**

Every segment of society tries to compose its own version of spiritual reality. As a result, the world regards designer deities as figureheads hardly worth worshiping. From politics and government to business and education, God’s image undergoes a culturally calculated makeover. From engineering and technology to media and the arts, crafty reformers attempt to retool God into fashionable shapes and sizes. As skeptical scientists discredit His accomplishments, social architects reinvent His reputation.



Throughout history, rival religious leaders have crafted deities to accommodate their own ambitious program. Rather than bowing in worship they bend God to fit their agenda. With sophisticated brushstrokes, they depict whatever type of god they think they might choose, or they fabricate excuses to justify rejecting him, her, them, or it. Nonetheless, Jesus is building His church—He will prevail.

In home and family, misinformed husbands and wives tweak God’s image in an attempt to leverage control over one another or other family members. Insecure moms and dads over emphasize God’s wrath to control their children and manipulate their behavior. Nonetheless, the Spirit of Truth is replacing parental propaganda with prophetic inspiration to strengthen, encourage, and comfort the entire family.<sup>22</sup>

For the sake of unredeemed entertainment, standup comedians and sitcom storytellers infuse their audience with a steady dose of propaganda. They warp God’s image by injecting derogatory venom into flimsy religious norms. They distort God’s character by promoting false profiles and underwhelming rumors. With

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<sup>22</sup> | Corinthians 14:3-4 NIV

comic abuse and witty assault, they insult God's reputation, assail His promises, and slander His messengers. Nonetheless, Psalm 2 reveals God's sovereign sense of humor. He laughs and pokes fun at international adversaries plotting in vain against Him and His Anointed (i.e., Messiah). Since God created humor and laughter, His sacred punchline inspires the last laugh—with eternal joy.

Commerce and industry add their two cents of propaganda by attempting to stimulate consumer spending and increase corporate profits. For example, the Christmas season wraps Jesus in a commercially attractive package. As ornaments and figurines bring baby Jesus to life, the god I want for Christmas caters to our wishes. Much of the world associates the festive birth of Jesus with a magically endowed elf popularized in 1822 by the poem, "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas". Better known as "The Night Before Christmas", Clement Clarke Moore portrays Santa Claus with magical powers deployed to inspire imagination and hope. In 1938, John Frederick Coats and Haven Gillespie published the popular carol, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town", which further embellished Santa's godlike attributes. He sees you when you're sleeping, knows when you're awake, and He knows if you've been bad or good.

As Yuletide fantasy inoculates innocent minds, entrepreneurs generate immense wealth throughout the western hemisphere. Monetarily, this "golden quarter" on the calendar represents an enormous economic stimulus. According to economist.com and others, American "retailers make 25% of their yearly sales and 60% of their profits between Thanksgiving and Christmas."<sup>23</sup> Profits multiply further when Christmas creep jumpstarts holiday sales in September and October.

Each year spiritual leaders refocus God's holiday shadow. Despite efforts at reducing Him to an irrelevant myth exploited for financial gain, Western Civilization continues to thrive because the truth about Jesus inspires a potent tradition of love, joy, peace, generosity, and good will.

### **Return of the Golden Calf**

Just as emancipated Hebrew slaves fashioned a golden calf, propaganda smiths are mass-producing artificial gods. Melting down the truth, they manufacture fatally flawed deities in an attempt to control the masses. Posing as progressive artisans, they push false religion like opium to manipulate nations. Karl Marx posited in his 1844 journal that "Religion... is the opium of the people."

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.economist.com/finance/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=885748](http://www.economist.com/finance/displaystory.cfm?story_id=885748) (accessed 1-10-20) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics\\_of\\_Christmas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics_of_Christmas) (accessed 12-17-20)

Like Bonaparte, Lenin, Marx, and Goebbels, ruthless leaders are propagating lies to brainwash nations. In the process, they suppress the truth about God and us. Using indoctrination schemes, so-called enlightenment ministers unleash intellectual deception with emotional duplicity. When lies fail to advance their agenda, tyrants and dictators resort to coercion and intimidation, and finally brute terror. Whether we admit it or not, propaganda poisoning has influenced public perception of divine reality. Based on our response, we underestimate God's attributes, underappreciate His accomplishments, and trivialize His promises.

### **Personalized Propaganda**

In "For All God's Worth", N. T. Wright describes how idols start out as the god somebody wanted. Wright asserts that "the god we want" is a god who will give us "what we want". Whether from pride, vanity, or insecurity, strong cravings, urgent needs, and desperate circumstances entice us to modify God's image to suit our fancy. As internal stress teams up with external pressure, we concoct imaginary saviors to mollify and rescue us. Fretful self-talk associated with wishful thinking becomes personalized propaganda. Wright reveals a god makers' self-deceived motive and method.

At the more sophisticated level, the god I want will be a god who lives up to my intellectual expectations: a god of whom I can approve rationally, judiciously, after due consideration and weighing up the theological probabilities. I want this god because he, or it, will underwrite my intellectual arrogance. He will boost my sense of being a refined modern thinker.<sup>24</sup>

As Wright explains, negative consequences occur when we replace the truth about God with an artificial substitute.

The result is that I become god; and this god I've made becomes my puppet. Nobody falls down on their face before the god they wanted. Nobody trembles at the word of a homemade god. Nobody goes out with fire in their belly to heal the sick, to clothe the naked, to teach the ignorant, to feed the hungry, because of the god they wanted.<sup>25</sup>

Self-indulgent gods devised at will, do not merit facedown veneration. According to Wright, when John the Apostle "found himself looking into the open door of heaven, he didn't see the god he might have wanted; he saw all creation wor-

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<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 23-24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* p. 23-24.

shipping the awesome and majestic creator God.”<sup>26</sup> Dream gods are impotent caricatures far removed from reality—they fail to deliver. They may stimulate a song, ceremony, or financial offering but they do not evoke facedown worship.

## **A Royal Sham**

Hans Christian Andersen illustrates how propaganda wove a devious tale to embellish a royal farce. In “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, he describes how two weavers exploit a self-absorbed emperor obsessed with his looks. They design a garment from special fabric claimed to be invisible for anyone unfit for his position, or hopelessly stupid. Based on a consensus of flattery, spineless subjects and insincere ministers praise the king for his appearance. Finally, with unadulterated candor, a child exposes the charade by proclaiming the truth.

Cloaked in false assumptions, fake gods attract plenty of attention. Though stripped of divine attributes, they parade their delusion before insecure onlookers too timid to object. As their façade gains momentum, naive spectators pretend to see the god they want. They fall for an absurd illusion adorned in deception. Manipulated gods are imperial imposters unfit to rule—or exist.

Though published in 1837, Andersen’s fable was adapted from a 14<sup>th</sup> Century collection of cautionary Arab and Jewish folktales printed in Spanish and then translated into German.<sup>27</sup> In the original fable, the garment adorning the king was visible only to the royal heir—the true son.

While false religions promote a collective denial of spiritual reality, God’s children will see the King for all He is worth. True sons and daughters will recognize the glorious splendor of his majesty and they will respond to His sovereign authority with radical reverence.

## **False gods**

Paul warns that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.<sup>28</sup> Historically, false gods attract attention and ensnare devotion. Posing as deities, they offer what people want but fail to provide what they need. Impostors captivate the imagination of individuals staggering under the sway of propaganda poisoning. God’s children recognize that *“the whole world lies in the power [control or influence] of*

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<sup>26</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> *Libro de los ejemplos* (or *El Conde Lucanor*, 1335), by Juan Manuel, Prince of Villena (1282–1348); German translation, “So ist der Lauf der Welt”. Wikipedia (2-17-11)

<sup>28</sup> 2 Cor 11:14 ESV

*the evil one*” and they pray accordingly, “*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one*”.<sup>29</sup> Only one God—our Heavenly Father, can deliver us from satanic sorcery and demonic propaganda.

To qualify as God, divine standards must be satisfied perfectly. The truth about God leaves no margin for error. A God that does not merit facedown worship does not measure up to the kind of God that we need. Cramming Him into the shape of a connect-the-dot idol always yields an inferior substitute. By filling in the blanks with opinion and fantasy, we merely conjure up a symbol of religion.

Propaganda that underestimates God’s worth provides a valid excuse to condemn Him as incompetent. Believing in an abstract deity based on vague approximations leads to indifference—and rightfully so. The more watered-down God appears, the less admiration and veneration He deserves. The more abbreviated His accomplishments the less love, praise, and gratitude He merits.

- A Santa type of god enjoys seasonal popularity but does not receive facedown reverence
- A behind-the-curtain Wizard of Oz type of god will never sweep us off our feet with tokens and symbols<sup>30</sup>
  - Instead of a heart, the Tin Man received a heart-shaped testimonial
  - Instead of bravery, the Cowardly Lion received a medal of courage
  - Instead of a brain, the Scarecrow received an honorary diploma
- A god that allows random selection to shape the outcome of humanity deserves no credit for creating our intricate and elegant design
- A remote god preoccupied on the backside of heaven stokes feelings of abandonment and resentment—distant gods depreciate over time

When we embrace the truth about God, religious wannabes and politically correct replacements fall short.

Next Chapter: Truth Triumphs

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<sup>29</sup> 1 John 5:19 NAS and Matthew 6:13 NIV

<sup>30</sup> L. F. Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, George M. Hill Co, Chicago, 1900.