

# From the Reformations to the Thirty Years' War (1500-1648)

## Introduction

*The roughly three hundred years of European history known as the early modern period evidence some of the most profound social, cultural, political, and economic transformations of European history. Social and cultural changes emerged out of challenges to the Roman Catholic religious hegemony of medieval Europe through the Reformations, and remarkable economic and geopolitical transformations developed out of emerging global contact and trade. New confessions of faith and political developments informed socio-political transformations, conflicts, and upheavals at the local and territorial levels. Artistic, scientific, and cultural developments introduced new methods of expression, inquiry, and knowledge production and dissemination.*

*The foundations of medieval Europe continued to develop in the early modern period, and the changes and challenges of the age affected all aspects of society, including cultural and religious institutions, familial structures, social rituals, legal procedures, and economic ties and formations. The durable legacies of these particularly early modern changes carried through and influenced the later developments of German and European history. This volume explores aspects of this remarkable period through fifteen sections focusing on Families and Communities; Sex, Gender, and Bodies; Knowledge, Work, and Mobility; Politics and Power from villages to empire; Religious Life and the Reformations; and Wars and Violence.*

This project and its introduction are built on and include the work of Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and Ellen Yutzy Glebe in the first edition and on the work of Greta Grace Kroeker with the invaluable transcription and translation assistance of Christina Moss and Elisabeth Mait for this current edition.

## Chapter 1: Families and Communities

If the decades before 1500 formed, in Johan Huizinga's words, "the autumn of the Middle Ages," then upon this autumn followed not winter but a new spring. The cities and their burghers flourished as never before, buoyed up by the spread of literacy and the recovery of trade. Petty burghers and even peasants became solid citizens. Nobles grew up in an age that demanded skills unknown to their ancestors (facility in written German and Latin, for example, and knowledge of the law), and they informed their lives with study and travel rather than relying on custom alone.

Families and communities were both the foundation and the forum of the developments of the early modern period. The monogamous, sexually exclusive household of an adult couple, their children, and servants formed the basic social unit of German (and European) society. Because men and women were only allowed to marry after they had achieved a certain level of economic security, the average age at first marriage was relatively high (mid to late twenties) and a significant percentage of the population never married. Unlike in southern Europe, spouses in German society were typically of comparable age, and obvious departures from this norm could spark ridicule and criticism.

Although the husband was the legal head of an intact family, women played a vital role in the daily organization and management of both domestic and commercial activities. Among the classes of urban craftsmen, women organized the household and often were active in a craft, either the husband's or a separate one, or in the marketing of products from their husbands' workshops. In some places, wives

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were permitted to assume control of the shop and employees upon a husband's death. This privilege encouraged remarriage within the husband's craft.

In the countryside, women were likewise responsible for the household and the children. In their province, too, lay the care of the garden and the preservation or marketing of its produce. At harvest time, they even worked alongside the men in the fields. Seasonal festivities and village celebrations offered men and women of marriageable age the opportunity to become acquainted with one another and provided relief from the monotony of everyday life. Urban artists idealized village life by portraying peasants as vibrant and carefree in (perhaps deliberate) contrast to the more restrained well-to-do burghers and nobles. In fact, relationships between the sexes were subject to strict protocols both within and between social classes.

Unfortunately, most of the surviving documentation on marital relations was produced under extraordinary circumstances, usually when the pair was geographically separated. In the case of Balthasar and Magdalena Paumgartner, the family business required the husband to make long trips to Italy and to markets in other German regions. Likewise, Martin Luther's frequent absences from home prompted his correspondence with his wife Katharina. Both sets of letters are interesting for the specific information they supply about historical personalities and their relationships. They are also invaluable for the glimpses they afford into two sixteenth-century marriages. The letters poignantly illustrate the extent to which the husbands valued their wives' contributions to their families' livelihoods, and they convey some sense of the maturing of marital relationships with the passage of time. In the Paumgartners' letters we can follow the development of their relationship from their engagement through sixteen years of "good times and bad." Martin Luther was frequently separated from Katharina during their twenty-one-year marriage, and, indeed, died on one of his trips in 1546. His last letter to her was written just days before. In two letters included in this collection, Luther also provides a glimpse into his relationships with his parents.

The ideal of marriage evolved significantly under the influence of the Protestant reforms. In the new Churches, marriage was not recognized as a sacrament, members of the clergy were encouraged to marry, and the vow of celibacy was not only rejected but scorned as one of the worst falsehoods introduced by the Roman Church. Although the denial of marriage's sacramental nature may seem to have devalued it, the abolition of clerical celibacy resulted in the elevation of marriage into the only social ideal for most of the population. (The Protestants could not deny that Paul had praised celibacy for those who were capable of remaining chaste, but they pointed to the evident failure of clerics to do so as proof that this was intended only for a very select few.) The Reformation era was a time of issuing and enforcing stricter rules for marriage, the regulation of which had never been a purely ecclesiastical function. Whereas medieval Canon Law had stipulated that a valid marriage occurred when two partners had exchanged vows and physically consummated their union, sixteenth-century reformers campaigned against clandestine marriages ("corner marriages") and demanded that the vows be taken publicly and that sufficient time elapse between the announcement of the engagement and the wedding, so that it could be determined whether both parties were free to marry. A genre of literature and art sprang up around these ideals, and, though some of these were tongue-in-cheek satires, they are nevertheless valuable sources.

Weddings offered occasions for both celebration and education. Early modern people gathered to celebrate the rite of passage into a new phase of life and to reinforce the centrality of the marital institution for the community. Images like Erhard Schoen's 1526 *Peasants' Wedding* not only reveal glimpses of peasant celebrations, but also illustrate elite views of peasant excess and debauchery. Songs like „Gar lustig ich spazieren ging“ (1603), and poems and love letters reflect that early modern marriages could be both romantic and functional. „A Wedding Speech“ by Anna Wecker in 1586 reflects her admonitions to the bride and groom to ground their marriage in Christian faith and biblical virtues.

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Marriages were expected to produce children, although there were checks, either intentional or not, on fertility. Women married relatively late (in their mid-twenties) and breastfed their babies, which reduced fertility. The same can be said of periods of malnourishment or hard labor. The ability of populations to respond quickly to compensate for population losses to disease and war suggests that married couples also practiced rudimentary forms of birth control during other times. The average woman bore four to six children over the course of her life and given the high rate of infant and child mortality, married couples might expect to see half their children die before reaching adulthood. The Paumgartners were devastated by the death of their only child in 1592, and the Luthers also watched two of their six children die at an early age.

Though the high rate of infant mortality – and mortality in general – certainly influenced parents' relationships with their children, the few first-person accounts that we have reveal parents' great personal interest in and affection for their children. As with marriage, there was a genre of popular literature – at times gruesome by modern standards – devoted to childrearing. On the whole, however, there is little reliable evidence for the not uncommon modern assumption that in earlier times high mortality rates and other factors inhibited the formation of close emotional attachments between parents and children. The eighteenth-century Jewish wife, mother, and businesswoman Glückel Hameln's diary reflects deep marital ties between husband and wife and emotional ties between mother and daughter at a time of great upheaval and particular risk to European Jews.

Social position and geographical circumstances also informed early modern family and community experience. In some ways, it was harder for the untitled (lesser) nobles to adapt to new ways. The stories of three different men from the same generation and land – Franconia – allow for interesting comparisons. Michel von Ehenheim (1462/63-1518) felt a need to record his deeds for the instruction and pleasure of his kin and descendants, but his account is spare and purely descriptive, mainly a family chronicle. His way of life, which involved military service to princes, also fit a traditional mold. The second man, the far more famous Götz von Berlichingen (c. 1480-1562), also had a traditional education and was committed to family and lineage but led a life of feuds for gain and pleasure. The third nobleman, Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523), shows us how life could be transformed by literacy and advanced education. He studied at seven German and Italian universities, consorted with learned men, published in both Latin and German, and raised a literary and political voice – unique among his class – for a stronger monarchy and a reformed Church. Country life, which so suited Berlichingen, bored Hutten and disgusted him with its stinks and squalor.

## **Chapter 2: Sex, Gender, and Bodies**

Early modern German-speakers also experienced changes in their perceptions of their bodies, genders, sexualities, and health. As humanists and doctors investigated ancient texts and contemporary bodies, new publications on diverse themes relating to the human body emerged in texts and art on anatomy, gender, disease, and childbirth. Likewise, religious and educational materials reflected the spiritual and social concerns of early modern people as they navigated an era of plague, travel, disease, and medical innovations.

The early modern period was an age of both printing and moral preoccupations, and a great deal of prescriptive literature and moralizing tracts reinforced gendered expectations and warned against moral failings and sinful sexual behavior. Texts like “The Wise Woman” (1525) and images like “Old Man with a Young Woman,” “Old Woman with a Young Man,” and “Child Eater” warned old and young alike of the pitfalls of lust, sin, and disobedience while poems and song lyrics reinforced moralizing themes through oral culture and music.

Printing also evidenced the moral concerns and medical priorities of early modern life. One theological, medical, and social concern included the spread of syphilis. Luminaries of the age like Martin Luther took

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up the pen to rage against sex workers as “poisoners” who spread syphilis and moral decay to “poor young men” while artists like Albrecht Dürer used art to warn against the consequences of the disease. Artists and writers also published images and texts about other medical catastrophes of the age, most especially the plague. Eyewitness testimonies about the personal and social devastation of the plague, like that of Basler Andreas Ryff, document both the physical and the emotional toll of the many waves of early modern plague.

The fifteenth and subsequent centuries produced eyewitness accounts in unprecedented numbers and quality. Before 1500, it was rare for women to write such texts. When they did write, they often turned to the intimate subjects of their lives, including pregnancy, birth, loss, and love. Some accounts from the period also featured those defying gendered expectations. The earliest known autobiographical text by a German-speaking woman was composed by Helene Kottannerin (c. 1400-after 1458), a Viennese noblewoman who was lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth (c. 1409-42), the wife of Albert II of the house of Habsburg, who was King of the Romans (and emperor-elect) (r. 1438-39) and King of Hungary (r. 1437-39). When Albert died on October 27, 1439, Elizabeth was five months pregnant with his heir, whom doctors predicted was a boy. To secure the legitimate rights of her son-to-be, the queen needed to have him crowned as soon as possible. Therefore, Elizabeth asked Helene Kottannerin to break into the royal stronghold of Plintenburg (Hungarian: Visegrád) and steal the heavily guarded royal Crown of Saint Stephen. In her memoirs, Kottannerin recounts how, on February 20, 1440, she and a Hungarian nobleman stole the crown and the royal regalia, replaced them with copies, and then fled up the Danube. She delivered the royal crown to Elizabeth, who gave birth to Ladislaus (Hungarian: László) just a few hours later. In May 1440, the two women arranged for three-month-old Ladislaus to be crowned King of Hungary. This episode is also recounted in Kottannerin’s memoirs. In the end, however, their daringness went for naught. Ladislaus died young at age seventeen, and the succession to Hungary and Bohemia passed to the King of Poland. But the tale is nonetheless astonishing, not only because it centers on two courageous women, but also because one of them left a written record of it.

### **Chapter 3: Knowledge, Work, and Mobility**

The nexus of early modern printing, scientific inquiry, and mobility led to an explosion of knowledge gathering and dissemination. New forms of artistic expression and innovative teaching, intellectual and scientific methods spread from and into the German speaking lands through printing, travel, study, and letter writing. The priorities of the age emerged in new educational tracts and pedagogies, in cookbooks that reflected both domestic medicinal traditions and emerging medical knowledge, in confessional and polemical artworks, and in autobiographical texts about the uniquely early modern experiences of travel, war, and plague.

Education underwent significant transformation in both theory and practice during this age. Fueled by Renaissance humanistic theory about how sources should be evaluated, used, and taught as well as practical responses to global economic developments, education focused on some of the real-world skills necessary for roles as notaries, lawyers, and politicians ready for careers in rapidly changing civic and economic life. At the same time, the new learning informed a renewed interest in the classical world and revived ancient models of rhetoric and historical inquiry. Humanists embraced the historical study of theological sources and used new methods of textual analysis to study the Bible and the Church Fathers. Those studies, in turn, informed new theological questions and interpretations across Christendom and underpinned new religious movements in the German speaking lands. Early modern German-speaking communities increasingly sought to establish schools to prepare young people for the future. Most schools sought to equip girls with the ability to read the Bible and to prepare boys for a trade or provide a foundation for further education.

The burghers, who had learned to write from the clergy, also began writing about their own lives. Augsburg resident Burkard Zink (1397-1474/75) penned an account of his times, into which he inserted

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the tale of his own life. Despite his modest circumstances, Zink got some education, traveled widely, and married a seamstress, with whom he founded a new household. His account describes the great events of south Germany in his time, such as the Cities' War of the 1440s, but also very familiar things: youth, schooling, courtship, marriages, and the births, baptisms, and deaths of his children. Zink is a prime example of a man who began life humbly (in Memmingen), but who managed, through intelligence, hard work, and a good marriage, to become a respectable burgher in a large city.

Although cities were known to shorten life expectancy, they drew migrants in this age of increased mobility, especially from smaller towns and villages. Many of these transplants got on well in town, we know, but rarely do we see individual peasants who rose to become respectable burghers. The most dramatic case is that of Thomas Platter (1489-1552), an Alpine goatherd in the Valais (today southwest Switzerland), who wandered in search of learning until, in the age of the Protestant Reformation, he had gained enough to become a teacher of Greek at a secondary school in Basel. His narrative is remarkable but not unique. A century later we encounter another ordinary man, Hans Heberle (1597-1677), a Swabian cobbler-farmer. Living in the midst of the Thirty Years War, sometimes very near the front, he recorded the great events of the conflict as well as the fortunes of his small family – just as Burkard Zink had done nearly two centuries before. Heberle, Platter, and Zink illustrate how people were transformed by skills, literacy, and mobility, and how their lives were situated between public and personal affairs.

This blending of increasing literacy, learning, printing, and mobility found other expressions, too. Cookbooks, like those of Anna Wecker, the wife of a physician, blended advice on nutrition and home medicine with the emerging art of printing, providing valuable information for everyday domestic life. More celestial expressions of scientific inquiry and innovation emerged in the work of Nicolaus Copernicus, whose work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* appeared in Nuremberg in 1543, and others like Paracelsus and the German astronomer and mathematician, Johannes Kepler. Early modern advances in science and medicine also appeared in studies of anatomy, leading to insights into how the body functions and new methods of medical interventions for childbirth and disease. Printing innovations meant that scientific discoveries and theories could be printed in increasingly precise detail and circulated across Europe. The work of Albrecht Dürer, in particular, expresses the medley of scientific, religious, and social themes common in early modern German printing.

Just as early modern German speakers experienced unprecedented innovation and inquiry, they also lived through the upheavals of war and violence. The dislocation and devastation of war produced accounts of human experiences of war, often highlighting survival and personal accounts like those of Götz von Berlichingen, whose autobiography reveals his experiences in the German Peasants' War of 1525. Printing, travel, war, exploration, trade, and immigration meant that new ideas and diverse perspectives spread throughout the German speaking lands, sometimes challenging accepted norms and sometimes reinforcing them.

## Chapter 4: Politics and Power: Holy Roman Empire

The early modern Empire inherited a dual legacy from the High Middle Ages: the Imperial monarchy and the German feudal order. Then, the fourteenth-century depression of populations and economies weakened the large structures of authority – Empire and Church – in favor of what may be called “dispersed sovereignty.” The era of recovery around 1500 promoted a revival of royal authority together with strong dynastic principalities, autonomous city-states, and a high degree of communal self-administration in the villages of many lands. The Imperial monarchy was elective, not hereditary. Upon an emperor's death, the Imperial electors met to select a successor, and the one chosen was crowned German king (called “King of the Romans”) and emperor-elect. Until the mid-sixteenth century, he became emperor only by papal coronation.

The monarchy's greatest weakness was the instability of the royal succession, as a remedy for which

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Emperor Charles IV (r. 1346-78) issued the Golden Bull in 1356. It fixed in law the number, duties, and rights of the seven royal electors, four temporal (Bohemia, Palatinate, Saxony, and Brandenburg) and three spiritual (Mainz, Cologne, and Trier). The electors' lands held in fief were declared to be indivisible, and their electoral duties and procedures were defined by law. When, in the following century, the Imperial Diet [*Reichstag*] began to take parliamentary shape, the electors formed its senior chamber, while the princes (around fifty bishops and a dozen dynasties) formed the second, and the fifty or so Imperial cities the lowest chamber.

The Golden Bull did not immediately end disputes about royal successions or halt the dispersal of power. At the election of 1410, when King Sigismund got only two votes, a wag quipped, "In Frankfurt behind the choir stool, a king was elected by a child and a fool." The monarchy's central problem was its penury. Because the royal domain had disappeared, the king's real power depended on his hereditary possession of a considerable dynastic principality. The promising reign of Emperor Frederick III (r. 1440-93), which began with a royal progress through many Imperial lands, was followed by a long sequestration in the tumultuous Austrian lands. The revival of the Imperial monarchy began after the election and royal coronation of his son, Maximilian I (r. 1486/93-1519). On this occasion, the Empire displayed itself in symbol and ritual of a sort that had not been seen for generations. Maximilian was a deliberate renovator of the Imperial monarchy who understood that the exercise of power required a union of image, word, and deed. He had a powerful sense of his dynasty as his destiny, and saw himself as the true heir to Frederick II, Otto the Great, and Charlemagne.

This symbolic revival of the monarchy coincided with an actual reform of Imperial governance under Maximilian and his heir, Charles V (r. 1519-56), which fixed the monarchical office's standing and limitations for the next three centuries and kept it firmly in the Habsburg dynasty's hands. The chief acts of the Imperial Reform unfolded at the Imperial Diets between 1495 and 1521. They began with the great Imperial Diet of Worms in 1495. Each of the reforms enacted or at least discussed at Worms aimed to strengthen Imperial (if not necessarily the emperor's) governance: a Public Peace, abolition of the feud, and an arrangement for policing the Empire (Imperial Circles); a new scheme of direct taxation, an Imperial supreme court, and an executive council staffed by both the king and the leading Imperial estates. The reforms were negotiated with the Diet, not dictated by the king, and behind them stood not Maximilian but the archbishop of Mainz and his party of estates. The formula for this new regime, "emperor and Empire" [*Kaiser und Reich*], denoted the dual nature of supreme authority in the Empire. Just as with other early modern developments, these political changes appeared in song and image. Some themes reflected lofty political subjects, such as Heinrich Isaac's *Virgo Prudentissima*, which commemorated the 1506 Imperial Diet, while others, like Paul Hofhaimer's *Zucht, Ehr und Lob*, celebrated courtly love.

## Chapter 5: Politics and Power: Territories

The new dual system of order drew its potential from the ongoing evolution of the patrimonial principalities of the feudal era into territorially-defined, institutionalized states. Among historians, this most German creation has long stood as a hallmark of early modern German history. The Empire possessed bounded lands identified with the ruling dynasty (the Habsburgs were also called the "House of Austria"); territorial impartibility among the male members of the dynasty; an internal sovereignty limited, if at all, only by the territorial parliament; the power to create new laws (statutes); and at least the rudiments of a fiscal, judicial, and administrative bureaucracy. Two additional things helped to restrain the dynasties from making the Empire a hub of inter-dynastic wars: the vast network of inter-dynastic marriages and the rise of the princes' corporate power through the Imperial Diet. They promoted a strong aristocratic culture of arbitration and negotiation of differences and thereby encouraged the growth of stability in Imperial public life.

Like many other innovations, the princely territorial state appeared earlier as an idea than a reality.



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Nearly 150 years before the reform of Austrian governance began under Maximilian I, a document was drafted that anticipated the outlines of a semi-sovereign dynastic state. Purporting to be a twelfth-century Imperial charter instead of what it was, a fourteenth-century Austrian forgery, the *Privilegium Maius* sketched with some accuracy the characteristics of a largely autonomous, semi-sovereign territorial state. It declared the “archdukes” to be exempt from Imperial service and judicial authority, and it specified primogeniture and the indivisibility of lands. By around 1500, when territorial polities vaguely resembling this ideal were beginning to appear, their princes were nevertheless commonly bound at least to consult their leading subjects gathered in parliamentary bodies. The territorial parliament [*Landtag*] was notably strong in the southwestern territory of Württemberg, where the nobles were mostly free of ducal authority and the towns relatively strong but modest in size. The Treaty of Tübingen of 1514 reveals how strongly the parliament could assert its will in times of political crisis. It endured as a kind of written constitution for the duchy of Württemberg until 1805. The give-and-take bargaining between prince and estates followed customary rules, which in some states were eventually set down in writing, as can be seen in the procedural rules for the territorial parliament of Electoral Saxony in the second half of the sixteenth century. The other side of territorialization involved the creation of a central administrative apparatus and rules for the regime’s administration and judiciary. The result was the formation of bureaucracies staffed by educated (or at least trained) officials who were organized into offices and colleges possessing functionally distinct competencies. This process spread from south to north.

## Chapter 6: Politics and Power: Cities

The Empire’s dense urban networks consisted mainly of middling, small, and very small towns. In 1500, only twenty-seven of these towns had more than 10,000 inhabitants, and more than half of these towns lay in the Low Countries. Otherwise, the size gradient plunged quickly from the largest cities of about 40,000 inhabitants (Cologne and Prague) to middling cities of 10,000, and more than half of the Empire’s townsfolk lived in cities smaller than that. Degrees of urban liberty varied considerably. The sixty or so Imperial cities, including nearly all of the major commercial entrepôts, enjoyed extensive rights of self-governance. Most cities, however, were territorial, in other words, ruled by princes, though they routinely possessed some rights of self-administration. In most places, the major urban institutions had been created and installed at some point between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. The social character of the urban regimes varied from exclusive rule by merchant and mixed merchant oligarchies (the Hanseatic cities, Nuremberg) to mixed merchant and noble oligarchies (Strasbourg, Frankfurt, Ulm) to broad representation of middling folk and artisans (Basel). In Strasbourg, with its 20,000 or so inhabitants, the constitution of 1482 codified the distribution of offices, fixed the procedures for the election or cooptation of magistrates, required the annual renewal of the communal oath, and proclaimed the traditional burghers’ obligation to the common good. Strasbourg possessed a full panoply of civic institutions: a commune of adult male citizens organized into guilds and nobles’ societies, a large council of 300 guild officials, a small council of nobles and guild representatives, and privy councils for internal and external affairs. The self-governing guilds and managed crafts found in most cities watched over production and competition as well as the situation, training, and social lives of journeymen and apprentices. They also performed social and religious functions (prayer, burials, hospitality). These collegial elements are missing from the craft ordinances enacted for territorial towns by their princes, most of which dealt principally with economic regulation.

## Chapter 7: Politics and Power: Villages

The rural folk of German farmers and stockmen depended for survival and success on communal institutions and values, and the old-settled lands of the south, center, and west comprised one of Europe’s great zones of communally organized agrarian life. The villagers’ rights of self-administration, which had developed since the thirteenth century in place of the direct seignorial exploitation of earlier times, reached their limit of intensification before 1500, when the economic recovery was inspiring some

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lords to introduce new kinds of serfdom. In the newer lands of the northeast, where the farmers had once been very free, such pressures grew with little resistance and eventually produced what is called “the Second Serfdom.” Where rural communes were strong, relations between peasants and lords depended on a rich mixture of struggle and negotiation. This was notably true in territories ruled by prelates. In some small territories, a stable level of tenant participation in governance developed. In other regions, new exactions and modes of servility gave rise to a culture of simmering resentment punctuated by revolts. Yet the Imperial Reform did not leave village life untouched. Even villagers had the right to appeal to the new Imperial Chamber Court [*Reichskammergericht*]. Such cases, even if rare, modify the impression that the communally organized village was a closed society. They also provide insight into the judicialization of peasant grievances that followed the Peasants’ War of 1525.

There were places where the devolution of self-government to the communes was common, even general, but outside of certain parts of the Swiss region, these rights were always limited to very local matters. Still, territorial villages often possessed some administrative powers, as can be seen in the Bavarian village of Ingenried, whose communal officers oversaw the livelihood of both its parish priest and a bathhouse attendant. The routinization of relations between villagers and lords tended to integrate the communes into the territorial state. The instruments of integration sometimes included a communal oath of loyalty and the reduction of customary law to writing, which permitted the villagers to cite written law and compelled territorial officials to check their claims.

The multiple layers of governance that formed in the German lands – Imperial, princely-territorial, civic, and rural – remained more or less intact until the abolition of the Empire in 1803. To some degree, the strengthening of Imperial judicial authority (“judicialization”) and the ability of the emperor’s officials to intervene in territorial and local conflicts may have slowed, but in the long run could not prevent, the territorial principalities’ growth into true states in the European mold. On the other hand, the Empire knew no real absolutist rule of the western kind until the eighteenth century, and then only in a handful of the largest territorial states. Measured by the standards of absolutist rule in England, France, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden, the Empire remained to the end a zone of mediate, limited powers of governance.

## Chapter 8: Religious Life and the Reformations: Before Reform

The strongly polarized religious mentalities of the late Middle Ages foreshadowed the schism of the sixteenth century. At one pole stood a rich ritual life which tended toward greater externalization in the sense of standardization and quantification. The medieval system as practiced by most laymen reflected the principle, “I give so that you may give” [*do ut des*]. This “salvation arithmetic” was increasingly complicated by the growing popularity of indulgences and the burgeoning cults of popular saints. In addition to the seven sacraments officially approved by the Church in 1215, the minor ritual acts (sacramentals) – e.g., the seasonal blessing of fields, processions, passion plays, and the prophylactic use of communion wafers – played a crucial role in the relationship of believers to the divine.

The other principal devotional tendency emphasized internalization in the form of mystical practices and new forms of piety, such as “the Modern Devotion” [*Devotio Moderna*], which stressed personal spiritual experience. The most popular text associated with the Devotion, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), was originally written in Latin but was translated into numerous languages including German by the turn of the sixteenth century. Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300-1361), a student of the mystic Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1328), transmuted his teacher’s profoundly abstract religious teaching (some statements of which were declared heretical in 1329) into a more concrete message about the importance of personal conversion, sincerity, and moral reform. Tauler wrote his sermons in German for the Dominican nuns he counselled in Strasbourg. His thoughts are held to have influenced the young Martin Luther. The same can be said of *The German Theology* [*Theologia Deutsch*], an anonymous fourteenth-century tract written in vernacular German. Luther, who published this text in two annotated



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editions in 1516 and 1518, apparently remarked that, after the Bible and *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, this book had taught him the most about God, Christ, man, and the world. Luther cited both *The German Theology* and Tauler's writings as evidence that his own teachings were not innovations but a continuation of orthodox ideas. (In fact, these mystical works – as the censure of Eckhart suggests – had long been viewed as suspect by the Church.)

Luther also called on the writings of the Bohemian theologian Jan Hus (ca. 1372-1415) as evidence that he stood in a tradition of reformers. He did so in defiance of the authority of the general council that had condemned Hus to death for heresy at Constance in 1415. Hus had taught that the laity should receive Communion in both kinds (bread and wine; the position is called "Utraquism"). In addition, Hus had criticized the sale of indulgences and advocated the right of the clergy to marry.

Around 1500, a number of preachers were active who preached in the vernacular and powerfully condemned immorality. The most famous of them was Johann Geiler von Keyserberg (1455-1510), an Alsatian who laced his sermons in Strasbourg's cathedral with folk-sayings, proverbs, anecdotes, complicated metaphors, and sharp admonitions to reform and communal morality. He demanded, for example, that usurers – among whose ranks most of the merchants of the day were included – should be punished with excommunication. Equally compelling, perhaps, were the sermons of itinerant preachers, some of whom preached indulgences. One of them was the Dominican Johann Tetzel (1465-1519), who told his hearers that indulgences would lessen the time their deceased loved ones and they themselves would have to spend in Purgatory. By this time, such actions had become a well-organized enterprise by preachers who employed, among other means, printed materials. It was in direct response to one of Tetzel's trips through Saxony – made on behalf of the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg – that Martin Luther penned his Ninety-Five Theses against indulgences, which, in hindsight, are said to have marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Printing and the distribution of polemical materials played an important role in ushering in the coming schism. Broadsheets critical of indulgences and other practices as well as other polemical sources like "On the Source and Origin of Monks" reached a broad range of audiences in both image and word.

## **Chapter 9: Religious Life and the Reformations: Reformation Agendas**

When Luther sparked the initial controversy over the preaching of indulgences, it was obvious to no one that the affair would lead to what might be called "The Reformation." Nor did Luther expect such a consequence from his own action. Only later did he reveal his moment of conversion, the "Tower Experience," in which he read the verse in Paul's *Letter to the Romans* in a new way: "The just shall live by faith." Not until Luther's appearance in April 1521 at the Imperial Diet of Worms, where he refused to retract his opinions, did the possibility of a schism within the Church begin to become clear. Within a few years, calls increased, echoing Luther, for a reformed religion based on the principles of salvation "by the Bible alone," "by faith alone," and "by grace alone" [*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia*]. According to the first of these principles, the highest Christian authority was Scripture, which every reader is capable of understanding without the intervention of pope, council, or professor. The second principle refers to the centrality of personal faith as the sole path to salvation, and the third principle points to the centrality of divine grace as the sole means of salvation. By emphasizing the individual's relationship to God, Luther and his followers devalued the role of the Church as mediator. They supported – in principle though not always in practice – a "priesthood of all believers."

This was more or less the initial spark of the movement that eventually (after 1529) came to be known as Protestantism. Or such was the claim, for in fact the break with Rome gave rise not to one movement but to many. The divisions began in the winter of 1521-22, when Luther was in hiding at the Wartburg in Thuringia. Some of his original allies at Wittenberg, the Saxon university town where he taught, began preaching more radical messages against secular authorities and against traditional religious practices involving images and the sacraments. Luther denounced them and urged that they be silenced. This act

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marked a positive shift in Luther's estimation of the secular ruler's role in religious matters.

Meanwhile, the multiplication of reformist programs grew apace. In Zurich, Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli had broken with Rome and was developing his own doctrines and practices. His interpretation of the sacraments, especially his rejection of the real presence of Christ in the Communion bread and wine, infuriated Luther and marked the opening of the split that would divide the movement permanently into Lutheran and Reformed streams of reformation.

Spreading competing reform messages became a central feature of the Reformations. Just as printing spread competing religious perspectives through word and image, music reinforced new theological principles and made them accessible to believers. Works like Elisabeth Cruciger's *Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn* and Arnold von Bruck's *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* [In Greatest Need I Cry to Thee] gave voice to the emerging Reformations.

By the late 1520s, the doctrinal differences between Luther and Zwingli and their followers posed a serious threat to Protestant efforts to organize a defensive alliance to protect the new faith. In 1529, Landgrave Philip of Hesse attempted to mediate the dispute by inviting Protestant religious leaders to his residence at Marburg in hopes of reaching a compromise. The colloquy failed in its goal, however, and Luther and Zwingli left more embittered than ever. This schism damaged the prestige and moral authority of the Protestants, because it revealed that those who insisted on the principle of *sola scriptura* could in fact not agree on what Scripture said. The schism did not greatly affect the power of the defensive league formed by the Protestant princes and cities in 1531, because they were able to exclude the Swiss cities and to curb partisanship for Zwingli in Strasbourg, Augsburg, and some smaller towns.

## **Chapter 10: Religious Life and the Reformations: Early Modern Catholicism**

At the heart of the Protestant projects for reforming social life lay their desire to uproot the religious orders' ascetic, celibate way of life. They focused not on abuses but on the institution itself. As the movement grew in the cities, it targeted for suppression the communities of the mendicant orders, chiefly Franciscans and Dominicans. The outcomes of these struggles depended on local conditions. At patrician-ruled Nuremberg in 1524-25, the Franciscan nuns resisted the demands of patrician parents and magistrates for the repatriation of their daughters. At Strasbourg at about the same time, three Dominican convents resisted the magistrates' demand for religious (and social) conformity and survived, two of them until the French Revolution. The triumph of this campaign against the religious orders meant essentially the absorption of the clergy into the laity. This is the message of Katharina Schütz Zell, daughter of an artisan master and Strasbourg magistrate, who married a priest. The root cause of the attack on women's convents was not abuses – alleged or real, financial or sexual – but the Protestants' idea of the patriarchal household as the only Christian way of life. Only marriage could restrain concupiscence.

Some Catholic rulers believed that simple repression would suffice to eradicate the movements for religious reform. Others saw quite clearly that in their own church's condition lay the deepest causes of the outcries against it. In the summer of 1524, a high-level consultation on the problem was held at Regensburg among Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, who was Charles's brother and vicar, the dukes of Bavaria, and twelve southern prince-bishops. They agreed to form an association to defend the old faith against heresy and to prosecute and punish errant priests and clandestine preachers. They recognized, however, that repression alone would not succeed, because the heretics were exploiting a truth – a corrupt Church – to gain adherents for their falsehoods. The assembly therefore went on to condemn many of the abuses and evils that reformists had been condemning for the past century.

The Regensburg conference acknowledged that Catholic reform depended – as Protestant reformation

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did – on the attitude of the secular authorities. In the Swiss Confederation, where there were no princes and few nobles, the larger city-states (Zurich, Bern, and Basel) adopted the new faith, but the old rural members of central Switzerland opposed it early and strongly. At the end of January 1525, envoys of nine “places” [Orte] met at Lucerne to discuss the Protestants’ errors and the possibilities for defending the old faith. This split presaged the definitive confessional division of the Confederation around 1530. Across the broad central and northern zones of the Empire, by contrast, the Protestant advance seemed irresistible. Except in the far northwest (Cologne, Münster, Paderborn, and Osnabrück), the prince-bishoprics fell one-by-one to Protestant dynasties, a dozen of them by the 1570s. Meanwhile, in 1563, the duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel took the last remaining Catholic territory in the north over to the Lutheran faith. In 1574, Lazarus von Schwendi had good reason to predict to the emperor that, within a generation, the old Church would be no more.

For the leaders of the Imperial Church the central issue was not what should be done but who should and could do it. The answer: not the emperor and the Diet, a body divided by religion, but the pope and a general council. Pope Paul III (r. 1534-49) called the Catholic bishops to assemble in December 1545 at Trent, where, in twenty-five sessions over the next eighteen years, they debated and defined both doctrinal canons on justification, the Eucharist, Penance, biblical authority, and the role of tradition, as well as disciplinary decrees concerning episcopal residence, seminaries, and matrimony. In the form of what is sometimes called “Tridentine Catholicism,” the council’s work spread in fits and starts through the entire Catholic Church. At this time, it worked to greatest effect in the Holy Roman Empire, where by 1600 or so the Catholic reform had begun to be well established.

## **Chapter 11: Religious Life and the Reformations: Imperial Reformation**

The confrontation of Luther’s reformation with the Holy Roman Empire began at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Now excommunicated by Roman decree, Luther was summoned to attend the Diet, under safe-conduct, to give an account of his teachings. On April 18, 1521, he was asked if he was prepared to recant his errors in the presence of Emperor Charles V and the Imperial estates the next day. There, in perhaps the most famous speech of the era, Luther declared that he could not retract unless he could be convinced, on the grounds of the Bible and reason, that his opinions were false. The young emperor then replied – through an orator, not in person – and declared that he would stand by the faith of his royal ancestors and the traditions of the Roman Church, for it was not possible that one man could be right against the entire Church. This was the defining moment of the German Reformation: Bible and reason vs. history and Church. In the following month, Charles issued the Edict of Worms, which laid the condition of outlawry on Luther, his followers, his writings, his printers, and their sellers. This edict, republished several times, proved unenforceable.

The urban movements before the Peasants’ War had divided the clergy and burghers into parties. After the insurrection, the princes also began to form parties. They thereby created the possibility both of political protection for the Protestant Reformation and of the movement’s integration into the structure of Imperial governance, a change that frustrated its revolutionary potential. After the Diet of Speyer (1529), where some princes and a few cities protested the Diet’s republication of the Edict of Worms, the term “Protestant” started being used. At the Diet of Augsburg (1530), their party gained a profile by presenting a comprehensive statement of Lutheran doctrine in twenty-eight articles, the Augsburg Confession. After the emperor’s theologians rejected it, he and the Catholic estates set about defining the issues from a Catholic point of view. After the dissolution of this Diet, the Imperial estates began organizing into armed leagues. The emperor had given the Protestants until April 1532 to agree to a provisional peace (until a general council of the Church should meet). On February 27, 1531, they ratified their alliance, named the Schmalkaldic League after their meeting place in Thuringia. Under two commanders, Elector John of Saxony and Landgrave Philip of Hesse, the League followed the

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organization typical of German political associations, with two exceptions: first, it united south and north – from Strasbourg to Pomerania – to an unprecedented degree; and second, it committed itself to “the praise and due honor of God Almighty and to the support and spread of His holy Word and Gospel” and it pledged to “rule and protect in a Christian manner.” The Schmalkaldic League lasted for fifteen years until, having been defeated in battle by the emperor’s forces, it disbanded in 1547. Charles V deprived the League’s two commanders of their lands and decreed that the Protestants had to accept a semi-restoration of Catholic rites and had to send their theologians to the Council of Trent.

The emperor’s victory proved brief, for in 1552 Elector Maurice of Saxony, who in 1547 had fought for the emperor against his fellow Protestants, joined hands with the king of France in revolt. The peace concluded between Maurice and King Ferdinand, Charles’s brother and putative heir, contained some of the terms that reappeared in the Religious Peace established at the Diet of Augsburg in 1555. The Peace restored Imperial governance by accepting an impossibility: a plurality of religions. It provided religious toleration for the Imperial estates (not their subjects) that adhered to the Augsburg Confession within what remained a Catholic kingdom. With three exceptions, it gave the estates the right to determine the official religion and require dissenting subjects to conform or emigrate, a formula that a jurist later named “whose the rule, his the religion” [*cuius regio, eius religio*]. The three exceptions, against the first two of which the Protestant and Catholic parties respectively protested: first a Catholic bishop who turned Protestant had to resign his office and jurisdictions (Ecclesiastical Reservation); second, subjects of prince-bishops were exempted from the rule of conformity (Ferdinandine Declaration); and, third, certain Imperial cities were to be governed according to the principle of parity between the Lutheran and the Catholic confessions.

The year 1555 is probably the most frequently chosen division point between the age of the Reformation, in the narrower sense, and the age of confessional formations. The moment’s importance was reinforced by Charles V’s abdication the following year. Against his earlier wish, he confirmed not his son but his brother Ferdinand in the Imperial succession. He combined this wise decision with the worst decision of his reign by giving his son, Prince Philip (future king) of Spain, the succession to rule over the Low Countries. Under the Religious Peace, Ferdinand promoted the Imperial *convivencia* with considerable success. Under his son, Maximilian II (r. 1564-76), the Imperial peace suffered from three sides: first, starting in the 1560s, the growth of the Reformed (Calvinist) faith created a second, illegal Protestant confession; second, starting in the 1570s, the revival of Catholicism unsettled relations between the emperor and the Protestant estates; and third, the Religious Wars in France and the Low Countries complicated efforts to preserve the Religious Peace.

## **Chapter 12: Religious Life and the Reformations: Consolidation and Division**

After the mid-1520s, the Protestant movement was also hampered by the formation and persistence of small groups that crystallized into distinctly heterodox communities. In Switzerland, former allies of Zwingli rejected infant baptism as unbiblical and began calling for believers’ baptism as a sign of true repentance and conversion. Their opponents thus called them “Anabaptists” (i.e., rebaptizers). About the same time, widespread revolts by peasants occurred across much of the southern and central sectors of the Empire. The connection between Anabaptism’s appearance in central Germany and the peasants’ demands and their ensuing defeat is a subject of controversy. The two movements did overlap, and the peasants’ defeat influenced the adoption of pacifism as a central Anabaptist tenet. Yet the rise of Anabaptism was by no means just a by-product of the Peasants’ War, for the movement sprang from the very impulse which led to the initial attempts at reforming the Church at large. Anabaptism attracted many who had agreed with Luther’s challenge to immorality and hypocrisy in the old church, but who ultimately turned the same critique on the Protestants. They were then led to reject the local Protestant churches as hardly better than the old ones. There is evidence, for example in Hesse, that this was the

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central issue for the appeal of the Anabaptist separatist message.

The story of the German Protestant Reformation has often been told as a tale of the Germans' national liberation from the Middle Ages and the Roman Church. A more recent view is that the Reformation was the first stage of the confessional era, when a relatively stable *convivencia* (co-existence) of confessions emerged in the Holy Roman Empire. The three German confessions – Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed (Calvinist) – were large, trans-territorial, readily identifiable, and more or less religiously disciplined communities. They were characterized by distinctive liturgical practices and doctrinal teachings but also by similar motivations and disciplinary goals.

Little had been settled by the time of Luther's death in 1546. Lutheranism underwent three decades of bitter doctrinal strife; in the 1560s Calvinism arrived as a third, illegal confession; and by 1600 the Catholic revival was putting the Empire's Protestants on the defensive. For more than fifty years, political collaboration across confessional boundaries – the fruit of 1555 – nonetheless continued. The confessions constructed stable new forms of church and school life; the Imperial estates supported the Empire's conflicts with the Ottoman power in Hungary; the integration of Imperial Jewry proceeded apace; and the long German campaign to rid the land of witches rose to its first highpoint. The war of 1618-48 disrupted these developments, of course, but also demonstrated the power of the incomplete reform of Imperial governance to resist a settlement of the incomplete religious reformation by force. Although the first major attempt at peace and restoration failed in 1634, in 1648 the old confessional order, its points of tension now soothed, could be fully restored.

In the post-1555 Confessional Era, the Empire seemed to be moving toward a stronger monarchy and a single, Protestant faith. The Religious Peace of Augsburg did not arrest this Protestant advance. In 1574, Lazarus von Schwendi (1522-84), a retired Imperial general, laid his vision of the Empire as a strongly ruled Protestant kingdom before Emperor Maximilian II (r. 1564-76). Schwendi was a patriot who longed for the Germans' restoration to the virtue and power of their ancient ancestors; he was a monarchist who saw the Empire beset by the Spanish and Ottoman "tyrannies"; and he was a Protestant who saw in Luther's Reformation a liberation of the Germans from the Roman Church, which, in his view, lay on the brink of extinction. Within two years, however, his emperor was dead, and his vision of the Empire began to fade away.

The post-1555 generation of Protestant leaders created the institutions and tools that would carry their churches through the coming centuries. Churches were visited, purified of idols and unsuitable pastors, and equipped with comprehensive new regulations called "church ordinances" [*Kirchenordnungen*], which spelled out in great detail how the new churches were to be managed. There was much borrowing, notably from Lutheran ordinances issued in Electoral Saxony, Württemberg, and Brunswick and from a Reformed ordinance issued in the Electoral Palatinate. Schools also were reformed, or new ones founded, based on strictly utilitarian principles. Their classically oriented curricula were designed to prepare young subjects for service in the church and the law. Everywhere, the spirit of regulation, discipline, and order was in the air, and if the Catholics were slow to follow the Protestant examples, it was for a lack of means rather than of need. Such regulations, combined with normative codes of doctrine – the Augsburg Confession for the Lutherans and the Heidelberg Catechism for the Reformed – created the Protestant confessions as communities of belief and liturgical practice.

Not everyone was prepared to be disciplined in religious matters. While some simply refused to accept the dominant faith, others, called "Nicodemites" (after the Pharisee Nicodemus, who visited Jesus in the night) conformed in body but not in their hearts. In some regions, such as Westphalia, local interconfessional agreements regulated the use of local churches and their churchyards. In four southern Imperial cities, the Peace of 1555 had decreed coexistence and governance on equal terms. Augsburg, a city of some 50-60,000 inhabitants, was governed by a magistracy based on confessional parity, and, with two breaks during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), it maintained this regime until the end of the Old

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Regime. In such a large city, Christians could live as dissenters, not as gathered communities but as individuals who went about their work and lived as other people did. Some were wealthy artisan masters. One of them, the goldsmith David Altenstetter (ca. 1547-1617), told the interrogating magistrates of his fondness for the writings of the sixteenth-century spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld. Altenstetter went sometimes to the Catholic church, sometimes to the Lutheran church, and sometimes not at all.

The Catholic revival surfaced during the final quarter of the sixteenth century. In 1574, two years after Schwendi's memorial, Peter Canisius (1521-97), a Dutch-speaking Jesuit from Nijmegen, informed Rome of the Church's pitiful state in the Empire. His correspondent, Giovanni Cardinal Morone (1508-80), was president of the Vatican's German Congregation and its leading expert on German affairs. Canisius's gloomy picture and the remedies he recommended echo both the Regensburg reform program of 1524 and the acts of the Council of Trent. He called for a new discipline of clergy and laity, purification of ceremonies, catechetical instruction for the laity, and collaboration with Catholic rulers to halt the conversions of Catholics and the secularization of ecclesiastical properties. Canisius's critique of the Catholic bishops emphasized the failure of leadership and need for outside help. Canisius and Morone also recognized the German nobility's central role in the governance of the Church in the Empire.

The Catholic revival's broad appeal is reflected in the mobilization of women for the cause. They sought to become "Jesuitesses" by serving God and the Church through the active life. Such a group, dedicated to St. Ursula, formed at Cologne in the latter years of the sixteenth century. Then help arrived from abroad in the persons of some Catholic Englishwomen led by Mary Ward (1585-1645) of Yorkshire. Ten years later, when these "English Ladies" had grown to about sixty members, Ward journeyed to Rome to seek papal approbation. Rebuffed, she and her companions turned to the Empire for help, where they found ducal (Munich) and Imperial (Vienna, Prague) sponsorship for the schools they founded for young women. Despite their zeal for the Church's cause, the English ladies fell afoul of engrained prejudice and the Council of Trent's prescription of claustration for women religious.

The work of the Catholic Reformation – winning whole lands back for the Catholic Church – depended on close collaboration between rulers, both dynastic and ecclesiastical, and clerical reformers. This work met perhaps its steepest challenges in the five duchies of eastern Austria. An exception was Tyrol, where the landed nobles had mostly adopted the new faith and negotiated toleration of it from their Habsburg princes. In some regions, Protestant nobles (illegally) extended this privilege from castle to town and burghers. Winning back these lands required, first, the destruction of the Protestant position by attacking noble liberties and Lutheran worship followed by massive evangelization by a corps of educated, disciplined Catholic clergy. Most of the latter had to be recruited from neighboring lands. In Inner Austria, the project of Catholic reform began under Bavarian tutelage with a consultation in 1579 at Munich among Archduke Charles (r. 1564-90) and his brother, Ferdinand of Tyrol, and their host, Duke William V of Bavaria. The three princes agreed that the key to solving the problem was to enforce the Habsburg princes' undoubted right under the Religious Peace to require religious conformity in their lands. One year later, Charles launched the campaign to break the Inner Austrian Protestant nobles' institutional structure and to retake the lands for the Catholic Church.

Left without interference, communities of mixed religion could sometimes agree to a local arrangement that both satisfied religious needs and maintained the public peace. After 1531, confessional conflict within the Swiss Confederation was handled through negotiations, although, as in the Empire, only the Confederation's full members could enforce conformity. True local *convivencias* appeared, however, in the associated republics, particularly Graubünden. When the commune of the Four Villages near Chur voted in the 1550s, three villages chose to maintain Catholic worship, the other Reformed. Dissenters attended services in a village of their confession until around 1600, when stronger Reformed minorities demanded use or even control of their own villages' churches. Tensions grew until 1616, when the formally Catholic village of Zizers confronted the issue. The two parties agreed to joint use of the village



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church and thereby restored the communal peace. The more popular the regime, as a rule, the less violence was caused by confessional conflicts.

The making of religious peace varied as widely as the Empire's forms of governance in the Empire. The Religious Peace did not apply to the kingdom of Bohemia, which (after 1527) shared a monarch with the Empire. The Bohemian religious situation was complicated by confessional diversity: Roman Catholics; two communities descended from the Hussites, Utraquists and the Bohemian Brethren (for political purposes a single party); and Lutheran and Reformed Protestants. The Bohemian estates, dominated by nobles, shielded the non-Catholic nobles and towns from their Catholic king. From around 1605, tensions were growing between Emperor Rudolph II and his eldest brother, Matthias. Allied to the heavily Protestant estates of Habsburg-ruled lands – Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Upper and Lower Austria – Matthias compelled Rudolph to cede these lands and to recognize him as future emperor. The Bohemian estates in turn exacted from the emperor a promise of a general edict of toleration. Issued as an edict in the summer of 1609, this “Letter of Majesty” guaranteed religious liberty to the allied Utraquists/Brethren and to the two Protestant confessions, whom Rudolph insisted be called “Utraquists” (“under both kinds,” in reference to communion with both the consecrated host (bread) and blood (wine)). On the same day, the heads of the Catholic and Protestant estates came to an agreement. These documents remained in force in principle until 1627, when the Catholic victories in the Thirty Years War emboldened the king-emperor to introduce a strongly Catholic and royalist constitution for Bohemia.

## **Chapter 13: Wars and Violence: Peasants' War**

In 1524 and 1525, a tremendous, largely rural, insurrection known as the Peasants' War of 1525, spread across the German lands from Lorraine to Hungary and from Lake Constance to Thuringia. Although the rebels made the ruling classes tremble, they could not produce the military victories that might have given their political agendas lasting credence. The ensuing repression, true, did not crush the communal structures of local life, but it did block access for village people to territorial governance except in small southern polities. The insurrection came as a brief but heavy shock to societies already agitated by the mounting debate about the reform of the Church, though the connection between the Peasants' War and the Protestant Reformation remains controversial. Protestant reformers condemned the insurrection as dangerous and criminal; Catholic critics condemned it as the inevitable fruit of heresy. While the rebels in the Peasants' War did employ religious language to justify their actions, their chief goal was not salvation but the abolition of feudal burdens on agrarian life through a reform of territorial and local governance. On the other hand, the local control of religious life formed an important part of their political basis in the communal structures and practices of local life. Villagers held that communal life required local control of their churches and priests on the principle that the priest is the servant of the commune, not its master.

Two genres of documents reveal what the insurrection was about. The local and regional grievance lists specify the need for change and help us to understand the revolt's underlying causes. The most influential of them was the “Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants,” which circulated widely in 1525 across the regions in revolt. Although the language of the grievance lists sometimes echoed that of the Protestant reformers, notably in “the holy, godly, true Word of God” as the basis of Christian community, the chief issues concern serfdom and its restrictions and other conditions of agrarian life. The second documentary genre consists of programmatic statements about larger political reforms. The plans drafted by Wendel Hipler and Friedrich Weigandt, both Franconians, incorporate the peasants' demands into wider agendas of reform of territorial and even Imperial governance. By far the most radical is Michael Gaismair's “Tyrolean Constitution.” He advocated the reform of territorial governance in a radically communalist sense, the abolition of noble and clerical political power, and a centralized management of Tyrol's trade and manufacturing. Gaismair's justification for his ideal egalitarian republic is cast in the language of Biblicism and the “godly law.”

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How deeply the Peasants' War shook the ruling classes in the zones of revolt emerges from the deliberations of the Imperial Diet, which assembled at Speyer in the late summer of 1526. While the estates acknowledged the rebels' grievances and showed a clear understanding of the chief issues – serfdom, tithes, free mobility, and death duties – their recommendations speak only of authority, obedience, and repression. Still, the events of 1525 did influence the Diet's timid decision about the religious schism, which was to leave each ruler responsible to God and the emperor for his actions.

## Chapter 14: Wars and Violence: Thirty Years' War

Almost from the beginning, the religious schism had promoted the formation of political-military alliances of Imperial princes and Imperial cities. While their forms resembled those of the traditional German leagues, their chief goal, defense of their faith, had been unknown since the Hussite Wars. In 1531, the Protestant estates formed the Schmalkaldic League, which lasted until its defeat by the emperor's forces in 1547. In the 1600s, after a generation of strife had stoked confessional enmities in Europe, a series of internal political crises, chiefly over either an interpretation or an enforcement of the Religious Peace's terms, began to undermine the Imperial *convivencia*. In 1608-09, just after the Ottoman peace, military alliances based on confessional solidarity began to reappear in the Empire. The Protestant Union of princes and Imperial cities formed in May 1608; eight months later the Catholic League formed under Bavarian leadership. This coincided, however, with the beginning of the Twelve Years Truce between the Spanish crown and the United Provinces of the Dutch rebels (1609-21).

Meanwhile, tensions were growing in the Habsburg lands between the Catholic sovereigns and their more or less strongly Protestant (in Bohemia also Hussite) nobles. Tensions simmered in Upper and Lower Austria, though the heyday of Protestant influence there had begun to decline from its peak. In the kingdom of Bohemia, however, the situation was coming into flux. In 1617, Emperor Matthias managed to have his heir, Ferdinand of Styria, elected to the royal thrones of Bohemia and Hungary, although the heir's reputation for aggressive Catholic recovery made the Hussite and Protestant leaders either flatly opposed to or wary about the succession. When the new crown prince sent his commissioners to Prague to take charge of the regime in his absence, some Hussite nobles pitched them from a window of Prague Castle. This highly symbolic "defenestration," which recapitulated a similar event during the fifteenth-century Hussite Wars, triggered the Bohemian revolt. It was followed by the deposition of Ferdinand (Matthias was still alive) and the election in his place of the Elector Palatine Frederick V (1596-1632), known for his brief reign as "the Winter King."

Viewed as a German civil war, the Thirty Years War falls into three phases: first, the Catholic victories of 1618-29; second, the Swedish invasion and the Peace of Prague (1630-35) between the emperor and most of the Imperial estates; and third, the military stalemate from the French invasion to the Peace of Westphalia (1635-48). During the war's first decade, the Catholic/Imperial armies defeated the Protestant forces and occupied much of the German north (1618-29). The peak came in March of 1629, when Emperor Ferdinand II (r. 1619-37) published the Edict of Restitution. It required the Protestants to disgorge all the bishoprics, monasteries, and ecclesiastical lands they had secularized since 1552. Some lands did change hands, but the edict's force depended on the Catholic armies' fortunes in the field.

The Catholic victories, which seemed to presage a stronger Habsburg and Catholic monarchy, emboldened King Gustavus Adolphus (1594-1632) to land his Swedish army in Pomerania to the aid, he said, of the Protestant princes and peoples. His good fortune was dramatic but brief. In 1631, having beaten the Catholic armies at Breitenfeld in Saxony, the "Lion of the North" invaded the south to graze his troops on episcopal lands and the duchy of Bavaria. After he died in battle in the following year, peace negotiations began between the emperor and some Imperial estates, which led to a near-restoration of Imperial governance (Peace of Prague, 1635). This provoked a French invasion that shifted the center of military operations westward toward the Rhine.

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One factor in the war of stalemate between 1635 and 1648 was the stiffening of confessional resentments. The most infamous event occurred in May 1631 at highly strategic Magdeburg, where the Catholic armies broke into the city, plundered it, and (intentionally or not) torched it. The surviving burghers – Magdeburg had housed 30,000 souls – fled the city to find only ruin and death. More than 250 newsletters spread news of this sack of a city and fueled Protestant anger and determination to repay the Catholics with “Magdeburg quarter,” that is, no mercy for survivors. Still, for the common people the worst challenge was not confessional struggle but the never-ending need of armies for supplies they could only rob from the farmers. While the notion of the Thirty Years’ War as a singular German catastrophe was formed only much later, the image of a murderous war of soldiers against peasants, punctuated by a few pitched battles, is realistic enough. The story received a realistic description from the Swabian cobbler Hans Heberle and a compelling literary dramatization in *The Adventurous Simplicissimus* (1668), a novel by the Hessian writer H. C. J. Grimmelshausen (1621-79). One can debate the latter author’s realism, but no one doubts that the war caused extreme destruction through plundering, famine, and disease. Two generations were required to make up for the losses in population, livestock, and tools, not to mention the losses in production and commerce.

The Peace of Westphalia, the end of hostilities, comprised two treaties signed on the same day between the emperor and his allies and the queen of Sweden and her allies at Osnabrück and between the emperor and his allies and the king of France and his allies at Münster. The most important articles for the German participants were those that restored the Imperial constitution and the Religious Peace. The Holy Roman Empire would continue in its old form as a monarchy of limited powers governed through collaboration with the German aristocracy. The Peace confirmed confessional parity – the Reformed confession was at last recognized – in Imperial collegial institutions; ownership of ecclesiastical lands and incomes was recognized as of possession on January 1, 1624; and the Imperial estates lost the right to force their subjects to choose between religious conformity and exile. Two dreams were buried in Westphalia, for the Empire became neither an absolutist Catholic monarchy nor a national Protestant one.

## **Chapter 15: Wars and Violence: Exclusion, Expulsion, Persecution, Survival**

From the early days of the Protestant Reformation to the eve of the Thirty Years’ War, all of the German lands were engaged to one degree or another in the Empire’s confrontation with religious difference in its many social, political, and cultural forms. The emergence and consolidation of mutually exclusive confessions of Christian faiths, organized in local, regional, and transregional forms, increasingly highlighted competing claims to religious truth. And while Catholics and Protestants continued to engage in imperial and international conflicts over religious and secular authority, they still managed to focus their attention on other religious outliers in their midst and seek to control, punish, exile, or eradicate their perceived religious enemies, particularly the Ottomans, the Jews, the Anabaptists and other heretics, and those accused of being witches.

Throughout the early modern period, the German speaking lands were preoccupied with the Ottoman challenge. This young, powerful state had recently arisen on the ruins of the Byzantine Empire (1453) and the Mamluk Sultanate (1517), upon the conquest of which the Ottoman sultan became Caliph and temporal leader of orthodox Islam. Soon thereafter Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-66) – “the Magnificent” to the Christians, “the Lawgiver” to his own people – acceded to the throne. His destruction of the Hungarian kingdom in 1526 inaugurated eight decades of alternating war and truce, during which border raiding periodically gave way to major field campaigns (1526-47, 1593-1606) in Hungary.

The Germans saw “the Grand Turk” and his peoples in four guises. He was: ruler of a semi-exotic, complex civilization; the most powerful warrior of his age; a tyrant who enslaved and slaughtered Christians; and (in Lutheran eyes) a servant of the Antichrist – the pope’s evil twin – who had come to

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inaugurate the world's Last Days. The popular woodcuts and pamphlets about the Ottomans mostly conveyed a sensational impression of them as exotic, fierce, and cruel. In 1582, however, a more detached perspective appeared (in Latin) in the well-informed *Turkish Letters* of the Flemish nobleman Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1521-92). Thirty years before, Busbecq had traveled to Istanbul as King (later Emperor) Ferdinand I's ambassador; in 1562 he returned bearing an Imperial-Ottoman treaty of peace. The first excerpt from Ogier's *Letters* includes an account of his arrival in the Ottoman capital and his assessment of their civilization (and his own). The second excerpt recounts his leave-taking and return to his own country. Together they reveal Ogier as an intelligent, learned, and acute observer of a civilization he assessed as in some ways superior to his own.

The "Long War" (1593-1606) between the Empire and the Ottomans confirmed the military stalemate in Hungary. At first, the war went well for the Imperial forces, who recovered the city of Esztergom/Gran, seat of the Catholic primate. Rudolph II's position was seriously threatened, however, by a challenge from his brother, Matthias, and by opposition from Prince István Bocskay (1557-1606) of Transylvania. Matthias's peace with Bocskay, and the Imperial army's loss of the city of Pest completely forced Rudolph's hand. On November 11, 1606, the Treaty of Zsitvatörök (Upper Hungary, now Slovakia) was signed in his name and that of Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603-17). The two monarchs guaranteed the territorial status quo; the emperor was freed from paying tribute to the sultan, who for the first time recognized him as a sovereign of equal rank; and the Hungarian villagers and nobles gained tax privileges. The peace endured right through the Thirty Years War until 1663. An earlier resumption of hostilities, say, in the 1630s, might well have brought down the Habsburg dynasty.

For Imperial Jewry, once numbered among the "enemies of God," the sixteenth century was a time of relative improvement in external life conditions. As the worst terrors of the past – accusations, lynching, and massacres – receded, they were replaced by an integration of the Jews into the webs of Imperial, territorial, and civic regulation. Martin Luther's vicious anti-Judaism had little influence on this main tendency, which was both promoted and symbolized by the monarchs' receptivity to Jewish petitions, but nevertheless reflected the sentiments of many of his contemporaries. In Charles V's time, the most prominent Jewish representative was the Alsatian Josel von Rosheim (ca. 1480-1554), who acquired the novel title of "Commander of All Jewry in the German Nation." From Charles's coronation at Aachen in 1520 well into the 1540s, Josel brought, by his own account, requests and proposals concerning Jewish interests before the emperor. He defended the Jews against allegations of crimes, argued against expulsions of Jews as usurers, and condemned Luther as an enemy of the Jewish people. Under Charles's successors, who tended to continue this Jewish policy, the treatment of Jews in the territorial states began to shift from repression to regulation. As the law of 1585 from Hesse-Darmstadt illustrates, the desire to integrate the Jews produced extensive codes of regulations which prohibited some activities but protected others. The chief tendency of these changes was to make Imperial Jews legal subjects, still burdened by discrimination and waves of violence, but increasingly free from some of the repression of earlier times.

While there was much that early modern German Protestants and Catholics did not agree on, a consensus emerged that the Anabaptists posed a significant risk to their communities. The Anabaptist rejection of many religious and socio-political norms, including, to lesser or greater extent depending on the Anabaptist group, infant baptism and the rejection of secular authority, unsettled their non-Anabaptist contemporaries. In many areas of the empire, intense persecution followed the emperor's 1529 edict that Anabaptism was a crime punishable by death. New legislation, like the 1585 Bernese Decree against Anabaptists, dictated a range of responses to the radicals, from fines, to exile, to death. Anabaptists commemorated the deaths of some of their coreligionists in a collection of images and texts known as the *Martyr's Mirror*, which for many came to be a formative part of Anabaptist religious identity as they established communities in more hospitable parts of the Empire and Europe throughout the modern period.

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The increasing integration of Jewry and growing concerns about Anabaptist heretics coincided with the rise of witch hunting. In the fifteenth century, this capital crime acquired its first real justification in the “diabolic theory,” according to which witches formed a kind of anti-church based on Devil worship and malevolent terror. In the 1580s, enthusiasm for ridding society of the witches exploded. It swept through the German lands, where approximately 30,000 persons (perhaps one-half of Europe’s total number of executions for witchcraft) were executed, more than two-thirds of them women. In everyday life, witch hunting took place in small towns and villages, where neighbor accused neighbor, but periodically veritable waves of panic engulfed larger cities, where they provoked mass trials and executions that spared neither wealth nor rank. Small, weakly governed states were more vulnerable to such panics than strongly governed ones, politically fragmented regions more than consolidated ones, and Catholic ecclesiastical states more than dynastic states of whatever confession. Over time, jurists began to have doubts about the compatibility of prosecution for this crime with the norms of legal justice. These doubts surfaced in discussions of the Bavarian ordinance of 1611 against witchcraft, sorcery, and superstition, the most detailed law ever drafted on this topic.

The great wave of witch hunting that swept through some of the ecclesiastical states (Bamberg, Würzburg, Trier, and above all Cologne) during the 1620s and 1630s intensified skepticism about the compatibility of witchcraft prosecutions with the norms of justice. In 1631, the German Jesuit Friedrich von Spee (1591-1635) published (anonymously) his arguments against prosecuting those accused of witchcraft. In his view, the practice of interrogating under torture for lack of eyewitnesses to the crime almost guaranteed a conviction. Witch hunting, he noted, was a German peculiarity, practically unknown in the Catholic Mediterranean lands of Spain and Italy. Prosecutions of witches continued apace for one more generation, until the 1660s, and then began to decline. For eight decades, witchcraft had been the great crime in the German lands. Whereas the Ottoman threat subsided as suddenly as it had arisen, and whereas the Empire’s Jews went from being repressed to being tolerated (with discrimination), the pursuit of witches continued. Over the entire period from 1500 to 1650, about thirty witches died for every heretic executed.

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Recommended Citation: Greta Kroeker: From the Reformations to the Thirty Years’ War (1500-1648). Introduction, published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-the-reformations-to-the-thirty-years-war-1500-1648/ghdi:introduction-1>> [October 10, 2025].