

## 6. Europe in Religious War

### 6.1. The Crisis of the Church



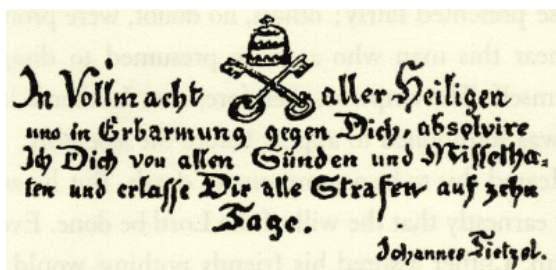
In 1517, a German monk called Johann Tetzel began to sell so-called letters of indulgence in the area around the city of Magdeburg. The Catholic Church promised that buying the letters would make people's time in purgatory shorter. Tetzel made a lot of money with the letters because people were afraid. Most of his money went to Albrecht, the new Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. He needed the money because he had to pay Pope Leo X in Rome to get his position as archbishop. The Pope on the other hand needed the money because he wanted to build the new St. Peter's Basilica.

Later in this same year, Martin Luther, the young monk and professor of theology at the new University of Wittenberg in Saxony, wrote a letter to Archbishop Albrecht. He strongly criticized the idea that all people needed was a letter of indulgence from the Pope. For Luther it was clear that people only went to heaven if they believed in God. Luther sent the Archbishop 95 theses to explain his ideas. To start a discussion, he also sent them to some bishops and a few friends. Until the end of 1517, copies of the 95 theses were translated from Latin into German and printed in different German cities. Luther became a famous man. From then on, it was not only priests and monks who were discussing Luther's ideas, but also the common people.

It is easy to imagine how upset Albrecht was because the people had stopped buying the letters of indulgence. But Luther did not take back what he had said. He criticized even more things which he believed were wrong with the Church. As a result, the Pope excommunicated Luther in 1521. Nobody was allowed to have anything to do with him. Nevertheless, Emperor Charles V ordered Luther to visit the Diet of Worms, a meeting of the rulers of the Empire. There, Luther defended his ideas again and did not take back what he had said. Therefore, the Emperor declared Luther an outlaw, which meant he could be arrested or killed by everyone. However, the ruler of Saxony, Frederick III, did not obey the Emperor: He secretly took Luther to one of his castles, the Wartburg. There, Luther was safe for the moment and translated the Bible into German.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 letter of indulgence: Ablassbrief |  
 purgatory: Fegefeuer |  
 Archbishop: Erzbischof |  
 Saxony: Sachsen |  
 common people: einfaches Volk |  
 excommunicate: aus der Kirche ausschliessen |  
 Diet of Worms: Reichstag zu Worms |  
 outlaw: ein Ausgestossener |

Source: Invitation to History: Starter (Cornelsen), p. 60.



⇒ Write down an explanation to these two sources above!

⇒ Read more about this topic on your own in Weltgeschichte (chapter 20).

⇒ Who did what? Copy the table and fill it in!

	Who was this person?	What did he do?	Why did he do it?
Tetzel			
Luther			
Albrecht			
Leo X			
Charles V			
Frederick III			



Pope Leo X (1513-1521) was a member of the Medici, one of the most famous ruling families of Florence. He was made a cardinal at the age of 14. As Leo was Luther's opponent, he became the symbol of shameless corruption and extravagance at the time. Some of it was of course propaganda spread by his enemies. Modern historians agree that Leo had a flawed character but that he was much less corrupt than the popes before him. Leo was a pleasure-seeker. When he became pope, he reportedly said: 'Since God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it.' He loved to travel round Rome at the head of parades which featured panthers and a pet elephant called Hanno. Leo had the reputation of being more interested in politics than religion. However, Leo also donated generously to charity. He also helped turn Rome into a center of art and culture by, for example, sponsoring great artists like Raphael. Leo died suddenly of malaria in 1521.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 an opponent : Widersacher,  
 Gegenspieler |  
 flawed: having a weakness | donate: give money freely | charity: organization which help people in need



Martin Luther (1483-1546) was born the eighth son of a wealthy silver miner in Saxony. He was pushed into studying law by his father. In 1505 Luther was caught in a severe thunderstorm. He prayed to St Anne, the patron saint of miners, and pledged to her that he would become a monk if his life was spared. Luther survived the storm and later joined the Augustine monastery at Erfurt. Trained as a lawyer, Luther's logical mind found little spiritual comfort in the rituals of the Catholic Church. He turned to reading the Bible to get closer to God. In 1516, while studying the new translation of the New Testament by Erasmus of Rotterdam, Luther came across a phrase which would change his life – and history. The phrase was 'The righteous shall live by faith' (Romans 1:17). To Luther it meant that 'faith alone' (sola fide) was what got a soul into heaven. 'Good works' were useless. God was not a merciless judge, God was love. He offered salvation to everyone through Jesus Christ – all one needed to do was to believe. Luther was completely inspired by this insight. He later said: 'I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.' Since this event occurred in Luther's study in the south tower of the Augustine monastery, it has become known as the 'tower experience'.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 a lawyer: Anwalt |  
 merciless: erbarmungslos |  
 salvation: Erlösung | insight: Einsicht



Charles' origin was complex, which was quite typical of high nobility at the time. Charles' grandfather was Maximilian I, the Habsburg emperor. His mother was Queen Joanna of Castile ("Joanna the Mad"). Charles was born in the Flemish town of Ghent and grew up in the Netherlands. Referring to his origin, Charles is supposed to have said: 'I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men and German to my horse.'

When Charles (1500-58) was six, he inherited the Duchy of Burgundy from his father. In 1516, he became King of Castile, gradually expanding his rule in Spain. By doing so, he founded the Spanish line of the Habsburg dynasty, while his younger brother Ferdinand continued the Austrian line. In 1519, Charles became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, following Maximilian's death. At the age of only 19 Charles ruled over a vast empire. Due to Spanish conquests in Central and South America, it had been described as the 'empire on which the sun never sets'. Two years before his death, Charles abdicated and withdrew into a monastery near Madrid.

*The Habsburg Jaw:* Many members of the Habsburg dynasty suffered from a genetic disorder in which the lower jaw grows longer than the upper jaw.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 origin: Herkunft |  
 inherit: erben |  
 duchy: Herzogtum | to abdicate: abdanken; zurücktreten



Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was born in Wildhaus. He became a priest at the age of 22. Two events helped Zwingli become a reformer. Zwingli was present at the Battle of Marignano (1515), where 6,000 young Swiss mercenaries were slaughtered in the service of the pope. He was convinced that selling blood for gold had to stop. Secondly, Zwingli was deeply impressed by Erasmus' new translation of the New Testament (1516). He was shocked to realize how far the Catholic Church had moved away from the Word of God. Zwingli became an Evangelical: To him, the Bible was the only basis of the Christian faith – it was an instruction book to find the right path to salvation. Zwingli was the first reformer who dared to question some of Luther's opinions. Most of Luther's followers almost blindly trusted in the great man's belief. By challenging Luther, Zwingli helped that Luther's views did not simply become Protestant dogma.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 mercenary: professional soldier who fights in a foreign army | slaughter: kill brutally | to dare: have the courage to do sth



At the time there were two St Gallen. There was the imperial city, which was connected to the Swiss Confederacy in many ways but was no full member. There was also the monastery and its territory. The prince abbot of the monastery ruled the region between Rorschach and Wil as well as the Toggenburg. The Reformation quickly became popular in the city of St Gallen. Its leading figure was Joachim von Watt, called 'Vadianus'. Vadian (1484-1551) came from a wealthy merchant family. He was a humanist scholar, who had studied in Vienna, among other places. In 1519, Vadian returned to his home town, where – influenced by his friend Zwingli – he began to support and spread the views of the Reformation. When Vadian was elected as mayor of St Gallen in 1526, he turned St Gallen into a reformed city. In 1527, the prince abbot was driven away and the monastery was abolished. When the Reformed troops lost the Second War of Kappel a few years later, the prince abbot was able to return and take control of the territory again. In the decades which followed, most of the population in the territory of the prince abbot of St Gallen was converted back to the Catholic faith. The city of St Gallen, however, remained reformed.

**KEY TERMS:**  
 Swiss Confederacy: Eidgenossenschaft | prince abbot: Fürstabt | scholar: Gelehrter | mayor: Bürgermeister | to abolish: abschaffen

When Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522, there was no such thing as a Lutheran movement. But there were thousands of people all over Germany to whom Luther was a hero and role model. They wanted to put Luther's views into practice and refused to wait for Rome to make any changes. Spontaneous forms of reformation began in hundreds of German towns and cities. Often it was rather chaotic – churches were stormed to destroy pictures of saints, priests put on ordinary clothes or even married, monks and nuns left their cloisters. Some people made the assumption that since Luther had attacked the traditional authority of the pope and the Church, he was also violently opposed to any form of established rule. Therefore, the ruling classes were often afraid of Luther and his ideas, while those people in the lower classes who wanted change looked towards Luther for a potential leader. Perhaps the most famous case where Luther's ideas were taken up by other people was the revolt of the German peasants in 1524-25. The discontent among German peasants had been growing for more than a century. Landlords and the Church demanded constantly increasing taxes and duties. Productivity, however, had not risen. To make matters worse, after a farmer's death all his heirs received a share of the land, which meant that the size of the land a farmer could use to produce food had grown smaller and smaller over time. In 1525, representatives of 50 peasant communities met at Memmingen and produced a paper that became known as the "Twelve Articles":



„1. Every municipality shall have the right to elect and remove a preacher if he behaves improperly. The preacher shall preach the gospel simply, straight and clearly without any human amendment, for, it is written, that we can only come to God by true belief.

2. The preachers shall be paid from the great tithe. A potential surplus shall be used to pay for the poor and the war tax. [...]

3. It has been practice so far, that we have been held as villain, which is pitiful, given that Christ redeemed all of us with his precious bloodshed, the shepherd as well as the highest, no one excluded. Therefore, it is devised by the scripture, that we are and that we want to be free.

4. It is unfraternal and not in accordance with the word of God that the simple man does not have the right to catch game, fowls, and fish. For, when God our master created man, he gave him power over all animals, the bird in the air and the fish in the water.

12. It is our decision and final opinion that if one or several of the articles mentioned herein were not in accordance with the word of God, those we shall refrain from if it is explained to us on the basis of the scripture. If several articles were already granted to us and it emerged afterwards that they were ill, they shall be dead and null. Likewise, we want to have reserved that if even more articles are found in the writ that were against God and a grievance to though neighbour.”

1. Jede Gemeinde soll das Recht haben, ihren Pfarrer zu wählen und ihn abzusetzen, wenn er sich ungebührlich verhält. Der Pfarrer soll das Evangelium lauter und klar ohne allen menschlichen Zusatz predigen, da in der Schrift steht, dass wir allein durch den wahren Glauben zu Gott kommen können.

2. Von dem grossen Zehnten sollen die Pfarrer besoldet werden. Ein etwaiger Überschuss soll für die Dorfarmut und die Entrichtung der Kriegssteuer verwandt werden. [...]

3. Ist der Brauch bisher gewesen, dass man uns für [Leibeigene] gehalten hat, welches zu Erbarmen ist, angesehen dass uns Christus alle mit seinen kostbarlichen Blutvergiessen erlöst und erkauft hat, den Hirten gleich wie den Höchsten, keinen ausgenommen. Darum erfindet sich mit der Schrift, dass wir frei sind und sein wollen.

4. Ist es unbrüderlich und dem Wort Gottes nicht gemäss, dass der arme Mann nicht Gewalt hat, Wildbret, Geflügel und Fische zu fangen. Denn als Gott der Herr den Menschen erschuf, hat er ihm Gewalt über alle Tiere, den Vogel in der Luft und den Fisch im Wasser gegeben.

12. Ist unser Beschluss und endliche Meinung, wenn einer oder mehr der hier gestellten Artikel dem Worte Gottes nicht gemäss wären ..., von denen wollen wir abstehe, wenn man es uns auf Grund der Schrift erklärt. Wenn man uns schon etliche Artikel jetzt zuliesse und es befände sich hernach, dass sie Unrecht wären, so sollen sie von Stund an tot und ab sein. Desgleichen wollen wir uns aber auch vorbehalten haben, wenn man in der Schrift noch mehr Artikel fände, die wider Gott und eine Beschweris des Nächsten wären.

⇒ *What are the peasants' demands? How are they connected to Luther's views?*

**Summary: During the period called “Reformation” the Catholic Church broke apart over the struggle for the right faith.**

At a time when people regarded heaven and hell as real places, it was extremely important to believe the right way. When doubts grew that the path shown by the Church in Rome may not be the right one, the whole system threatened to collapse. The German theologian Martin Luther started the Reformation in 1517 by attacking the sale of indulgences and by questioning the authority of the pope. At first it seemed impossible that Luther could win his struggle against mighty Rome. Luther had a charismatic personality, however, his attacks on the pope turned him into a national hero. So Luther won powerful friends who could protect him. The Church was unable to silence Luther. The Reformation was not the first attack against the authority of the Catholic Church but it was the first one which had such dramatic consequences. The religious conflict started by a Saxon monk eventually caused the Catholic Church to split. New Protestant churches were created. In some European regions the new faith triumphed while in other countries the Catholic Church remained in control.

The term “Reformation” generally describes a series of events in the 16th century during which large parts of Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain and the Netherlands broke away from the Roman Catholic Church to found independent Protestant churches. People at the time, however, did not use this term. As such, “Reformation” is not a neutral term but belongs to one of the sides involved in the conflict. It can therefore be seen as a great propaganda victory for the Protestants that “their” expression is generally used. “Reformation” is a positive expression, suggesting that the break with the Catholic Church was justified and the right thing to do, which – naturally – the opposite side disagrees with. From a Catholic perspective, the word “desertion” would be more accurate.

#### KEY TERMS:

to threaten:  
(be)drohen | the  
right faith: der  
richtige Glaube |  
desertion:  
Desertation,  
Fahnenflucht



## 6.2 The Catholic Church Reacts – Counter-Reformation

⇒ Try to empathize with the Catholic Church at that time: How should the Church react?

With some delay the Catholic Church reacted to the challenge offered by the Protestants. In what is called the ‘counter-Reformation’, Rome conducted some necessary reforms. At the same time, however, the Catholic Church rejected most of the central views of the Reformation and began to try and win people back to Catholicism. The religious division of Western Europe was confirmed.



A **council** of the Catholic Church is a meeting of bishops, cardinals and other high-ranking members of the Church to discuss and decide on important religious matters. It is headed by the pope. It was not until 1535 that Pope Paul III announced a council to discuss the Reformation in Europe. It took another decade before the first meetings were actually held in Trent, a town in northern Italy. There were three phases of meetings because the council was interrupted by political tensions and a typhus epidemic. Since the Reformation only the Catholic Church has conducted councils. Protestant Churches do not accept the decisions of a Catholic council. There have been only two councils since the Council of Trent in the 16th century. The First Vatican Council was held in 1869/70, the Second Vatican Council lasted from 1962 to 1965.

After decades of debate, the **Council of Trent** passed a number of decisions:



1. Only the Church has the right to interpret the Bible and fix dogmas.
2. To find salvation, people need faith. But good works can contribute to it.
3. There are seven sacraments.
4. The existence of purgatory is confirmed.
5. Bishops must be present in their dioceses. If they are absent without permission, they must not collect any income from them.
6. Every bishop must establish a seminary for educating young priests.
7. Priests are obliged to live a pious life and carefully obey their duties.
8. Celibacy is confirmed.
9. Indulgences are confirmed but they must not be abused.
10. The worship of saints and relics is confirmed.

⇒ Write a keyword next to each decision. This will help you remember the strategy of the Catholic Church.

⇒ What do you think of these decisions?

## 6.3. The Thirty Years' War (1618-48)

The struggle for the right faith and the freedom of religion became mixed with the politics of power. In 1618, the tensions erupted into a bloody war, which was mainly fought on German soil. After thirty years of brutal fighting, millions of casualties and terrible hardship, the war ended because no side was strong enough to win. The peace talks, however, brought a positive result. The concept of religious tolerance was generally accepted and the age of religious wars in Europe was over at last. Today, we could hardly imagine such a vast destruction as the result of this war. In relation to the population at the time, there were more victims than during World War II. Nevertheless, only few people today know about the Thirty Years' War as another example of an unimaginable catastrophe in the history of Europe.



**Defenestration** is the act of throwing someone out of a window. The first notable incident of such a kind happened in Prague in 1618. A few Protestant Bohemian noblemen managed to enter the castle at Prague and confronted the Catholic envoys of the Habsburg emperor. Eventually the Bohemians threw two envoys and one secretary out of a window. They fell 30 meters but survived because they landed on a large pile of horse manure in a dry moat below the window. The Catholic Church later claimed that the three men had been saved by angels. The emperor made the secretary a nobleman and gave him the title ‘von Hohenfall’.