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The Religious Reformation Movement in Germany: From German Lutheranism to European Protestantism

حركة الإصلاح الديني في ألمانيا: من اللوثرية الألمانية
إلى البروتستانتية الأوروبية

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Abstract:

This study addresses some important aspects of the religious reformation movement in Germany, by highlighting the foundations and general principles upon which Martin Luther's religious reform movement was based, While providing important insights into its development and spread in Germany and other European countries, Especially after Martin Luther separated from Rome and the Catholic Church, thereby declaring the establishment of the Protestant denomination in response to ethical misconduct within Catholicism. This transformation shifted his reform movement from German Lutheranism to European Protestantism.

Keywords

Religious Reformation, Germany, Martin Luther, Catholic Church, Protestantism.

الملخص :

تتناول هذه الدراسة بعض الجوانب المهمة عن حركة الإصلاح الديني في ألمانيا، من خلال تسليط الضوء على الأسس والمبادئ العامة التي قامت عليها حركة مارتن لوثر الدينية الإصلاحية، مع تقديم توضيحات مهمة عن تطورها وانتشارها في ألمانيا وفي غيرها من الدول الأوروبية، خاصة بعدما انفصل مارتن لوثر عن روما والكنيسة الكاثوليكية، مُعلنًا بذلك تأسيس المذهب البروتستانتي كرد فعل على تجاوزات الكاثوليكية في الفساد الأخلاقي، لتتحول بذلك حركته الإصلاحية من اللوثرية الألمانية إلى البروتستانتية الأوروبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإصلاح الديني، ألمانيا، مارتن لوثر، الكنيسة الكاثوليكية، البروتستانتية.

1. INTRODUCTION

The religious reform movement that Europe experienced at the dawn of the modern era is considered one of the most significant outcomes of the European Renaissance. It stands as an important event in European history, drawing its origins and roots from the history of the Catholic Church. Religious reform became one of the most crucial topics influencing the thoughts and lives of Europeans, especially after the increasing corruption within the church and among Catholic supporters.

in this study, we will attempt to provide some important clarifications about the religious reform movement led by the German cleric Martin Luther who called for the reformation of the church and the limitation of its excesses and persecution of people. This was an important step to reduce the church's control over human life, not only in Germany but throughout Europe in general. Luther's reform efforts developed to encompass a wide range of Europe after he founded Protestantism.

This study aims to trace Martin Luther's reform activities, which began in Germany and spread to various European countries, especially after Luther separated from Rome, thereby establishing Protestantism (from German Lutheranism to European Protestantism). This will be done by addressing the following issue: What was the general reality of the spread and development of Martin Luther's movement from German Lutheranism to European Protestantism?

2. Introducing the religious reformer "Martin Luther":

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483¹, in the city of Eisleben, in the province of Saxony². From parents who lived off farming in a poor family that improved its financial situation when the father joined the management of a mine³.

The poverty of Luther's family greatly influenced his upbringing. He grew up in harsh and difficult circumstances, surrounded by religious myths and false beliefs prevalent during his time. These superstitions portrayed Christ as a vengeful avenger who threatened people with severe torture and punishment in the afterlife, instilling fear, anxiety, and a sense of divine retribution in him. Luther was not convinced by the means offered by the church to alleviate his psychological torment⁴.

Luther grew up fond of learning and received a substantial education at the schools of the Brethren of the Common Life. Despite their poverty, his parents were keen on his education, so they sent him in 1497 to the Latin school in Magdeburg, and from there to the University of Erfurt, where he studied law. Due to the fear and religious anxiety that plagued him, he decided in 1505 to join the monastic order, hoping that this would save him from his sins. He entered the Augustinian monastery⁵.

There, he devoted himself to prayer, austerity, and self-mortification, hoping to attain God's mercy and forgiveness. At the same time, he studied theology until he obtained his doctorate. He then spent his time teaching and preaching⁶. In the year 1508, he was summoned to teach at the University of Wittenberg⁷ in the province of Saxony.

He taught philosophy and took on the

task of explaining Aristotle's "Ethics to Nicomachus". This continued for two years (1509-1511), and he felt that this task was difficult for him. This is evident from what he wrote to his friend, the priest Johann Braun, saying: "If you want to know my condition, know that I am in good health by the grace of God, but studying is difficult and hard, especially studying philosophy"⁸.

Through his teaching at this university, Luther was able to attract attention, and his name shone brightly as enthusiasts gathered around him. His students were impressed by his views and reflections, especially as he developed some opinions that contradicted the Catholic Church, particularly regarding salvation and the purification from sins⁹. This led some historians to describe him as an ambitious figure. No one can ignore the significance of such a personality that left its mark on global thought. Luther expressed the life of the peasant and its hardship, understanding the struggles and poverty of the worker. Afterwards, he lived a life of splendor, authority, wealth, and glory. He became, by virtue of his work at the university and his bold ideas, the companion of many German princes¹⁰. Moreover, Luther was distinguished by German virtues such as strong character, self-confidence, and the ability to influence others¹¹.

3. Principles and Ideas of Martin Luther:

In 1511, Luther visited Rome on an official mission as a representative of the Order of Saint Augustine. This visit was a pivotal moment in his life. He was appalled by the moral decay he witnessed among the clergy there, expressing his dismay by saying, "Anyone who goes to Rome feels their religious faith waver under the blows inflicted by what they see there." He then returned to Wittenberg with his heart filled

with indignation toward the clergy¹². Thus, Luther remained confused and deeply troubled by doubts that plagued his mind, fearing that all his supplications and prayers might not save him from the fires of hell. As a result, he began to examine and reflect until he was guided to a doctrine that brought him peace, satisfaction, and tranquility. He realized that faith in God's mercy ensures salvation from His punishment and that prayer and worship, in all their rituals and forms, are not sufficient for the remission of sins. Rather, a person is cleansed from sins by offering praise and thanks from a pure and sincere heart to the Almighty. This is the doctrine that Luther arrived at through his study of the Bible and the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, known as the doctrine of "Justification by Faith."¹³, Luther lived contentedly and peacefully with this doctrine for a few years, preaching it quietly among his students without interfering with authority and the church. However, his time came to publicly declare his principles and views, which had a significant impact on the course of European history¹⁴.

No one paid attention to Luther's teachings until the year 1517¹⁵. In that year, an event occurred that suddenly brought Luther into the spotlight that is because the popes had been working for some time on the reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and to raise the necessary funds, Pope Leo X widely distributed indulgences across Germany¹⁶. So, in the year 1517, the Church sent the monk Johann Tetzel of the Dominican Order to sell indulgences in some German provinces¹⁷. The monk Johann Tetzel stood up and called out his merchandise of indulgences in the town of Jüterbog in Saxony, loudly proclaiming that purchasing these indulgences would forgive

the sins of both the living and the dead, no matter how great, even if the buyer had committed the sin of violating the Virgin herself¹⁸.

Luther confronted this scandalous priest and expelled him from the town, marking his first steps towards reform. He engaged in public debates with Johann Tetzel about the concept of indulgences in Christianity, which traditionally involved repentance, remorse, confession, and penance through prayer and fasting. However, the Roman popes replaced penance with participation in crusades or pilgrimage to Rome to visit the tombs of saints and offer gifts and alms. This turned the matter into a lucrative economic issue, especially after banks were established to collect these donations. Consequently, these indulgences became a cause of moral decay and laxity, making it easy for individuals to commit crimes and sins, then purchase indulgences to absolve themselves of their wrongdoing¹⁹.

Luther was dismayed by this process. On the Feast of All Saints on October 31, 1517, he posted a vehement protest in Latin on the door of the church in Wittenberg. This protest, known as the "95 Theses," contained 95 points of objection against the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly regarding indulgences. The people widely circulated these protests everywhere²⁰, Luther also called upon fellow clergy to debate these points and made it clear that genuine repentance was the fundamental requirement for forgiveness²¹.

During his debates with Johann Tetzel and other supporters of the Church²², Luther harshly criticized the church's system, its supreme authority, and teachings, declaring

that reliance should be placed solely on the Bible for interpreting beliefs and various matters, rather than fully depending on clergy²³. As every educated person can read the Bible, they are free to interpret it as they see fit²⁴.

On the other hand, Luther emphasized that the soul will find its way directly to either heaven or hell, and thus does not need indulgences but requires divine mercy. Luther argued his point using biblical passages such as "The righteous shall live by faith", The entire religious heritage of Rome and pilgrimage to it, the celebrations of that church, the lighting of candles, and everything that is part of the ancient church heritage is meaningless. He argued that the purpose of worship is to fulfill what God has commanded humanity, which is gratitude and praise, rather than seeking forgiveness²⁵. Luther concluded that every believer must regulate their life through worship and refine it. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is not obtained except through worship, which is a divine obligation not granting any special entitlement to humans before God.²⁶

Luther invited German knights and princes to lead the religious reform movement, as he vowed to force the church to reform after other attempts by churchmen had failed, and a number of these princes and knights were ready to accept this invitation and join Luther, especially after he explained the principles of his call, which include:

- Subjugating religious figures to civil authority, which encouraged princes to join Luther.
- The Pope does not have the right to monopolize the interpretation of the Bible; it is a common right for every capable and

knowledgeable person. He also does not have the right to issue indulgences.

- Not establishing new monasteries²⁷.
- Reducing the number of monasteries to a tenth and allowing those who want to leave monastic life to leave it, and allowing those who wish to leave monastic life to do so, thus moving towards abolishing monasticism and convents²⁸.
- Allowing clergy to marry like other people, permitting divorce for Christians. Luther later married a former nun named Katharina von Bora²⁹.
- Reforming universities and removing the study of Aristotle from their curricula.
- Reducing the number of feasts because they delay people's daily work³⁰.

Luther's opinions and principles found widespread acceptance among many, especially among enthusiastic followers in Germany. They were among those angered by the actions of the Church in Rome and the Pope's control over people, and his claim to be the intermediary for forgiveness from God. During the years 1519 and 1520, Luther stirred public opinion with a series of religious writings that included explanations of the new doctrine. He clarified that the clergy's claim to have the final word, and their assertion of being different from ordinary people, was false. He urged people to seek the truth for themselves in the Bible³¹. Luther was extremely active and productive, writing extensively and publishing widely. One of his greatest achievements was translating the Bible into German, making it easy for anyone to read the scriptures without relying on the church clergy. Luther's eloquent expressions also influenced contemporary German literature

significantly³².

4. The development of Martin Luther's movement and its spread outside of Germany

The Lutheran movement, which began at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was destined to achieve considerable success and become a permanent factor in the social and religious history of Europe. This movement, Lutheranism, quickly made its way through difficulties, dangers, and political rivalries among the rulers of German provinces and the disasters of religious wars until it spread in northern German cities in general, in addition to a significant number of its southern cities³³.

The Lutheran denomination spread throughout Northern Europe. In England, the Anglican Church emerged, and this denomination also spread in Sweden and Denmark (the Scandinavian kingdoms) because these lands were fertile ground for spreading the denomination that opposed the Catholic Church to obtain its territories. For instance, the King of Sweden, Gustav Vasa, embraced the Lutheran denomination as part of his desire to gain control over Catholic Church lands³⁴. As a large number of Swiss cantons embraced the Lutheran denomination, the same occurred in East Borussia. This province was an ecclesiastical state subordinate to the Teutonic Order, a Catholic organization. In 1525, Albert of Hohenzollern, the ruler of Brandenburg, found a golden opportunity to adopt the Lutheran faith, declaring himself hereditary ruler over the region he governed on behalf of the church³⁵.

In general, almost all the Nordic countries turned towards Luther and the Reformation, while most Southern European

countries remained Catholic and loyal to the Pope in Rome ³⁶.

Regarding the factors that contributed to the spread of Lutheranism, we mention the following:

- Luther's Personality: Luther was known for his strong faith and deep understanding of the German spirit, including its pains and hopes. He also possessed a high ability to persuade, which led a large segment of the German people to believe that under Luther's leadership, they could reach the pure truth that had long been hidden within the corruption of many Catholic books ³⁷.

- Luther's Leadership: From the German people's perspective, Luther was the leader of modern German nationalism. He promoted the slogan "Germany should be for Germans only," which resonated deeply with the Germans due to their long history of suffering from foreign intervention. The Germans disliked the Pope primarily because he was Italian, and they also disliked Emperor Charles V (1519-1556) because he was Spanish. This animosity helped rally the German people around Luther ³⁸, Luther was no longer seen merely as a religious reformer, but primarily as a national leader. Consequently, his movement succeeded because it was a call for liberation from foreign domination ³⁹.

- Luther's Friendship with Frederick, Elector of Saxony: This friendship greatly aided Luther in spreading his message. Frederick provided significant support to Luther by making his university a platform for the dissemination of Lutheran ideas. As a result, the university was involved in publishing and distributing Luther's books and views ⁴⁰. We should not overlook the contributions of the scholar Philip Melancthon (1497-

1560).

- The Political State of the Empire: The political circumstances surrounding Germany facilitated the spread of the Lutheran movement ⁴¹, Germany was politically divided; although officially an empire, it operated as a federal union comprising independent states that resisted outside interference. The emperor lacked the power to impose taxes, raise armies, or declare war without consent from these major German states which facilitated Luther's success ⁴².

- The Italian Wars (1494-1559) unquestionably played a significant role in steering the course of the religious reform movement. These wars occupied Catholic European rulers in their political struggles for control over the continent. The Pope himself became embroiled in numerous conflicts, unable to decisively confront them and resorting instead to largely ineffectual excommunications. His focus shifted between resisting French and then German domination over Italy, while also aiming to expand territorial control into Romagna and Florence.

- The Italian Wars (1494-1559) undoubtedly helped steer the religious reform movement in the right direction. These wars occupied Catholic European rulers in their political struggles for control over the continent. The Pope himself became embroiled in numerous conflicts, unable to decisively confront them and resorting instead to largely ineffectual excommunications. His focus shifted between resisting French and then German domination over Italy, while also aiming to expand territorial control into Romagna and Florence ⁴³.

- The era of Luther, which coincided with

the European Renaissance, saw European minds opening up as they liberated themselves from papal authority and feudalism. Luther's important writings, which he composed, published, printed, and disseminated widely among the German people, also contributed to this intellectual awakening⁴⁴.

- Translation of the Bible into German: Luther's translation of the Bible into German was printed, published, and distributed among the German people. Additionally, the newly invented printing press in Germany played a crucial and effective role in transmitting Luther's ideas to Germans specifically and Europeans in general⁴⁵.

These factors all contributed to the spread of the Lutheran movement. However, it did not achieve widespread adoption throughout all of Europe, due to several obstacles, including:

- The difficulty and complexity of Lutheran doctrine, particularly concerning matters like the Eucharist and justification by faith, posed challenges. In addition to that, interpreters struggled to explain these doctrines because they were based on deep philosophical foundations that required profound understanding of religious matters and theological studies⁴⁶.

- The reliance of its leaders on princes and secular authority caused many people to turn away from the movement, especially when Luther began supporting princes against the common people and endorsing knights and nobles against peasants, among other actions⁴⁷.

- Luther's lack of consideration for spreading his doctrine outside Germany stemmed from his primary reliance on national sentiment and the nationalist motives and foundations

to rid Europe of the universal authority of the papacy. This led to disagreements among Lutherans themselves after Luther's death, and made it difficult to overcome the organized Catholicism on the other side, especially when Luther refrained from resorting to force and violence in spreading his teachings⁴⁸.

- Luther's lack of concern for clearly defining and explaining the new Protestant doctrine in a way that could be understood by the general public⁴⁹.

- Other religious reformers emerged in different countries, and their ideas were adopted by their populations, as seen in France and Switzerland with figures like Calvin and Zwingli. Similarly, in the Netherlands and England, reformers participated in spreading their reformist views⁵⁰.

- The strong opposition of both the papacy and the imperial authorities in Europe towards Lutheran ideas acted as a double-edged sword. While this opposition was severe, it also hindered the spread of the Lutheran movement⁵¹.

5. The separation of Martin Luther from Rome and the Catholic Church, and his establishment of the Protestant denomination

The Protestant denomination emerged in Europe during the 16th century as a result of the religious reform movement, when Luther separated from Rome and the Catholic Church and founded the new denomination⁵², this denomination was named "Protestantism," with "Protestant" deriving from the Latin word meaning protester or objector. They were called so because its followers protested against the Pope of Rome and opposed him on many doctrinal issues⁵³,

Regarding the origin of this denomination, historian Stefan Bäumlín states in his book "The Protestant Denomination": "Protestantism emerged in the sixteenth century as a reaction to the Catholic Church, which had exceeded moral bounds, departed from the Gospel, and Christian religious principles"⁵⁴, The situation had escalated to the point where the Pope and the clergy of that time engaged in the commercialization of religion to gain money by any means necessary. This prompted Luther to vehemently protest against this corruption, especially when the Pope ordered the sale of indulgences to raise as much money as possible from the German people and other Christian populations in Europe. At that time, the German people were poor, illiterate, and fearful for their fate after death. They blindly obeyed the clergy and purchased these indulgences in the hope of securing their place in heaven and delivering their souls from purgatory⁵⁵.

As for the churches and monasteries, they had become places of immorality and vice⁵⁶, faced with this state of affairs within the Christian Church, Luther began spreading his ideas that debunked the claims of the clergy. He told the German people, "Religion cannot be bought with money. Likewise, heaven is not for those who pay more money to the Pope of Rome, but for true believers who fear God, do good works, and show mercy to the poor. Therefore, indulgences will not benefit you, so do not buy them."⁵⁷

On the other hand, Luther affirmed to the Germans that the Pope of Rome is a human being like them and is not infallible at all. This led the Pope to attempt to have him killed, but he was unsuccessful because

the German nation rallied around Luther and protected him. From that time onward, the religious reform movement emerged in Europe, starting from Germany. This movement gave rise to Protestantism, which became the major rival to Catholicism in Europe⁵⁸.

The Protestant movement aimed to reform the Catholic Church in Western Europe. To achieve this, Protestants enthusiastically translated the Bible into local European languages and distributed it among all segments of the population, a practice that had been prohibited in the Catholic Church⁵⁹.

The Protestant denomination distinguished itself from other Christian sects in the following ways:

- The Bible is the highest source of authority in Protestant Christianity, rather than the teachings of the papacy.
- The Bible is interpreted literally, not metaphorically.
- The Pope does not have the right to monopolize the interpretation of the Bible.
- Protestants do not recognize the authority of the Pope, indulgences, and some rituals and practices of the Catholic Church.
- Protestants welcome clergy to marry if they choose to do so, and those who wish to remain celibate have the freedom to make that choice⁶⁰.

The importance of the Protestant denomination increased over the Catholic denomination. However, the Protestant denomination itself split into several branches. There is the Lutheran branch led by Luther, with most of his followers

located in Germany and Northern Europe such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Following in strength is the Calvinist branch, led by Calvin, the second founder of the Reformation in Europe after Luther. His followers are spread across Germany, France, Switzerland, and many other countries. Additionally, there is the Zwinglian branch, which led the Reformation movement in Switzerland, where most of its followers are located ⁶¹.

6. The stance of the religious and secular authorities towards the Lutheran movement

6.1 The stance of the religious authority (the Church):

Luther attacked the Catholic Church in terms of its authority and doctrine. He soon wrote a letter to the Pope titled "On the Freedom of a Christian," in which he said: "You cannot deny that what is called the Roman priesthood is more corrupt than Babylon and Sodom. I have truly shown my contempt and have been angered because the Christian people are being deceived under the guise of your name and the name of the Christian Church. Therefore, I have resisted and will continue to resist as long as there is a vein in me that pulses with the spirit of faith."⁶²

In the face of these increasingly stringent positions adopted by Luther, which affected the Catholic Church in its unity, beliefs, and institutions, Pope Leo X took the initiative to issue a declaration condemning Luther's ideas and threatening him with excommunication. However, Luther responded by publicly burning the papal bull on Christmas Day in 1520, leading to the issuance of a papal decree of excommunication against Luther in

December 1520 ⁶³.

In these difficult circumstances of Luther's life, he gained strong and wealthy princes and followers, which provided him with the necessary political and military protection. Foremost among them was Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, who embraced Luther's movement and also opposed the papal decrees.⁶⁴, this expanded Luther's movement, leading to the convening of a religious council in January 1521 in the city of Worms, attended by Luther to justify his actions and ideas ⁶⁵.

Luther attended this religious council after the Emperor granted him personal safe conduct, allowing him to travel from Wittenberg to Worms and reside in the latter city throughout the duration of the council then returning to his hometown without being arrested or harmed by anyone ⁶⁶. The council asked Luther to retract his positions, to which he responded: "I cannot retract or recant anything I have written or said, unless shown by one of you that my words and writings contradict the Holy Scriptures, or contradict reason and conscience, or prove them to be unsound or incorrect." He concluded by saying, "Apart from this, I cannot retract my opinions or act against them. This is my oath, and I will remain steadfast in it. May God help me. Amen."⁶⁷

Thus, Luther remained steadfast in his positions, considering them in line with the Holy Scriptures and sound reasoning. Consequently, the council issued a decree declaring Luther outside the established authority, outlawing him, sanctioning his bloodshed, and forbidding all Germans from sheltering, feeding, or providing him with drink. Additionally, they prohibited them from reading any of his writings ⁶⁸.

Luther escaped death with the help of his friend Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, who secretly provided him protection in Wartburg Castle. There, Luther remained hidden for a whole year, during which he devoted himself to translating the Bible into German. This monumental work is considered a cornerstone in the history of German literature ⁶⁹.

While Luther was hiding in Wartburg Castle, the religious reform movement continued to spread in Germany. During this period, Luther's religious reform ideas converged with other calls for reform that also had political, social, and economic dimensions. This convergence led to events that surpassed purely doctrinal dimensions, which was not what Luther had intended or aimed for ⁷⁰. Some knights and minor nobles interpreted Luther's ideas as a call to a general revolution. In 1523, they attacked some estates belonging to the Church, seized their lands, and divided them among themselves. In 1524, a revolutionary movement led by peasants erupted in Germany. These peasants understood Luther's ideas as a call for freedom and equality, viewing them as the only way to reform the poor economic and social conditions. They sought to overthrow the authority of the wealthy landowners ⁷¹.

Luther did not approve of these movements; instead, he strongly opposed the peasant revolution when they hardened their demands for social and economic reforms. He worked vigorously to suppress their movements with utmost severity and violence. Luther was clear that his call was solely for religious reform, and he stood firmly with the authorities, the system, princes, and wealthy landowners. This stance led to the loss of support for the

Lutheran movement among the peasants and the middle class. Consequently, these events significantly redirected Lutheranism towards closer ties with national governments ⁷².

5.2 The stance of the secular authority (the Emperor)

The Emperor Charles V was not as guided by his religious duty as he was influenced by the political situation of the empire in Europe, where there was a conflict between him and Francis I, King of France. Additionally, it was unfortunate for Catholicism that Lutheranism spread in Germany at a time when the Ottoman Turks were threatening the Emperor's possessions in Austria and Hungary. The Emperor was thus preoccupied with this external struggle, limiting his internal efforts to calming the situation in Germany in order to take a decisive stand against Lutheranism. Moreover, the Emperor's relationship with the Pope was at its worst, especially when Pope Clement VII called for the formation of a Holy League against the Emperor in May 1526, aiming to eliminate his influence in Italy ⁷³.

The Emperor's stance on the Lutheran movement and his handling of it went through several stages:

- The first stage:

This occurred when Emperor Charles V sensed that a religious division would occur in the Holy Roman Empire in general, and specifically in the German states. He then called for an Imperial Council to be held in the city of Speyer (Speier) in Bavaria in July 1526 ⁷⁴; to settle the religious issue and consider the decisions of the "Worms Council" against Luther, King Ferdinand of Austria, who was the Emperor's brother,

presided over this council. From this council, two decisions emerged:

- It is necessary to convene a council or national assembly soon to find a solution to the religious crisis caused by the emergence of the Lutheran movement.

- Each prince has the right to proceed as he sees fit in implementing the decisions of Worms Council, taking responsibility before God and the Emperor ⁷⁵. The decisions of the Speyer Council were not in the interest of Catholics, as they granted each government the right to live, govern, and follow the path for which they would be held accountable before God and the Emperor. This made Luther's supporters a recognized center ⁷⁶.

- **The Second stage:**

As religious disputes within the empire escalated, Emperor Charles V called for a second Imperial Council to be held in the city of Speyer in March 1529 ⁷⁷. He himself presided over it and explicitly declared the necessity of convening the national assembly to study the religious issue in order to avoid the dangers of religious division within the empire. It is notable here that the Emperor recognized the need to limit the authority of Pope Clement VII, who issued the "League of Cognac" decree on May 22, 1526, which called for the expulsion of Emperor Charles V from Italy ⁷⁸.

The council ended with the following decisions:

- The necessity of implementing the decisions of the Worms Council.
- Revocation of the freedom granted to princes to choose the denomination they

prefer ⁷⁹.

The decisions of the Second Imperial Council were unjust towards the Lutherans, who protested and declared the following:

"In our assembly, we protest against this decision and declare that we will not comply with its call. We consider it null and void" ⁸⁰, from this point, followers of Luther were called "protestants," meaning protesters, a term that soon encompassed all non-Catholic Christian denominations ⁸¹.

- **The third stage:**

The Emperor attempted to resolve the religious dispute through peaceful means because he feared the outbreak of civil war in the empire. He was in no position to take any action against the Lutherans, as he was preoccupied with fighting the Ottomans ⁸². Therefore, he invited the Protestants to meet with the Catholics at a council held in the city of Augsburg in June 1530 ⁸³. At this meeting, the Lutheran thinker Melancthon presented Lutheran principles, which later became known as the Augsburg Confession. However, the council rejected this confession, and the Emperor gave the Protestants a deadline to abandon their views. In response, the Protestants formed an alliance to defend their interests, known as the "Schmalkaldic League" in December 1531 ⁸⁴, in which the Protestant princes took on the responsibility of defending the Lutheran faith. The decisions of the Schmalkaldic League were formulated as follows: "Since it appears likely that force will be used to prevent those who preach the Word of God in their territories and deprive them of performing that service which pleases God, and since it is the duty of every Christian government to spread the Word of God among its subjects... we, who work for

our salvation by the human and religious rights guaranteed to every person, have agreed that if any one of us is attacked for following the Word of God and the doctrine of the Gospel, the others will immediately come to their aid with all that they possess."⁸⁵ The assembly approved the implementation of this decision by establishing a joint army, fully equipped and prepared for war ⁸⁶.

- The fourth stage

During this stage, the Catholic princes formed an alliance against the Protestants, known as the "Nuremberg League" in 1532, to defend their interests. After the Emperor failed to resolve the conflict peacefully, the German states (Württemberg, Baden, Hesse, Brandenburg) declared their adherence to the Lutheran doctrine. In response, Pope Paul III convened a religious council in the city of Trent in 1525 to discuss the religious disputes ⁸⁷. However, the Catholics dominated the council, and the Protestants refused to accept the invitation and attend the council. The Emperor began preparing to eliminate the religious division that strongly threatened his possessions. During this time, Luther died on February 17, 1546 ⁸⁸, and the Protestants became divided after his death. Maurice, Duke of Saxony, sided with the Emperor, causing the Protestant armies to lose a great leader. As a result, they were defeated in a famous battle known as the Battle of Mühlberg in April 1547 ⁸⁹.

In May 1548, the Emperor called for the Imperial Council to meet in Augsburg and presented the system he wanted to impose on Catholics and Protestants alike. Essentially, it involved adherence to Catholic doctrine, with some concessions to appease Protestants on specific issues like clerical marriage and Protestant worship

rituals. This system became known as the "Interim." The Emperor was compelled to use soldiers to enforce this system, especially after Maurice, Duke of Saxony, protested against the Interim and returned to the Protestant side, bringing renewed strength to their cause⁹⁰.

- The fifth stage:

In this stage, events favored the Protestants due to the Emperor's preoccupation with inheritance issues in his domains. The Protestant princes allied with King Henry II of France in the Treaty of Chambord in 1552. Emperor Charles V entrusted his brother Ferdinand with mediating the Peace of Passau in July 1552, which called for convening the Imperial Council to settle all outstanding issues within a period not exceeding six months⁹¹.

After the Emperor's death, the Imperial council convened in February 1555 in the city of Augsburg, chaired by his brother Ferdinand, to negotiate peace with the Protestant princes. This assembly became known as the Peace of Augsburg. Some of its key conditions were:

- The Peace of Augsburg decreed religious freedom for Lutheran territories, in addition to granting Protestants the freedom to practice their religious rituals⁹².

- The principle established at the First council of Speyer in 1526 stated that each prince had the right to choose the denomination to be practiced in their territory⁹³.

- The Peace of Augsburg preserved the church properties that Protestants had seized before the year 1552 in the hands of those who had taken them, whether clergy or others. However, properties lost after 1552

were required to be returned to the Catholic Church in Rome⁹⁴.

- The Peace of Augsburg stipulated non-recognition of any denomination other than Catholicism and Lutheranism, thereby excluding denominations like Calvinism and Zwinglianism⁹⁵.

- This peace allows subjects who wish to move from one state to another to sell their possessions without being subjected to harm⁹⁶.

The Peace of Augsburg was indeed a significant religious victory for Protestantism. However, politically and constitutionally, it led to the fragmentation of Germany into numerous independent principalities. Lutheranism predominated in the north, while Catholicism prevailed in the south. The Peace granted princes the sole right to choose their religion, denying the general populace that freedom⁹⁷, which was undeniably unjust. Additionally, the Peace did not extend religious freedom to other Protestant denominations like Calvinism and Zwinglianism, despite their substantial followings among Germans and residents of the empire⁹⁸.

This deficiency in the terms of the peace reignited religious conflicts and turned Germany into a battleground of international struggles in the 17th century, akin to Italy in the 16th century. Consequently, the Peace bolstered the princes' influence at the expense of the emperor, granting them the authority to determine the religious fate of their territories⁹⁹.

6. CONCLUSION

We can conclude from this study that Martin Luther's movement was one of the most

significant religious reform movements in Europe, given its profound impact on modern European society after expanding beyond German borders and spreading throughout Europe under what became known as Protestantism. The truth is, Luther's movement would not have emerged or succeeded without the religious revolution that surpassed any imagined reform movement. Particularly, Luther's challenges to the Papacy reverberated across all corners of Europe, shocking the souls of its peoples with immense excitement and conflict, leading to the emergence of a new denomination, Protestantism. This transformed Lutheranism from a German phenomenon into a broader European Protestant movement.

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