**Luther at the Imperial Diet of Worms (1521)**

**Background**

Luther, who through the church's excommunication was practically declared a heretic, was invited to Worms by the Emperor who had been pressured by a few princes. Both the church and Emperor wanted Luther to recant his teachings while he was there. The princes who supported Luther hoped that through the forthcoming events the political power of Rome over Germany would be weakened.

Luther's powerful sovereign, [Elector Friedrich the Wise of Saxon](http://www.luther.de/en/friedr.html) demanded that Luther not be outlawed and imprisoned without a hearing.

**The Trip to Worms**

Luther began his trip to Worms on April 2, 1521. The journey to the Imperial Diet did not embody the repentance the church had hoped for. The journey to Worms was more like a victory march; Luther was welcomed enthusiastically in all of the towns he went through.   
He preached in Erfurt, Gotha and Eisenach. He arrived in Worms on April 16 and was also cheered and welcomed by the people. Luther's appearance at the Imperial Diet was described as objective, clever and well thought out. He had to appear before the Emperor twice; each time he was clearly told to take back his teachings. Luther didn't see any proof against his theses or views which would move him to recant: *"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the 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 conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*

The infamous saying *"Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."* does not come

After he left the negotiations room, he said "I am finished." And he was for the time finished; Luther was dismissed, and not arrested because he had a letter of safe conduct (Schutzbrief) which guaranteed him 21 days of safe travel through the land. He headed home on April 25.

When Luther and the princes who supported him left Worms, the emperor imposed an Imperial Act called the Edict of Worms which declared Luther an outlaw (he may be killed by anyone without threat of punishment).   
On the trip home, [Elector Friedrich the Wise](http://www.luther.de/en/friedr.html) allowed Luther to be kidnapped on May 4 (Luther knew about it beforehand). This took place on the one hand to guarantee Luther's safety and on the other hand to let him disappear from the scene for a short while; there were even rumors of Luther's death. This action also helped the Elector not to endanger himself because he could have been held liable for protecting an outlaw and heretic.

Luther was taken to the secluded Wartburg and the Reformation had time to stabilize and strengthen itself.

**The Thirty Years War**

The Thirty Years’ War (1618-48) began when Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II of Bohemia attempted to curtail the religious activities of his subjects, sparking rebellion among Protestants. The war came to involve the major powers of Europe, with Sweden, France, Spain and Austria all waging campaigns primarily on German soil. Known in part for the atrocities committed by mercenary soldiers, the war ended with a series of treaties that made up the Peace of Westphalia. The fallout reshaped the religious and political map of central Europe, setting the stage for the old centralized Roman Catholic empire to give way to a community of sovereign states.

This conflict, which redrew the religious and political map of central Europe, began in the Holy Roman Empire, a vast complex of some one thousand separate, semiautonomous political units under the loose suzerainty of the Austrian Hapsburgs. Over the previous two centuries, a balance of power had emerged among the leading states, but during the sixteenth century, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation had divided Germany into hostile Protestant and Catholic camps, each prepared to seek foreign support to guarantee its integrity if need arose.

Thus in 1618, when Ferdinand II, heir apparent to the throne of Bohemia, began to curtail certain religious privileges enjoyed by his subjects there, they immediately appealed for aid to the Protestants in the rest of the empire and to the leading foreign Protestant states: Great Britain, the Dutch Republic, and Denmark. Ferdinand, in turn, called upon the German Catholics (led by Bavaria), Spain, and the papacy. In the ensuing struggle, Ferdinand (elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1619) and his allies won a major victory at White Mountain (1620) outside Prague that allowed the extirpation of Protestantism in most of the Hapsburg lands. Encouraged by this success, Ferdinand turned in 1621 against Bohemia’s Protestant supporters in Germany. Despite aid from Britain, Denmark, and the Dutch Republic, they too lost, and by 1629 imperial armies commanded by Albrecht von Wallenstein overran most of Protestant Germany and much of Denmark. Ferdinand then issued the Edict of Restitution, reclaiming lands in the empire belonging to the Catholic Church that had been acquired and secularized by Protestant rulers.

Only Swedish military aid saved the Protestant cause. In 1630 an army led by King Gustavus Adolphus landed in Germany and, with a subsidy from the French government and assistance from many German Protestant states, routed the Imperialists at Breitenfeld (1631) and drove them from much of Germany. The Protestant revival continued until in 1634 a Spanish army intervened and at Nordlingen defeated the main Swedish field army and forced the Protestants out of southern Germany. This new Hapsburg success, however, provoked France-which feared encirclement-to declare war first on Spain (1635) and then on the emperor (1636).

The war, which in the 1620s had been fought principally by German states with foreign assistance, now became a struggle among the great powers (Sweden, France, Spain, and Austria) fought largely on German soil, and for twelve more years armies maneuvered while garrisons-over five hundred in all-carried out a “dirty war” designed both to support themselves and to destroy anything of possible use to the enemy. Atrocities (such as those recorded in the novel Simplicissimus by Hans von Grimmelshausen) abounded as troops struggled to locate and appropriate resources. Eventually, France’s victory over the Spaniards at Rocroi (1643) and Sweden’s defeat of the Imperialists at Jankau (1645) forced the Hapsburgs to make concessions that led, in 1648, to the Peace of Westphalia, which settled most of the outstanding issues.

The cost, however, had proved enormous. Perhaps 20 percent of Germany’s total population perished during the war, with losses of up to 50 percent along a corridor running from Pomerania in the Baltic to the Black Forest. Villages suffered worse than towns, but many towns and cities also saw their populations, manufacture, and trade decline substantially. It constituted the worst catastrophe to afflict Germany until [World War II](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii). On the other hand, the conflict helped to end the age of religious wars. Although religious issues retained political importance after 1648 (for instance, in creating an alliance in the 1680s against [Louis XIV](http://www.history.com/topics/louis-xiv)), they no longer dominated international alignments. Those German princes, mostly Calvinists, who fought against Ferdinand II in the 1620s were strongly influenced by confessional considerations, and as long as they dominated the anti-Hapsburg cause, so too did the issue of religion. But because they failed to secure a lasting settlement, the task of defending the “Protestant cause” gradually fell into the hands of Lutherans, who proved willing to ally (if necessary) with Catholic France and Orthodox Russia in order to create a coalition capable of defeating the Hapsburgs. After 1630 the role of religion in European politics receded. This was, perhaps, the greatest achievement of the Thirty Years’ War, for it thus eliminated a major destabilizing influence in European politics, which had both undermined the internal cohesion of many states and overturned the diplomatic balance of power created during the Renaissance.

**PEACE OF AUGSBURG**

Peace of Augsburg**,** first permanent legal basis for the existence of Lutheranism as well as Catholicism in Germany, promulgated on September 25, 1555, by the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire assembled earlier that year at Augsburg.

The emperor Charles V’s provisional ruling on the religious question, the [Augsburg Interim](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/42798/Augsburg-Interim) of 1548, had been overthrown in 1552 by the revolt of the Protestant elector Maurice of Saxony and his allies. In the ensuing negotiations at Passau (summer 1552), even the Catholic princes had called for a lasting peace, for fear that otherwise the religious controversy would never be settled. The emperor, however, was unwilling to recognize the religious division in Western Christendom as permanent and granted a peace only until the next imperial Diet.

The Diet, which opened at Augsburg on February 5, 1555, was proclaimed by Charles V, but, not wishing to take part in the inevitable religious compromises, he refused to attend the proceedings and empowered his brother Ferdinand (the future emperor Ferdinand I) to settle all questions.

The Diet determined that in the future no ruler in the empire should make war against another on religious grounds and that this peace should remain operative until the churches were peacefully reunited. Only two churches were recognized, the Roman Catholic and the adherents of the Augsburg Confession—i.e., the Lutherans. Moreover, in each territory of the empire, only one church was to be recognized, the religion of the ruler’s choice being thus made obligatory for his subjects. Any who adhered to the other church could sell his property and migrate to a territory where that denomination was recognized. The free imperial cities, which had lost their religious homogeneity a few years earlier, were exceptions to the general ruling. Lutheran and Catholic citizens in these cities remained free to exercise their religion as they pleased. The same freedom was furthermore extended to Lutheran knights and to towns and other communities that had for some time been practicing their religion in the lands of ecclesiastical princes of the empire. This last concession provoked vehement Catholic opposition, and Ferdinand circumvented the difficulty by deciding the matter on his own authority and including the clause in a separate article.

Ecclesiastical lands taken by Lutheran rulers from Catholic prelates who were not immediate vassals of the emperor were to remain with the Lutherans if continuous possession could be proved from the time of the Treaty of Passau (August 2, 1552), but, to ensure the permanence of the remaining ecclesiastical territories, the Catholics gained the condition that in the future any ecclesiastical prince who became Protestant should renounce his office, lands, and revenues. Because the Lutherans would not accept this ecclesiastical reservation and the Catholics would not yield, Ferdinand incorporated the clause on his own authority with a note that agreement had not been reached on it. In fact, Lutherans were in many cases able to nullify its effect.

The wish for a lasting settlement was so strong that the compromise peace, which satisfied no one completely and had many loopholes, was accepted. In spite of its shortcomings, the Peace of Augsburg saved the empire from serious internal conflicts for more than 50 years. It also strengthened the power of the territorial ruler. Germany thus emerged from the 16th century as a religiously divided country.

**PEACE OF WESTPHALIA**

The Westphalia area of north-western Germany gave its name to the treaty that ended the Thirty Years War, one of the most destructive conflicts in the history of Europe.

The war or series of connected wars began in 1618, when the Austrian Habsburgs tried to impose Roman Catholicism on their Protestant subjects in Bohemia. It pitted Protestant against Catholic, the Holy Roman Empire against France, the German princes and princelings against the emperor and each other, and France against the Habsburgs of Spain. The Swedes, the Danes, the Poles, the Russians, the Dutch and the Swiss were all dragged in or dived in. Commercial interests and rivalries played a part, as did religion and power politics.

Among famous commanders involved were Marshal Turenne and the Prince de Condé for France, Wallenstein for the Empire and Tilly for the Catholic League, and there was an able Bavarian general curiously named Franz von Mercy. Others to play a part ranged from the Winter King of Bohemia to the emperors Ferdinand II and Ferdinand III, Bethlen Gabor of Transylvania, Christian IV of Denmark, Gustavus II Adolphus and Queen Christina of Sweden, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, Philip IV of Spain and his brother the Cardinal-Infante, Louis XIII of France, Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin and several popes. Gustavus Adolphus was shot in the head and killed at the battle of Lutzen in 1632. The increasingly crazed Wallenstein, who grew so sensitive to noise that he had all the dogs, cats and cockerels killed in every town he came to, was murdered by an English captain in 1634. Still the fighting went on.

The war was largely fought on German soil and reduced the country to desolation as hordes of mercenaries, left unpaid by their masters, lived off the land. Rapine, pillage and famine stalked the countryside as armies marched about, plundering towns, villages and farms as they went. ‘We live like animals, eating bark and grass,’ says a pitiful entry in a family Bible from a Swabian village. ‘No one could have imagined that anything like this would happen to us. Many people say that there is no God...’ Wenceslas Hollar recorded devastation in the war zone in engravings of the 1630s and starvation reached such a point in the Rhineland that there were cases of cannibalism. The horror became a way of life and when the war finally ended, the mercenaries and their womenfolk complained that their livelihood was gone.

The peace conference to end the war opened in Münster and Osnabrück in December 1644. It involved no fewer than 194 states, from the biggest to the smallest, represented by 179 plenipotentiaries. There were thousands of ancillary diplomats and support staff, who had to be given housing, fed and watered, and they did themselves well for close to four years, despite famine in the country around. Presiding over the conference were the Papal Nuncio, Fabio Chigi (the future Pope Alexander VII), and the Venetian ambassador.

The first six months were spent arguing about who was to sit where and who was to go into a room ahead of whom. The principal French and Spanish envoys never managed to meet at all because the correct protocol could not be agreed. A special postal system handled reams of letters between the envoys and their principals at a time when it took ten days or more to send a communication from Münster to Paris or Vienna and twenty days or more to Stockholm or Madrid. Slowly deals were hammered out. Even then it took almost three weeks just to organize the signing ceremony, which commenced at two o’clock in the afternoon of Saturday, October 24th, 1648.

The treaty gave the Swiss independence of Austria and the Netherlands independence of Spain. The German principalities secured their autonomy. Sweden gained territory and a payment in cash, Brandenburg and Bavaria made gains too, and France acquired most of Alsace-Lorraine. The prospect of a Roman Catholic reconquest of Europe vanished forever. Protestantism was in the world to stay.