

THE PROTESTANT REVOLUTION
AND THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

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In the middle of the sixteenth century, in the midst of the political firestorm that ravaged Europe as a result of the Reformation, it appeared that German rulers had settled their religious differences. With the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, German princes agreed that the faith of each ruler would determine the religion of his subjects.¹ Religious self-determination ruled the day allowing German churches to decide for themselves whether or not they would be Catholic or Lutheran. Either option was fine as long as no one chose the path of Calvinism.² Despite their best intentions both Catholics and Protestants watched each other with suspicion.

As time went on, both Lutheran and Catholic princes sought to strengthen themselves politically by gaining followers. Moreover, Catholic and Protestant rulers alike were deeply troubled as they watched Calvinism establish a foothold within Germany. As tensions mounted, the Lutherans joined together in forming the Protestant Union in 1608. The Catholics responded in kind, establishing the Catholic League the following year. Germany was now primed for military conflict; all that was missing was the spark that would ignite the hostilities. The spark was provided in 1618, when the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Ferdinand II, head of the Hapsburg family, closed some Protestant churches in Bohemia sparking a Protestant revolt. Ferdinand responded by sending an army into Bohemia to crush the revolt. Seizing their opportunity to challenge their Catholic emperor, several German Protestant princes met Ferdinand's forces in battle.³ Ultimately, the Peace of Augsburg would not last long as both sides

¹ Roger B. Beck and others, *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (Evanston: McDougal Littell, 2007), 603.

² *Ibid.*, 603.

³ *Ibid.*, 603.

would soon become embroiled in a long war for religious dominance known to history as the Thirty Years War.

Traditionally the Thirty Years War has been considered a holy or religious war by many historians.⁴ Simply stated, a religious war is conflict that can be justified based on religious differences. As such, religious wars often fall into two categories; first wars of this nature can be conflicts between the forces of one state that possesses an established religion against another state that possesses either an entirely different religion or a different sect of the same faith. Secondly, religious wars can also be motivated by the forces of one faith attempting to expand their reach and influence within or without a particular state. While there can be little doubt that some of history's conflicts have been fought exclusively on religious grounds, wars usually possess a multiplicity of interwoven causes that can often be difficult to unravel. Much ink has been spilt attempting to untangle the complicated matrix of people, places, and ideas that culminated in The Thirty Years War. Over the years, many historians have traditionally pictured The Thirty Years War as "a religious conflict that degenerated into a political one or as a political conflict camouflaged by religious ideologies."⁵

While some modern historians have sought to recast The Thirty Years War as something other than a religious/political conflict, there appears to be little evidence that a new understanding of the conflict is merited. As the writers of *World History of Warfare* suggest, "the war began in Bohemia over old religious issues, but it soon spread

⁴ J. V. Poliřenský, "The Thirty Years War," *Past and Present* No. 6 (Nov., 1954): 31, <http://www.jstor.org.library.norwich.edu/action/showArticle?doi=10.2307/649813&Search=yes&term=thirty&term=years&term=war&item=9&returnArticleService=showArticle&ttl=94166&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DThirty%2BYears%2BWar%26x%3D11%26y%3D10&cookieSet=1> (accessed April 17, 2008).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

to involve Denmark, Sweden, and, after 1635, France.”⁶ Reaching far beyond traditional religious disagreements, the conflict became political as strange bed fellows were formed when Cardinal Richelieu, the leader of Catholic France, cast his lot alongside the Bohemian Protestants.⁷ Why would the leader of Catholic France fight against the Holy Roman Empire? There can be only one reasonable answer; the Cardinal thought that siding with the Protestant Germans and Swedes would serve to advance the long term political interest of France. Consequently, religious and political motivations were the driving force for those who participated in The Thirty Years War.

Thus, the primary purpose of the current essay is not to recast the causal dice with regard to The Thirty Years War, but rather the focus of the current volume is to understand The Thirty Years War from a broader historical context. In other words, the conflict that consumed much of Europe from 1618 through 1648, was not an isolated event but part of a greater causal chain finding its origin in Protestant Revolution. The event commonly known as the Protestant Reformation is more accurately termed a “revolution” according to noted historian Jacques Barzun.⁸ Barzun states:

The Modern Era begins, characteristically, with a revolution, It is commonly called the Protestant Reformation, but the train of events starting early in the 16C and ending—if indeed it has ended—more than a century later has all the features of a revolution. I take these to be: the violent transfer of power and property in the name of an idea.⁹

Barzun makes two assertions that have significant bearing upon how one should conceptualize The Thirty Years War. First, Barzun’s definition of a revolution as “the violent transfer of power and property in the name of an idea,” is a very fitting

⁶ Christian I. Archer and others, *World History of Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 292.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁸ Jacques Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

description of what occurred during The Thirty Years War. As previously stated, one cannot divorce the religious ideological struggle between Protestants and Catholics from the causal chain that culminated in The Thirty Years War. Second, the theological ideas of the Protestant Revolution set in motion a chain of events that lasted more than a century. Therefore, based on the religious component of the conflict, it is reasonable to assume that The Thirty Years War was part of the chain reaction, described by Barzun.

In modern times, Western society uses the term revolutionary too loosely. Whenever a new technology, gadget, or practice hits the market that changes our domestic habits or makes life a little easier, the culture screams revolutionary! Unfortunately, this liberal use of the word has detracted from its true meaning. When something is truly revolutionary it changes more than our personal habits or a widespread practice. True revolutions give culture a new face.¹⁰ According to Barzun, it is incorrect to view the Protestant Revolution as merely religious in nature,

To call the first of the four revolutions religious is also inadequate. It did indeed cause millions to change the forms of their worships and the conception of their destiny. But it did much besides. It posed the issue of diversity of opinion as well as faith. It fostered new feelings of nationhood. It raised the status of the vernacular languages. It changed attitudes toward work, art, and human failing. It deprived the West of its ancestral sense of unity and common descent. Lastly but less immediately, by emigration to the new world overseas, it brought an extraordinary enlargement of the means of West and the power of its civilization.¹¹

Protestant theology provided the philosophical justification for the formation of new political structures that would break with Roman Catholicism and assert their own autonomy. The new religious ideas that were being articulated by Martin Luther and others gave the German princes an ideological justification for breaking with the Roman

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

Catholics and increasing their own power. The net effect of these changes was that, as advertised by Barzun, the cultural and political landscape of Europe was permanently altered.

Herein lies the goal of the current volume, to demonstrate that The Thirty Years War was the capstone event of the Protestant Revolution that began over one hundred years earlier. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the conflict in 1648, closed the door on the religious wars of Europe and brought about the establishment of a completely new political structure.¹² In short, The Peace of Westphalia weakened the Hapsburg states of Spain and Austria, strengthened France by awarding it German territory, and made German princes independent of the Holy Roman emperor.¹³ “The treaty thus abandoned the idea of a Catholic empire that would rule most of Europe. It recognized Europe as a group of equal independent states. This marked the beginning of the modern state system and was the most important result of The Thirty Years War.”¹⁴ In order to support these claims, the current essay will begin by briefly exploring the central ideas of the Protestant Revolution followed by an account of their initial political impact upon the German princes. Germany’s early religious wars and the Peace of Augsburg will be presented as a precursors to the religious and political climate in Germany prior to the outbreak of The Thirty Years War. Finally, it will be demonstrated how the religious ideas of the Protestant Revolution culminated in the establishment of a new political order within Europe and thus ended the Protestant Revolution.

¹² Beck and others, *World History*, 604.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 604.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 604.

The Revolution Begins

At the dawn of the sixteenth century the church in the West had successfully weathered many of the storms that besieged it during the Middle Ages. While Islam continued to spread in Africa and Asia, Western Christendom remained loyal to Papal authority despite a series of challenges during the Renaissance.¹⁵ On the eve of the Protestant Revolution two phenomena were already at work within European society. First, in order to replenish their coffers, the Church began to sell indulgences, as a means of divine favor for the afterlife in order to shorten one's stay in purgatory.¹⁶ Many, including the Dutch humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus, viewed the sale of indulgences as well as many of the Churches other practices as immoral. As the foremost theological scholar of his day, Erasmus penned many books that became popular, in which he skillfully utilized satire to attack the poor state of the Church. Consequently, it has commonly been stated with regard to the emergence of the Protestant movement, that "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it."¹⁷ Second, combined with the popular spiritual unrest that was burgeoning throughout Europe in the early sixteenth century, political tensions were also emerging. Many of the European monarchs sought to control their own national churches and resented not having dominion over church lands. As a result, these rulers presented a growing challenge to the authorities in Rome.¹⁸ Europe was now spiritually and politically primed for revolution. All that was missing was the spark that would ignite the flames.

¹⁵ Matthew A. Price and Michael Collins, *The Story of Christianity: 2,000 Years of Faith* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1999), 130.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

When Martin Luther posted his Ninety Five Theses on the door of All Saints' Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, that last thing he wanted to do was to break up the Catholic Church and divide the world into warring camps.¹⁹ Rather, Luther sought to elicit the truth about the sacrament of penance which was a timely question given the current sale of indulgences that was occurring within the Church.²⁰ Despite receiving virtually no attention, debate, or discussion within the academic community of the University of Wittenburg, Luther's ideas would strike a popular cord.²¹ Using the newly invented moveable type printing press invented by Guttenberg, Luther's Ninety Five Propositions were soon printed and widely circulated throughout Germany in the vernacular tongue in a matter of weeks, the results were astounding.²² The wide distribution of Luther's theses set Europe ablaze, as men realized that a voice had at last been raised to utter what most felt, that the whole system of indulgences was a fraud and had no place in the Gospel.²³

Bearing the title "Disputation to explain the Virtue of Indulgences," Luther's theses are surprisingly Catholic in tone and doctrine. Noted church historian Philip Schaff makes the following observations with regard to Luther's propositions:

They are no protest against the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church, or any of her doctrines, not even against indulgences, but only against their abuse. They expressly condemn those who speak against indulgences, and assume that the Pope himself would rather see St. Peter's Church in ashes than have it built with the flesh and blood of his sheep. They imply belief in purgatory. They nowhere mention Tetzl. They are silent about faith and justification, which already formed the marrow of Luther's theology

¹⁹ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ Philip Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII: The German Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 156.

²² *Ibid.*, 156.

²³ E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Gospel Folio Press, 1931), 161.

and piety. He wished to be moderate, and had not the most distant idea of a separation from the mother church.²⁴

Yet the Theses represent a transition from twilight to daylight and contain the living germs of a new theology that was soon to emerge.²⁵

Too heavily immersed in Italian and European politics, Pope Leo X took little more than a casual notice of Luther's propositions that had been forward to him, considering them a relatively unimportant debate among monks.²⁶ However, by the summer of 1518, Luther had been summoned to Rome by the Pope to answer the charges of heresy and contumacy.²⁷ Through the good offices of the Elector of Frederick, the hearing was transferred to Germany in connection with a meeting of the imperial Diet at Augsburg.²⁸ Cardinal Cajetan (Thomas de Vio of Gaeta), represented the Pope at the German Diet where Luther was interviewed three times.²⁹ The Cardinal demanded that Luther retract his errors and submit to the authority of the Pope. Luther refused to acquiesce declaring that he could do nothing against his conscience and that one must obey God rather than man, arguing that the scriptures were on his side.³⁰ Cajetan, in turn, threatened Luther with excommunication, having already the papal mandate in his hand, and dismissed him with the words: "Revoke, or do not come again into my presence."³¹ Clearly at an impasse with the Church authorities and, with the aid of his friends, Luther escaped from Augsburg, but not before leaving an appeal with Cajetan to the Pope

²⁴ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 157.

²⁵ Ibid., 158.

²⁶ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1953), 709.

²⁷ Ibid., 709.

²⁸ Ibid., 709.

²⁹ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 172.

³⁰ Ibid., 173.

³¹ Ibid., 173.

himself. On 28 November 1518, Luther formally appealed to the Pope for a general council and thus anticipated the papal sentence of excommunication.³²

Perhaps perceiving that the writing was already on the wall in terms of his future within the Catholic Church, Luther abandoned the bland approach of the theses and began a direct assault upon the Roman Church. “In 1520, he boldly stated his position in five tracts which are often regarded as the primary expositions of his distinctive convictions.”³³ Turning to the German populace for popular support, all five of these tracts were published in the vernacular languages and therefore enjoyed wide circulation.³⁴ The first tract entitled *Sermon on Good Works*, was published in May. In it, Luther articulated his position on justification being by faith alone resting in the merits of Christ. Moreover, Luther’s first tract sought to debunk the Catholic belief that power to forgive sins resided in the sacraments being administered by the church.³⁵

The publication of, *To the Christian Nobility of the German nation Respecting the Reformation of the Christian Estate*, in September, “called on princes to correct the abuses within the church, to strip bishops and abbots of their wealth and worldly power, and to create, in effect, a national German Church.”³⁶ As such, Luther’s address to the German nobility contained his most scathing assessment of the Roman system thus far. He argued that the Roman Church had erected three walls in its defense which had caused Christianity to suffer.³⁷ The first wall Luther sought to topple was the superiority of Popes, bishops, priests, and monks over the laity whom He identified as being princes,

³² Ibid., 175.

³³ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 710.

³⁴ Ibid., 710.

³⁵ Ibid., 710-711.

³⁶ Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1982), 241.

³⁷ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 710.

lords, artisans, and peasants.³⁸ Rather, Luther argued that all Christians are consecrated priests by baptism, and that the only difference amongst Christians is one's office. He thus sought to sweep aside the principle which exempted clergy from the jurisdiction of civil authorities.³⁹ The second wall that Luther attempted to scale was the Papal claim to have the exclusive right to interpret the Scriptures. Thirdly, Luther used the famous Council of Nicaea to question the Pope's authority to summon councils and confirm their acts on the grounds that it had been called by Emperor Constantine a secular authority. Furthermore, he condemned the luxury of the Popes and Cardinals and challenged their authority in domestic matters by suggesting that, when a Pope caused an offence to Christendom, temporal rulers ought to have the authority to summon him to a council.⁴⁰

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther assaulted the church with a caustic ferocity suggesting that Rome's sacramental system held Christians captive.⁴¹ "He attacked the papacy for depriving the individual Christian of his freedom to approach God directly by faith, without the mediations of priests, and he set forth his own views of the sacraments."⁴² To be valid, Luther asserted that a sacrament had to be instituted by Christ and be exclusively Christian. Using these parameters Luther disposed of five of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments. Maintaining only Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Luther placed these within the community of believing Christians rather than in the hands of the priesthood.⁴³ "As a result, Luther brushed aside the traditional view of the Church as a sacred hierarchy headed by the pope and returned to the early Christian view of a

³⁸ Ibid., 710.

³⁹ Ibid., 710.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 711.

⁴¹ Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 241.

⁴² Ibid., 241.

⁴³ Ibid., 241.

community of Christian believers in which all believers are priests, called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God.”⁴⁴

In November of 1520, Luther penned *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, and addressed it to the Pope. This tract’s most famous line reads, “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”⁴⁵ By this Luther meant that, since justification is by faith alone and cannot be earned by good works, he who has this faith is freed from the bondage to the law and from seeking to earn salvation by works.⁴⁶ Not to be misunderstood, he did not discourage good works but believed that the inner spiritual freedom that comes from the certainty found in faith should lead all true Christians to perform good works.⁴⁷ Plainly stated, Luther wrote, “Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works.”⁴⁸ Thus on the eve of his excommunication, now virtually insured as the result of his 1520 writing campaign, Luther removed the necessity of monasticism by stressing that the essence of Christian living lies in serving God in one’s calling whether secular or ecclesiastical.⁴⁹

Alister McGrath, the renowned University of Oxford professor of Historical Theology and author of *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution*, has summarized four principles of Luther’s religious reforms that gave birth to the religious and political revolution that was to follow. The first principal according to McGrath, is the belief that the Bible is the ultimate foundation of all Christians’ faith and practice.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁵ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 222.

⁴⁷ Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 242.

⁴⁸ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 715.

⁴⁹ Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 242.

Often referred to as the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, this doctrine contends that “the Bible was central to the life and thought of the church, as it was to the personal devotion of the individual Christian.”⁵⁰ Second, desiring to break from the clerical and academic monopoly of the priesthood over the Scriptures, Luther maintained that the text of the Bible and all preaching based upon it should be in the vernacular everyday language of the people.⁵¹ Next, Luther asserted that salvation is a free gift of God received by faith; totally separate from the requirements and sacraments of the Roman Church.⁵² Fourth, he argued that there is no fundamental distinction between clergy and laity, a doctrine commonly known as the Priesthood of all Believers, had tremendous implications.⁵³ Congregations of believers were free to select their own pastors and teachers in addition to clergy being allowed to marry.⁵⁴ In summary, Luther’s reforms were not a piecemeal demand for change; his fundamental conviction was that the church of his day had lost sight of some fundamental themes of the Christian gospel.

As previously discussed, Jacques Barzun defines a revolution as “the violent transfer of power and property in the name of an idea.”⁵⁵ Using Barzun’s definition of a revolution, one can clearly see how the ideas articulated by Luther were revolutionary in nature; and how they threatened the religious and political status quo of Western Europe. Herein lies what McGrath refers to as Christianity’s Dangerous Idea, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which allowed believers to bypass the ideas of a centralized

⁵⁰ Alister McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2007), 56.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁵⁵ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 3.

authority and interpret the Bible for themselves.⁵⁶ As time went on, “not even the personal authority of Luther could redirect this religious revolution, which anxious governments sought to tame and domesticate.”⁵⁷ The result of this idea was a radical reshaping of Christian society and the violent transfer of power and property in the name of an idea. There can be little doubt that a momentous revolution was now under way in Europe.

German Princes and Peasant Support the Revolution

Ideas are only revolutionary if they are embraced by the majority of society. Luther’s use of the vernacular language was critical in fostering a revolutionary spirit amongst the common people within Germany. Before 1520 the average press run of a printed book had been about one thousand copies. In contrast, printers produced four thousand copies of Luther’s *To the Christian Nobility*, and were completely sold out in only a couple of days with thousands more soon to follow.⁵⁸ Meanwhile as Luther’s pamphlets were selling so rapidly, his personal drama riveted all onlookers. Late in 1520, Pope Leo X issued a decree threatening Luther with excommunication unless he recanted the views expressed in his series of five tracts.⁵⁹ On 10 December 1520, Luther responded by casting the bull (Papal order) calling for his recantation and all of the Church’s laws onto a roaring bonfire in front of a huge crowd.⁶⁰ By this time it was clear to Roman authorities that Luther was more than a fly by night agitator; Papal supporter,

⁵⁶ McGrath, *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, 3

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ Revrand T.M. Lindsay, “Chapter IV Luther,” in *The Cambridge Modern History Volume 2, The Reformation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1903) 137.

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=62407231> (accessed May 8, 208).

⁵⁹ Beck and others, *World History*, 490.

⁶⁰ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 248.

Jerome Aleander, recorded the popular attitude in Germany prior to the Diet of Worms he wrote:

All Germany is up in arms against Rome. All the world is clamoring for a council that shall meet on German soil. Papal bulls of excommunication are laughed at. Numbers of people have ceased to receive the sacrament of penance. . . Martin is pictured with a halo above his head. The people kiss these pictures.⁶¹

The excitement was fanned by a whirlwind of anti-Papal pamphlets; a wagon, Aleander mourned, would not hold all these scurrilous tracts.⁶² Luther had clearly captured the hearts and minds of the German populace.

On 11 December 1520, the day after the burning of the Papal bull, Luther took his final revolutionary step and proclaimed that no man could be saved unless he renounced the role of the Papacy. The monk had excommunicated the Pope.⁶³ Upon receiving word of these events, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther and released him to his lay overlord, the Elector Fredrick the Wise, for proper punishment. Instead of burning Luther at the stake, which would have been the customary punishment for heresy, Fredrick claimed that Luther had not yet received a fair hearing and brought, him in January 1521, to be examined by a Diet of princes of the Holy Roman Empire convening in the city of Worms.⁶⁴

The German problem now fell into the hands of the young newly elected emperor, Charles V, who was under oath to defend the church and remove heresy from the Holy Roman Empire.⁶⁵ As the grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Charles not only

⁶¹ Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization From Wycliffe to Calvin, 1300-1564* (New York, NY: MJF Books, 1957), 359.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 359.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁶⁴ Philip Lee Ralph, and others, *World Civilization: Their History and Culture* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1197), 687.

⁶⁵ Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 242.

shared his grandmother's desire for a moral reform of the Church but also her adherence to the doctrines of which the Pope was the guardian.⁶⁶ Viewing Catholicism as the glue that held his far-flung empire together, Charles had no sympathy for Luther. On 18 April 1521, the second day of questioning after a rough first day, Luther uttered his now famous response in German:

Since your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without distinctions . . . Unless I am convicted by testimony of Sacred Scriptures or by evident reason (I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other), my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.⁶⁷

Now possessing no other choice but to officially brand Luther a heretic, Charles V was faced with the prospect of martyring the most popular figure in all of Germany.

Fearing public opinion and knowing that the support of the German princes might lead to revolution, Charles V, with the sanction of the Pope, secured for Luther a safe passage back to Wittenberg.⁶⁸ Despite these promises, Luther's supporters feared that he would face the same fate as John Hus who was murdered while making a similar journey despite the promises of an earlier Emperor.⁶⁹ "In a piece of superb melodrama, he was kidnapped by a group of bandits and held in captivity in Wartburg Castle from May 1521 to February 1522."⁷⁰ Elector Fredrick the Wise had pressured the reluctant monk to consent to the "kidnapping" so that Luther could be protected without Fredrick laying

⁶⁶ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 716.

⁶⁷ Durant, *The Reformation*, 361. According to Durant, "We cannot fully authenticate the famous works engraved on the majestic Luther *Denkmal* or Memorial at Worms: "Here I stand, I can do no other." The words do not occur in the transcript of Luther's reply as given in the records of the Diet; they make their first appearance in the earliest printed version of his speech.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁶⁹ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 717.

⁷⁰ McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 55.

himself open to the charge of harboring a heretic.⁷¹ While in Wartburg, Luther began making his landmark translation of the New Testament into German, thus implementing his own demand that God's Word be made available to all people.

Meanwhile, on 26 May 1521, the Diet of Worms issued its' official edict. The council ruled that beginning on 15 April 1521, Luther was to have twenty one days after which time; no one was to harbor or aid him in anyway. Moreover, his followers were condemned and his books were ordered to be burned anywhere they were found.⁷² At this point, Luther's hopes of reforming the Catholic Church had been dashed. But there was an alternative, a dangerous, radical, and groundbreaking possibility that was open to Luther. Thanks to his being backed by German princes; he could create a new church and start all over again. Luther's ideas were now being backed by secular principalities and powers thus providing a formula that would soon lead to violence.

While in exile at Wartburg Castle, disguised as a minor nobleman and living under the assumed name Junker George, the revolt against Rome spread without Luther's direct leadership.⁷³ "In town after town, priests and town councils removed statues from the churches and abandoned the Mass. New reformers, many of them far more radical than Luther, appeared on the scene."⁷⁴ By far, the most critical development during Martin's stay at Wartburg was that German princes, dukes, and electors were defying the condemnation of Luther by giving support to the new movement.⁷⁵ The importance of political support for the revolution's ideas should not be underestimated. No matter how influential Luther had become within the German populace. His cause surely would have

⁷¹ Ibid., 55.

⁷² Durant, *The Reformation*, 363.

⁷³ Price and Collins, *The Story of Christianity*, 134.

⁷⁴ Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, 242-243.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 243.

failed had it not been for the decisive intervention and support of constituted political authorities.⁷⁶ The authors of *World Civilizations: Their History and Culture* offer the following insight into this matter:

There had been heretics aplenty in Europe before, but most of them had died at the stake, as Luther would have done without the intervention of Frederick the Wise. And even had Luther lived, spontaneous popular expressions of support alone would not have succeeded in instituting Lutheranism because such could easily have been put down by the power of the state. In fact, although in the early years of revolt he was more or less equally popular throughout Germany, only in those territories where rulers formally established Lutheranism (mostly in the German north) did the new religion prevail, whereas in the other Luther's sympathizers were forced to flee, face death, or conform to Catholicism. In short, the word of the prince in religious matters was simply law.⁷⁷

The German princes that chose to support Lutheranism did so for a variety of reasons. Some truly believed and embraced the movement's doctrinal teachings; others did so for their own economic and political gain.

German princes had assembled at the Diet of Augsburg in 1500 to demand a refund of some of their ecclesiastical dues they had sent to Rome on the grounds that their coffers were being drained. As one might expect, these requests fell on deaf ears within in the Vatican. With the emergence of Lutheranism, many German princes were quick to perceive that if they embraced this new religious movement, ecclesiastical dues would not be sent to support foreigners and that much of the savings would directly or indirectly wind up in their own bank accounts.⁷⁸ In addition to the economic matter of taxation, the larger political issue of the early 16th century was the search for absolute governmental sovereignty. "Throughout Europe the major political trend in the years around 1500 was toward making the state dominant in all walks of life, religious as well

⁷⁶ Ralph, and others, *World Civilizations*, 688.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 688.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 688.

as secular.”⁷⁹ As a result, many rulers fought for the right to appoint their own church officials within their own realms thus limiting the independent jurisdiction of Church courts. Consequently, many Germany princes seized the revolutionary religious ideas of Luther as their chance to assert their political independence from the Catholic Church. While individual religious beliefs no doubt played a part in this power grab, the most common aim was the gaining of sovereignty by naming pastors, cutting off fees to Rome, and curtailing the jurisdiction of Church.⁸⁰ In the end, what the German princes were not able to secure through negotiation they were prepared to wrest by force.

The Revolution Turns Violent

Using Barzun’s notion of a revolution, Protestantism’s primary ideas at this point had been articulated by Luther, embraced popularly, and supported by a plethora of German princes. According to Barzun’s revolutionary definition, the situation was about to erupt into violence as power and property were now up for grabs. Commenting on the religious and politically charged situation within Germany, Barzun writes:

An idea newly grasped stirs the blood to aggressiveness. From safe corners such as universities and monasteries, force was called for, and many laymen were not afraid to use it. They quoted Luther: “One must fight for the truth.” When possessions were at stake, whether simply threatened or taken over the Protestants, armed conflict was inevitable. Pulpits, churches, and other religious houses, town offices, and privileges that went with all these changed hands—and more than once. Local sentiment, coupled with power, decided ownership.⁸¹

Violent events would be typical in European life till the middle of the 17th century and the conclusion of The Thirty Years War. Riots, combat, sieges and sacks of towns, as well as burnings at the stake were to repeat themselves without relenting.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 688-689.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 689.

⁸¹ Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 15.

Widespread violence swept over Germany with the Peasants' Revolt of 1524 through 1526. The German peasants were the beast of burden for society, and in no better condition than slaves. They were ground down by taxation, legal and illegal, a condition that would only worsen after the discovery of America and the rapid increase of wealth and luxury that followed.⁸² Long before the Protestant Revolution, revolutionary outbreaks took place in various parts of Germany, only to end as disastrous failures as they were put down by brute force.⁸³ In 1524, German peasants, excited by reformers' talk of freedom, and mistaking spiritual liberty for carnal freedom, demanded an end to serfdom.⁸⁴ Bands of angry peasants went throughout the countryside raiding monasteries, pillaging, and burning them to the ground. In addition, the peasants also demanded the right to choose their own clergy, be paid by their rulers for extra services performed, and claimed rights of land ownership.⁸⁵

Initially, Luther supported the peasants; however, he turned against them when Thomas Muntzer massacred the inhabitants of Weinsberg and burned castles and churches.⁸⁶ In a venomous tract, Luther urged the German princes to use whatever means necessary to put down the revolt. In response, both Protestant and Roman Catholic princes united their forces against a common enemy and successfully put down the rebellion, slaughtering over one hundred thousand peasants in the process.⁸⁷ Luther responded to the carnage by calling the nobility devils for their brutality, but the damage had been done. The ultimate result was that Luther lost the trust of those he had initially

⁸² Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 441.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 441. Schaff records the dates that these early Peasants insurrections as occurring in 1476, 1492, 1493, 1502, 1513, and 1514.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 442.

⁸⁵ Price and Collins, *The Story of Christianity*, 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁷ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 447.

sought to help with his reforms.⁸⁸ Despite losing much of his popular support, many northern German princes continued to support Lutheranism.

The temporary truce between the Protestants and Catholics did not continue after the end of the Peasants' Rebellion. It would not be long before religious antagonism would erupt into full scale warfare. Germany would witness twenty three years of war with periodic breathing spells as two unstable leagues of princes, Protestant and Catholic, sought to establish the dominance of their own faith and governmental power.⁸⁹ Even though the Edict issued at Worms in 1521 was binding; Charles V was too preoccupied with wars in France and Italy to enforce its ruling.⁹⁰ In the years following Worms and preceding the outbreak of open hostilities, the German princes had begun arranging themselves on one side or the other, with Northern Germany primarily supporting Lutheranism while the Southern states remained loyal to Rome.⁹¹ In 1524, Papal legates succeeded in organizing a league of Roman Catholic princes in Southern Germany.⁹² Despite having the battle lines clearly drawn, hostilities did not immediately commence.

In 1526, the First Diet of Speirer convened to consider the demands of the Catholics that the Edict of Worms should be enforced, and the counterproposals of the Protestants, that religion be left free until a general council, under German auspices, should adjudicate the disputes.⁹³ To the surprise of many, the Protestants prevailed at Speirer. The council ruled that, pending the findings of future Diets', each German state in religion, "should so live, rule and bear itself as it thought it could answer to God and

⁸⁸ Price and Collins, *The Story of Christianity*, 134.

⁸⁹ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 15.

⁹⁰ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 726.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 726.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 726.

⁹³ Durant, *The Reformation*, 442.

the Emperor.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, it was decided that no one should be punished for past offences against the Edict of Worms, and that the Word of God should be preached by all parties, none interfering with the others.⁹⁵ The revolutionaries interpreted this “Recess of Speirer” as sanctioning the establishment of Lutheran churches, the religious autonomy of each territorial prince, and the prohibition of the Mass in Lutheran areas.⁹⁶ While the Catholics rejected these assumptions, Charles V was too preoccupied with other matters to do much about the situation.

In February of 1529, having settled the majority of his foreign distractions, Charles V ordered that the Diet of Speirer be reconvened. Possessing a Catholic majority, The Second Diet of Speirer repealed the “Recess” of 1526 and passed a decree permitting Lutheran services but requiring the toleration of Catholic services in Lutheran states, while completely forbidding Lutheran preaching in Catholic states, thus enforcing the Edict of Worms.⁹⁷ On 25 April 1529, the Lutheran minority published a protest declaring that conscience forbade them from accepting the decree and appealed to the Emperor for a general council while pleading to hold unswervingly to the original “Recess of Speier,” no matter the cost.⁹⁸ Herein lies the origin of the term protestant; it was first used by the Roman Catholics to describe the German princes who protested the ruling of the Second Diet of Speirer.⁹⁹

By 1530, the religious and political situation within Germany was an absolute mess. Philip Schaff offers the following assessment of the situation:

⁹⁴ Ibid., 442.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 442.

⁹⁶ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 683-687.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 690-691.

⁹⁸ Durant, *The Reformation*, 442.

⁹⁹ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 727.

The Diet of Speier had forbidden the further progress of the Reformation: the Edict of Worms was in full legal force; the Emperor had made peace with the Pope, and received from him the imperial crown at Bologna; the Protestants were divided amongst themselves, and the Conference at Marburg had failed to unite them against the common foe. At the same time the whole empire was menaced by a foreign power. The Turks under Suleiman . . . had reached the summit of their military power, and approached the gates of Vienna in September 1529.¹⁰⁰

Under these circumstances the Diet of Augsburg convened, on 8 April 1530. Its objective was to settle the religious question, and to prepare for war against the Turks.¹⁰¹ Knowing the hour and the score, Charles asked the Protestants to put forth their beliefs in writing and demonstrate where they differed from the Roman Catholic Church. The resulting document became known as the Augsburg Confession, which was henceforth regarded as the official presentation of the Lutheran position.¹⁰² The document was drafted by Melancthon, a student of Luther's, who being under imperial ban was not present at the meeting. Despite being absent from the Diet, Melancthon consulted his teacher and composed a two-part treatise outlining the articles of the faith which Lutherans and Catholics shared in common as well as those that were unique.¹⁰³ The Swiss portion of the Empire, being the followers of Zwingli, refused to sign the Augsburg Confession and submitted their own document. Charles V attempts to reconcile the views of the revolutionaries with Catholic rebuttals failed. As a result, the Roman Catholic majority claimed that the Protestants had been refuted resulting in Charles decree that they had until April 1531 to submit to Papal authority.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Schaff, *History of The Christian Church Volume VII*, 696.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 696.

¹⁰² Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 727.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 727.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 727.

Unwilling to capitulate, the Lutheran princes met at Schmalkalden and formed a defensive league which bore the name of the town in which it was formed.¹⁰⁵ Over the next twenty-three years, Germany existed in a state of almost constant warfare as leagues of Catholics and Protestants sought to establish their own political and religious dominance.¹⁰⁶ In 1532, a temporary truce was struck between Charles V and the Schmalkaldic League in order to defend the region against Turkish invasion. However, during the intermittent time Protestantism continued to spread throughout the Empire.¹⁰⁷ When conferences between Protestants and Catholics, held in 1540 and 1541 at Charles V's request, failed to bring peace, the Emperor sought to eradicate Protestantism from within the borders of the empire and restore Imperial obedience within Germany.¹⁰⁸ In order to accomplish his goal, Charles declared under the ban Philip of Hesse and Elector John Fredrick of Saxony, the nephew and successor of Elector Fredrick the Wise who had aided Martin Luther.¹⁰⁹ In the ensuing war, both Protestant princes were defeated and imprisoned. Protestantism appeared to have been destroyed.¹¹⁰

In actuality, the revolutionaries were far from being snuffed out, as large portions of the populace still embraced Luther's teachings. When war broke out again, this time the Protestant princes were aided by the King of France who was awarded the border cities of Metz, Toul, and Verdun for his support of the revolutionary cause.¹¹¹ With French strength behind them, the Protestants defeated Charles V's forces and nearly

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 727.

¹⁰⁶ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 727-728.

¹⁰⁸ Durant, *The Reformation*, 453.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 454.

¹¹⁰ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, 728.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 729.

captured him 1552.¹¹² “Arms and circumstances so favored the Protestants that they demanded everything: they were to be free in the practice of their faith in all German territory; Catholic worship was to be forbidden in Lutheran territory; present and further confiscation of Church property were to be held valid and irrevocable.”¹¹³ The resulting Peace of Augsburg was established on 25 September 1555, and rested on the notion of *cuius region, eius religio* (“as the ruler, so the religion”), which meant that in those principalities where Lutheran princes ruled, Lutheranism would be the sole state religion and the same for those with Catholic princes.¹¹⁴ Thus, in order to permit peace among and within the states, each prince was to choose between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. In addition, all ones’ subjects were expected to embrace the religion of their realm or emigrate.

As such, the Peace of Augsburg was a historical milestone inasmuch as Catholic rulers for the first time acknowledged the legality of Protestantism; however, it boded ill for the future in assuming that no sovereign state larger than a free city could tolerate religious diversity.¹¹⁵ Moreover, in excluding Calvinism, it insured that Calvinists would become aggressive opponents of the status quo, a reality that would always make the Peace of Augsburg tenuous at best.¹¹⁶ The real winner was not freedom of worship, but the freedom of the princes. Each became like Henry VII of England, the supreme head of the Church in his territory, with the exclusive right to appoint the clergy and the men who should define the obligatory faith.¹¹⁷ It was the princes not the theologians who had led

¹¹² Ibid., 729.

¹¹³ Durant, *The Reformation*, 456.

¹¹⁴ Ralph, and others, *World Civilizations*, 715.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 715.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 716.

¹¹⁷ Durant, *The Reformation*, 456.

Protestantism to its triumph; they naturally assumed the fruits of victory, their territorial supremacy over the emperor, and the ecclesiastical supremacy over the church. There can be little doubt that Protestantism fits Barzun's definition of a revolution. Luther and the theologians had articulated the ideas while the political authorities transferred power and property in the name of the theologian's ideas. As one shall see in the second half of this essay, the Peace of Augsburg may have brought a temporary peace but the revolution was far from over.

The Thirty Years War Continues the Revolution

In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg became the law of the Holy Roman Empire, a territory that included modern-day Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.¹¹⁸ At the time the Hapsburg dynasty, which was divided into two branches, one in Austria and the other in Spain, each with its own responsibilities and territories, ruled the Empire. Stating that each prince had the power to decide the religion in his own province, the Augsburg declaration was an attempt to defuse the rampant religious and political feuding that had descended upon central Europe as a result of the Protestant Revolution.¹¹⁹ The Peace of Augsburg worked for several decades, but by the early 1600's, religious alliances became more and more political.

Historian, Ronald G. Asch, does an excellent job dissecting the principle shortcomings of the Peace of Augsburg and how they served to increase religious tensions and ultimately contributed to the outbreak of The Thirty Years War. First, the settlement of 1555 did not resolve the religious and political conflicts that were

¹¹⁸ Paul K. Davis, *100 Decisive Battles: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

threatening to undermine the stability of the Empire. Catholics and Protestants alike continued to remain convinced that their theological persuasions constituted the only true expression of faith.¹²⁰ Second, “the attempt to confine religious conflicts to the level of territorial affairs could only work if the domestic disputes of individual territories could be clearly separated from the political problems of the Empire.”¹²¹ As one might expect, this proved to be an extremely challenging problem for the Augsburg settlement because both sides would eventually appeal to the law courts of the Empire to resolve conflicts throughout the local principalities. However, as the years passed, the court’s rulings themselves became a cause for controversy and were rejected by many princes as binding within their estates.¹²² Third, exclusion of Calvinists from the Peace of Augsburg indicates a lack of foresight on the part of its writers. By 1613, two German princes had converted to Calvinism, a move that only further destabilized the tenuous peace.¹²³

When The Peace of Augsburg was drawn up, there were no Calvinist princes in the Holy Roman Empire. Consequently, the spread of Calvinism, coupled with the expansion of Lutheranism after 1552, undermined the bases for peace. Catholic princes were determined to thwart Protestant gains of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.¹²⁴ Tension mounted in 1608 at the Imperial Diet of Rengensburg when the Protestants demanded confirmation of the terms established at Augsburg.¹²⁵ The Catholics agreed to confirm the peace in the Imperial Constitution on the condition that all ecclesiastical

¹²⁰ Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe 1618-48* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 1997), 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁴ Richard Bonney, *The Thirty Years’ War 1618-1648* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 11.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

property seized by Calvinist or Lutheran rulers be returned to the Catholics.¹²⁶ As a result, the elector of the Rhine Palatinate and other Calvinist princes withdrew from the Diet. Five years later in 1613, a subsequent Diet also saw Protestant members leave in disgust, “the Imperial constitution was deadlocked and the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the political and religious disputes were gravely diminished.”¹²⁷ The Imperial Diet would not meet again until 1640.

By 1617, it was clear that Matthias, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia, would die without an heir.¹²⁸ As a result, his lands and titles would be passed to his nearest male relative, his cousin Ferdinand of Styria.¹²⁹ As a staunch Catholic, educated by the Jesuits, Ferdinand wanted to establish religious uniformity on his newly acquired lands. Meanwhile, Bohemia the ancestral land of another great revolutionary, John Hus,¹³⁰ tolerated a variety of religious views in their country and had little desire to have Ferdinand impose his will on them.¹³¹ In protest the Bohemians threw Ferdinand’s appointed Imperial governors out of a 70-foot-high window of the Royal Place at Hardcany in Prague.¹³² Occurring on 23 May 1618, this event is known to history as the Defenseration of Prague and is regarded as the official beginning of The Thirty Years War.¹³³

Sensing that their time had come, the Bohemians raised an army and offered their throne to the Calvinist Elector of Palatine Fredrick V who had been their initial choice

¹²⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁸ C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1938), 68.

¹²⁹ S.H. Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1966), 36.

¹³⁰ Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, 69.

¹³¹ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 209.

¹³² Bonney, *The Thirty Years’ War*, 13.

¹³³ Ibid., 13.

before Ferdinand had been imposed upon them.¹³⁴ Weakness on the part of both Ferdinand and the Bohemians escalated the war and transformed a local conflict into a bloody struggle that would engulf much of Europe. By appealing to Frederick and the Protestant Union, the Bohemians spread the war to western Germany. Ferdinand responded in kind by appealing to his nephew, King Philip IV of Spain, a move that brought the Catholic League and the Protestant Union into a prolonged bloody conflict.¹³⁵

The initial clash of arms was brief. The Catholics, lead by General Baron von Tilly, defeated Frederick's forces in 1620.¹³⁶ Ferdinand proceeded to impose Catholicism on Bohemia and widespread killing and destruction ensued, ruining the nation's economy.¹³⁷ The ruling aristocracy was deposed and supplanted by Ferdinand's supporters who received large estates. "Protestant religious practices disappeared in Bohemia over the next ten years of persecution, while the Catholic Hapsburgs reasserted their authority."¹³⁸

The outbreak of The Thirty Years War was not the result of a new set of causal circumstances but the continuation of an old unfinished conflict. The transference of power and property in the name of an idea would continue for the next thirty years as secular powers married themselves to religious ideas for their own worldly advancement. Historian S.H. Steinberg summarizes the traditional view of The Thirty Years War when he writes:

The traditional interpretation of the origins, course and significance of the so-called Thirty Years War requires no elaboration. According to this version the war began with the Bohemia revolt in 1618 and ended with the

¹³⁴ Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, 75.

¹³⁵ Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Routledge, 1984), 51-55.

¹³⁶ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 40.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁸ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 209.

peace of Westphalia in 1648. It was, so we have been taught, initially a war of religion between the German Protestant and Catholics, which the foreign powers of Spain France, Denmark, and Sweden exploited, each for political reasons of its own. In this way Germany became the battlefield of Europe for thirty consecutive years. The war completely ruined Germany's economic and intellectual life and left behind it a depopulated, devastated and impoverished country which, for two hundred years, suffered from its disastrous after effects.¹³⁹

While Sheinberg ultimately does not agree with the traditional view, his summary does raise some undeniable facts. First, as has been demonstrated above, latent religious tensions for the Protestant Revolution provided the tinder for the outbreak of The Thirty Years War. Secondly, European powers from outside of Germany seized their chances to expand their own power and influence by entering the conflict.

Ronald G. Asch, author of *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe 1618-48*, argues that tension over religious beliefs and their political affiliations were the primary cause in igniting The Thirty Years War. Asch writes:

Of course, the religious conflict between Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists in its various theological, legal and political forms was not the only cause of the breakdown of the Empire's constitution before 1618 and thus of the war. The religious question can, however, be considered the focus of all others issues, be it the dispute about the authority of the Emperor or the purely dynastic rivalries between the various territorial princes, which often went back to the pre-Reformation. The religious antagonism created political options which would not have existed otherwise.¹⁴⁰

Asch's comments support the notion that as one untangles the matrix that is The Thirty Years war and seeks to discern its root causes, the religious question is the focal point. For example, if one views The Thirty Years War as a spinning wheel, the fixed point at the center, around which the tire rotates, is the religious question. Revolving around the central cause are the secondary causes which have a tendency to cloud one's

¹³⁹ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 21-22.

understanding of the core causal issue. However, just as a properly functioning wheel needs a fixed rotational point to operate properly, it also needs the rim and the tire. In like manner, one cannot overlook the secondary causes of The Thirty Years War because that would result in an incomplete picture of what occurred. In short, religious rivalries were the driving force of The Thirty Years War. When one comprehends this critical issue, it becomes clear that the fires of the Protestant Revolution were still burning bright. The Peace of Augsburg had not cooled the tensions, and the revolution would not come to its conclusion for another thirty years.

Summary of The Thirty Years War

Given the limitations of space and the constraints of the topic, a total rehashing of the war's details is simply outside of the scope of the current essay. However, if one is to grasp the significance of the Peace of Westphalia that concluded The Thirty Years War, a brief summary of the major events of the conflict is in order. Historians have proposed many different explanatory models for organizing and conceptualizing the struggle's major events.

One simple model proposed by the authors of *World History Patterns of Interaction*, divides the war into two main phases, Hapsburg triumphs and Hapsburg defeats.¹⁴¹ According to this model, during the first twelve years of fighting the armies of Hapsburg Austria and Spain crushed the mercenary forces that had been hired by Protestant princes, thus putting down the Bohemian uprising and defeating the Protestants that had supported them.¹⁴² The war's second phase commenced in 1630, when the Protestant Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden aided the reeling Lutheran princes of Northern

¹⁴¹ Beck and others, *World History*, 603.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 603.

Germany by leading his army of 23,000 professionally trained soldiers into the field. Thus turning the tide of the war, Adolphus' forces drove the Hapsburg armies out of Northern Germany.¹⁴³

Another popular paradigm used to describe The Thirty Years War is to break the war into smaller pieces that coincide with the years that foreign powers interfered with the predominately German conflict. S.H. Steinberg's *The 'Thirty Years War' and the conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, is a prime example of this approach. Steinberg describes The Thirty Years War as a series of smaller conflicts, each one unique, based on its primary participants. For example, Steinberg organizes his material with headings such as The Bohemian-Palatine War, The Danish War, The Swedish-Polish War, The Swedish War, and The Franco-Swedish Conflict with Austria-Spain. While both models are perfectly acceptable, for the sake of brevity, the following summary will follow the first paradigm articulated above.

The authors of *World History of Warfare*, follow this model when outlining The Thirty Years War. After Ferdinand suppressed the initial Bohemian revolt and attempted to reestablish Catholicism, the war entered a temporary lull. By 1626, the Protestants were in total disarray because Lutheran and Calvinist princes were fighting amongst themselves.¹⁴⁴ In addition, Catholic power extended to the Baltic Sea where Dutch, Danish, and Swedish strategic interests were threatened.¹⁴⁵ Seeing that his own interests were in danger, hostilities resumed at the initiation of the Danish Duke of Holstein, Christian IV. As a Lutheran, Christian IV aided the Lutheran rulers of neighboring lower

¹⁴³ Ibid., 603-604.

¹⁴⁴ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 210.

¹⁴⁵ Archer and others, *World History of Warfare*, 293.

Saxony by leading an army against the forces of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁴⁶ “Without a much stronger Anit-Hapsburg alliance, however, the Danes were no match for the forces of two outstanding imperial generals, Johan Tzerclaes, the Count of Tilly, and Albrecht von Wallenstein, Duke of Frieland and Mecklenbrg.”¹⁴⁷ Moreover, all of Christian’s would be allies such as England, France, and Sweden were occupied with either their own civil wars or external conflicts thus leaving the Danish king without support.¹⁴⁸ Annexing Tilly’s army, Wallenstein drove the Danes out of Germany and most of Denmark. Christian fled to the Danish islands and sought to make peace with Wallenstein, after considering the high cost of continuing the war. Compared with what he stood to gain from conquering the rest of Denmark, Wallenstine agreed to make peace.¹⁴⁹

Ferdinand pressured Wallenstein to force the conversion of Protestants residing within the newly conquered German and Danish territories. Wallenstein refused and chose moderation allegedly stating to the emperor, “Give the peasantry plenty of time, do not press the lower orders too hard about religion.”¹⁵⁰ Fearing the growing power of Wallenstein, in addition to not sharing his views of religious tolerance, Ferdinand and the princes of the Catholic League sought to relieve him of his command. After receiving the title, Duke of Mecklenburg, Wallentsein took a portion of his army and returned to Bohemia.¹⁵¹ Wallenstein’s relinquishing of his command marks the end of the first phase

¹⁴⁶ Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 73.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁴⁸ William Weir, *50 Battle That Changed the World: The Conflicts That Most Influenced the Course of History* (Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Book, 2004), 257-258.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

of The Thirty Years War. The early Hapsburg triumphs would soon be replaced by a series of embarrassing defeats.

The intervention in Germany of Gustavus Adolphus in 1630, with a small Swedish army of thirteen thousands troops, marked a second stage of The Thirty Years War. Responding to economic threats contained in aggressive Hapsburg policies directed toward the Swedish sphere of influence in the Baltic, Gustavus proved to be a powerful advocate for the Protestant cause.¹⁵² Often referred to as the father of modern warfare, Gustavus was well schooled in the military classics of Caesar and Vegetius as well as possessing a firsthand understanding of the battlefield and of weapons.¹⁵³ The Swedish king was the first to create a national standing army based on conscription for the infantry and on close linkages between the regular forces and military units raised in home defense.¹⁵⁴ His army was equipped with the first artillery light enough to maneuver on the battlefield, improved muskets, regular pay, uniforms, and discipline. From 1611 through 1629, Gustavus' professional army had won victories over Poland, Denmark, and Russia thus making Sweden the dominate force in the Baltic. It was for the protection of this dominance from Catholic encroachment that Gustavus came to the military aid of the German Protestants.

On 17 September 1631, Protestant armies commanded by Gustavus and comprised of 45,000 Swedish and Saxon forces met the forces of The Holy Roman Empire, commanded by Count Tilly, outside the town of Breitenfeld.¹⁵⁵ Upon arriving south of the town of Breitenfeld, the Swedes found Tilly's forces already deployed and

¹⁵² Archer and others, *World History of Warfare*, 295.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 210-211.

waiting for their arrival. Tilly had formed his 36,000 soldiers into squares of 2,000 pikemen each with cavalry on both flanks with the entire force stretching across a front more than two miles long.¹⁵⁶ Rather than emulating the traditional Spanish designed *tercio* utilized by Tilly, the Snow King positioned his forces in smaller more mobile units in which pikemen protected musketeers.¹⁵⁷ This formation would allow for more mobile formations that could maneuver around and through the bulky imperial squares, while his lighter more mobile artillery took advantage of the packed mass of men in the Imperial tercios.¹⁵⁸

Tilly's artillery commenced hostilities as they began to fire upon Protestant positions while Gustavus was in the process of deploying his men into formation. Catholic artillery caused little damage due to Gustavus' decision to use smaller formations. Much of the artillery fire fell harmlessly into open spots on the battlefield.¹⁵⁹ In contrast, Protestant artillery fire, while smaller, ripped massive holes in the tightly packed Catholic formations. Artillery exchanges between the two armies took place until midday when, without orders, Count Pappenheim, Tilly's cavalry commander charged his mounts against the Swedish right flank. Despite being outraged by Pappenheim's rashness, Tilly proceeded to send in his infantry against the Saxons whom he correctly perceived to be the weakest part of Gustavus's army.¹⁶⁰ The Saxons put up little resistance; many ran at the site of Tilly's approaching juggernaut leaving the Swedish situation quite dire with infantry attacking the left flank and cavalry assaulting the right.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶⁰ Archer and others, *World History of Warfare*, 295.

Poor soldering and the mobility of Swedish artillery would thwart the cavalry attack on the right flank and neutralize Pappenheim's attack. Instead of utilizing the heaviness of this cavalry to smash the Swedish formations, Pappenheim ordered the use of the caracole.¹⁶¹ Imperial cavalry rode near the enemy and fired wheel-lock pistols prior to turning to allow the next line to fire while the first reloaded. "As the pistols range was too short to be effective, Gustavus's musketeers were able to use the greater range of their weapons to kill many of the imperial cavalry, who were easy targets."¹⁶² To add insult to injury, the mobile Swedish artillery turned and began to fire grapeshot into the attacking cavalry which caused disarray and confusion amongst the Imperial cavalry. Finishing the job, the Swedish cavalry counterattacked with drawn sabers thus thwarting the Catholic's attack on their right flank.¹⁶³ Swedish forces captured Tilly's large stationary field guns that had rained death upon the Saxons early in the day and used them to shell the Catholic tercios.¹⁶⁴ With artillery fire raining down on them from two directions and possessing no protection against the free movement of Swedish cavalry the massed square of pikemen were decimated.¹⁶⁵

"Breitenfeld was the first major Protestant victory in the field since the war began."¹⁶⁶ While there is much variation in the reported death statistics at the Battle of Breitenfeld, a good conservative estimate would have Tilly losing over one third but probably less than the two thirds that has been commonly reported.¹⁶⁷ The Swedish victory was decisive; Gustavus's forces captured 19 cavalry standards and 80 infantry

¹⁶¹ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 212.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶⁴ Archer and others, *World History of Warfare*, 301.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶⁶ Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 73.

¹⁶⁷ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War*, 44.

colours, in addition to almost capturing and wounding Count Tilly several times.¹⁶⁸ Not only were Protestant forces victorious for the first time since the outbreak of hostilities in 1618, but Gustavus's victory attracted the support of additional Protestant princes, which aided the creation of a much-needed unified political front.¹⁶⁹

After Breitenfeld, Gustavus continued his assault upon The Holy Empire by laying waste to Bavaria. With the destruction of Tilly's army Emperor Ferdinand had only one potential ally powerful enough to confront the Swedish forces, the previously dismissed Wallenstein. Wallenstein forced Ferdinand to beg for his assistance before acquiescing, contingent upon being allowed to establish his own terms.¹⁷⁰ The impending clash of the titans took place outside of Lutzen on 16 November 1632 between armies of comparable size numbering around 18,000 men each.¹⁷¹ The Snow King was faced with the difficult proposition of dislodging Wallenstein from the defensive position that he had chosen before Gottfried Heinrich von Pappenheim's Black Cuirassiers mercenary forces could relieve the Imperial positions.¹⁷² Realizing the Pappenheim's mercenaries were not in the field, Gustavus attacked Wallenstein's forces. The ensuing battle was a seesaw affair with each side possessing the advantage at one point or another. Pappenheim's Black Cuirassiers cavalry, heading Wallenstein's dispatch, suddenly appeared on the field of battle and charged the right wing of the Swedish formation.¹⁷³ Gustavus had previously elected to reinforce his cavalry position with small groups of musketeers who wounded Pappenheim after his horsemen buckled the

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-

¹⁶⁹ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 212.

¹⁷⁰ Weir, *50 Battle That Changed the World*, 260.

¹⁷¹ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War*, 48.

¹⁷² Weir, *50 Battle That Changed the World*, 261.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 262.

Swedish line.¹⁷⁴ As Pappenheim's private army, the Black Cuirassiers hesitated upon learning that the leader had been wounded, a move that allowed the Swedes to rally and eventually drive The Imperialists from the field, despite the fact that Gustavus had been mortally wounded.¹⁷⁵

By the military standards of the day, Lutzen was technically considered to be a Swedish victory since Wallenstein choose to leave the field of battle.¹⁷⁶ However, many modern military historians consider the outcome of the battle to be inclusive in terms of who won or lost; some have even argued that Lutzen was a defeat for both sides.¹⁷⁷

Renowned military historian Geoffrey Parker offers the following assessment with regard to impact and outcome at Lutzen. Parker states:

It was because it put an end to the brief Protestant tide of success at Lutzen, although a drawn battle, was so important. Another Swedish victory like Breintided or Rain would have destroyed the Imperial cause beyond all hope of recovery. Now the two sides were again more or less equal, leading each combatant to seek desperately more foreign support which might tip the scales—the hopes of Sweden pinned ever more firmly to France, those of the emperor fixed increasingly on Spain.¹⁷⁸

In slight contrast, Paul K. Davis argues that Breintiefeld, along with Lutzen, broke the back of Catholic power as exercised by the army of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁷⁹

According to Davis, “the Hapsburgs were never again able to capture the initiative, and the later entry of France as a major player in the war shifted the fighting westward.”¹⁸⁰

While Parker and Davis appear to be at an impasse with regard to the outcome of Lutzen,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 262.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 262.

¹⁷⁶ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War 1618-1648*, 49.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷⁸ Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 132.

¹⁷⁹ Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 212.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 212.

they both agree that after this battle more foreign powers would intervene and continue to prolong the conflict.

For a brief moment in 1632, it appeared that the Holy Roman Empire would be dissolved and transformed into a Protestant confederation led by Sweden and comprising most of the principalities and cities east of the Rhine and north of the Danube.¹⁸¹

Brokered on 30 May 1635 the Peace of Prague was supposed to have been a compromise between the Protestant and the Holy Roman Empire but it did not last long.¹⁸² Compared with the Peace of Westphalia that would be signed 13 years later, the Peace of Prague was a German peace and nothing else. For Emperor Ferdinand, it was an attempt to free his hands for the imminent war against France.¹⁸³ In the same month and year that the Peace of Prague was negotiated, France officially declared war on Spain, the Catholic ally of the Holy Roman Empire.

France, although predominately Roman Catholic, was a rival of the Hapsburg Holy Roman Empire and Spain and choose to enter the war on the Protestant side rather than be encircled by her chief rivals.¹⁸⁴ Cardinal Richelieu was the Chief Minister to King Louis XII of France. Richelieu thought that the Hapsburgs were still too powerful, since they held a number of territories on the Eastern border of France including parts of the Netherlands.¹⁸⁵ As a result, in 1635 French armies entered the war directly on the side of Swedish and German Protestants. In short, a series of bloody battles were fought between the now French lead Protestants and the Catholic Hapsburgs from 1636 to 1648 when a lasting Peace was finally brokered.

¹⁸¹ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 110.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁸⁴ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War*, 50.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

By 1645, The Thirty Years War was finally beginning to wind down. French and Protestant armies scored a series of victories in 1645 that finally began to shift the balance of power in their favor. Swedish marshal, Lennart Torstensson, defeated the Imperial army at the Battle of Jankau near Prague¹⁸⁶ and French commander, Louis II de Bourbon, was victorious over the Bavarian army in the Second Battle of Nordligen, where the final significant Catholic commander, Baron Franz von Mercy, died in battle.¹⁸⁷ On 14 March 1647, the desperate electors of Bavaria and Cologne, along with some of their allies, signed a cease-fire agreement with French and Swedish representatives at Ulm.¹⁸⁸ At this point many thought the war was over but hostilities would not officially cease until May 1648 when the last field army to fight for the emperor was destroyed at the Battle of Zumarshausen.¹⁸⁹ Following Zumarshausen both belligerents withdrew their forces when word finally reached them in November 1648 that peace had been declared.

The Peace of Westphalia and the End of the Protestant Revolution

As one might expect, finding a peaceful solution to a conflict that had enveloped all of Europe, was not an easy task. Much like the war itself, negotiating a lasting peace would prove to be long and arduous. According to S.H. Steinberg, the first steps towards the Peace of Westphalia were taken in 1638, ten years before the treaty was signed.¹⁹⁰ Binding its signers to strike a common peace, The Hamburg Treaty was established on 6 March 1638 by representatives of France and Sweden. The agreement called for the

¹⁸⁶ Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, 465-467.

¹⁸⁷ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War*, 64.

¹⁸⁸ Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 185.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁹⁰ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 77.

restitution of the political, constitutional and religious status of 1618.¹⁹¹ At a meeting with the new Emperor Ferdinand III who had replaced his father who passed away in 1637, at Nurnberg in 1640, the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire appeared willing to meet the basic demand of France and Sweden in order to establish peace.¹⁹² Desiring to continue his father's crusade of unifying the church and strengthening Hapsburg, Austria and Spain, this was not the news that Ferdinand III wanted to hear.¹⁹³ Hoping to mobilize the lesser princes against the Electors, Ferdinand summoned the imperial Diet which had not meet since the beginning of hostilities almost thirty years prior.¹⁹⁴ Much to Ferdinand's disappointment, the Diet expressed its desire for peace in a declaration that corresponded with the wishes set forth by France and Sweden in 1638.¹⁹⁵

The Congress of Westphalia officially opened on 11 July 1643.¹⁹⁶ "On 11 June 1645 the French and Swedish envoy submitted their crowns' propositions for the future peace in Munster and Osnabruck (Munster was the venue for the negotiations between France and the Emperor and the other Catholic princes and Estates; Osnabruck for those between the Emperor and Sweden and her Protestant allies)."¹⁹⁷ In the meantime, all Estates and princes of the Holy Roman Empire had been invited to take part in the peace talks, thus the negotiations were to be at one and the same time an international conference and localized event within the German states.¹⁹⁸ Serious peace talks did not begin until the autumn of 1645 and were, therefore, affected by military actions that were

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹² Ibid., 77-78.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 76.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹⁶ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War*, 82.

¹⁹⁷ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 134.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 134.

still occurring in the field.¹⁹⁹ Historian Richard Bonney observes, “Peacemaking has to take account of events on the battlefield; or, to put it another way, military event happening at the end of a war may have a disproportionate effect on treaty making.”²⁰⁰ Regardless of the reason, the five years spent between 1643 and 1648 made the Westphalian peace congress the longest in early modern and modern European history.²⁰¹

Another reason for the long delay was the complexity of the issues at stake and a strong desire on the part of the participants not to repeat the shortcomings of the Peace of Prague and other similar agreements. A failure to settle the primary causes of The Thirty Years War would threaten the permanency of the agreement and possibly lead to further prolonged conflict. As such, the primary issues that needed to be settled were: German religious and political issues, the demands of foreign powers such as France and Sweden, as well as power and territorial disputes between the Austrian and Spanish segments of Hapsburg territories.²⁰²

Of primary concern for the current essay were the political and religious resolutions that were reached within Germany. According to S.H. Steinberg, “The Peace of Westphalia finally settled the constitutional and religious problems which had for centuries beset the German Empire; and it settled them within a European framework.”²⁰³ The political struggle between the monarchical and centralistic desires of the Emperor and the oligarchic and federalistic tendencies of the Estates were resolved in favor of the latter. Consequently, the Estates were granted full sovereignty, including the right to conclude alliances among themselves and with foreign powers with the caveat that no

¹⁹⁹ Bonney, *The Thirty Years' War 1618-1648*, 82.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁰³ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 81.

alliances be directed at the Empire or the Emperor. In short, the Estates were to be regarded as equal.²⁰⁴ Continuing in this vain the Emperor ceded to the Imperial Diet the right to declare war, compose peace, levy and house troops, and build and garrison fortresses.²⁰⁵ Moreover, secular governmental structures were to be constructed upon a foundation of religious equality. For example, the Supreme Court was to be comprised of two Catholic and two Protestant presidents and twenty six Catholic and twenty four Protestant judges.²⁰⁶ The Imperial Diet would no longer decide religious disputes by majority vote rather, amicable settlements would be negotiated between the Corpus Catholicorum and the Corpus Evangelicorum, thus relieving religious tension.²⁰⁷

Fortunately the spirit of compromise was also allowed to rule in the religious settlement as well. The Protestants sought to restore the religious climate of 1618 prior to the outbreak of The Thirty Years War.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, the radical Catholics called for the restoration of the conditions of 1630. In the end both sides compromised and agreed upon establishing the religious climate of 1 January 1624 as the status quo for post war Germany. Concessions were made to the Catholics in Austria, Bavaria, and several other imperial cities,²⁰⁹ but overall the Peace could be viewed as a triumph for the Protestant cause.²¹⁰ Both sides agreed to abandon the maxim *Cujus region ejus religio* thus ending the mandate that upon a ruler's conversion his subjects must embrace his new creed.²¹¹ Departing from the Peace of Augsburg that was struck in 1555, dissenting subjects would be granted the rights of private worship and the right to emigrate to

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 82.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 82.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 82.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 82.

²⁰⁸ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 135.

²⁰⁹ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 82.

²¹⁰ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 148.

²¹¹ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the Conflict for European Hegemony 1600-1660*, 83.

realms with a more agreeable religious climate. Furthermore, Protestant governmental officials from the reformed Northern German bishoprics were at last admitted to the Imperial Diet with full voting rights.²¹² Finally and most importantly, the Peace of Westphalia marked a definite step toward separating politics and religion, while political institutions would begin to be secularized, religious beliefs and affiliation would be left to the conscience of the individual.²¹³

Beginning as a German religious and political struggle, The Thirty Years War would ultimately envelop much of Europe. As a result, the Peace of Westphalia was every bit as much an international settlement as it was a German one.²¹⁴ Not only did the Peace of Westphalia end The Thirty Years War, it had the following important consequences: it weakened the Hapsburg states of Spain and Austria, it strengthened France by awarding it German territory: it made German princes independent of the Holy Roman Empire; it ended religious war in Europe; and it introduced a new method of peace negotiations whereby all participants meet to settle the problems of war and decide the terms of peace.²¹⁵ “The treaty thus abandoned the idea of a Catholic empire that would rule most of Europe. It recognized Europe as a group of equal, independent states. This marked the beginning of the modern state system and was the most important result of The Thirty Years War.”²¹⁶

In addition to concluding The Thirty Years War and bring about the end of Europe’s religious wars, it also closed the book on the Protestant Revolution. Please

²¹² Ibid., 83.

²¹³ Ibid, 83.

²¹⁴ Asch, *The Thirty Years War*, 148.

²¹⁵ Beck and others, *World History*, 604.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 604.

recall the words of Jacques Barzun referred to at the beginning of this essay. Barzun wrote:

The Modern Era begins, characteristically, with a revolution. It is commonly called the Protestant Reformation, but the train of events starting early in the 16C and ending—if indeed it has ended—more than a century later has all the features of a revolution. I take these to be; the violent transfer of power and property in the name of an idea.²¹⁷

The story recounted in this essay matches Barzun's definition of a revolution perfectly.

Beginning on 31 October 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety Five Theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, the European world would be divided into warring camps. What were they warring over? They were fighting over a set of caustic religious ideas that would challenge the religious and political status quo and throw Germany and eventually all of Europe, into a prolonged military struggle for power and property. Military historian, William Weir, sees the connection between the emergence of Protestantism and The Thirty Years War. Weir writes, "When the Protestant Reformation began, there was little resistance from a lax laity and a self-serving clergy. But the fires of religious passion had been burning for more than a century, and by 1632, they were white hot."²¹⁸

The flames of revolution would ravage European society for over one hundred and thirty years before all the belligerents grew weary of bloodshed and put out the fire with the Peace of Westphalia. Emerging from the smoldering embers was a totally new religious and political landscape for Europe. Rome's religious monopoly had been supplanted by the freedom of the individual to exercise his own conscience in matters of religion. Moreover, secular authorities could no longer mandate religious beliefs upon

²¹⁷ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 3.

²¹⁸ Weir, *50 Battle That Changed the World*, 262.

their subjects. Politically, the map of Europe had been redrawn in addition to the emergence of new political ideologies. As stated earlier, the notion of the modern state system that viewed Europe as a group of equal independent states, literally gave European nations a new political identity.

Given the overuse of the word “revolutionary” in modern society, how does one determine if something is truly worthy of the designation? Jacques Barzun offers the following excellent test:

We have got into the habit of calling too many things revolutions. Given a new device or practice that changes our homely habits, we exclaim: “revolutionary!” But revolutions change more than personal habits or widespread practice. They give culture a new face.²¹⁹

Could there be a more fitting description for the emergence of Protestantism and its resulting political consequences? The course of European history and culture was altered irrevocably by Luther’s ideas and the ensuing scramble for power and property they touched off.

Conclusion

The emergence of Protestantism was more than a reforming of the European religious order. Rather, it was a total reshuffling of old power structures that ushered Europe into the Modern Era. Luther’s religious concerns entered the German mainstream at precisely the right time to provide the revolution its spark. Political and religious dissent was already present, along with the new power of the printing press that would be used to champion Luther’s ideas throughout Germany and across Europe. Taking hold of their opportunity to break from the taxes and power of Rome, a handful of powerful German princes supported the popular uprising that Luther’s ideas had touch off

²¹⁹ Barzun, *From Down to Decadence 1500 to the Present*, 3.

throughout Germany. Following Barzun's definition, violence soon followed as new and old ideas clashed in an attempt to either maintain or gain power and property.

Consequently Germany was racked by a series of religious and politically motivated conflicts for the next one hundred years.

While the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 ushered in a temporary peace, the fires of religious differences, secular rivalries, distrust, and desire for power and wealth continued to smolder. In 1618, the embers were once again fanned into a raging inferno as the religious and political contest renewed itself in The Thirty Years War. Continuing almost without abatement until 1648, what began as a German dispute, consumed much of the European continent. When the Peace of Westphalia was struck, over one hundred years of open religious hostility and military conflict had finally come to an end.

As a result, it is the opinion of this author, that The Thirty Years War was part of the causal chain of events identified by Barzun as the Protestant Revolution. The conflict was not an entirely new struggle, but the renewal and conclusion to a previously unfinished conflict. As such, The Thirty Years War should be viewed as the last act of a revolutionary play that took more than a century to reach its climax and conclusion. Therefore, the Peace of Westphalia closed the curtain on this revolutionary era of world history. Not only did it end Europe's religious wars; it also caused society and culture to emerge with a new face.

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