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# CRITIQUING THE MOTIVATIONS FOR LUTHER'S REFORMATION

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## **Abstract**

What informed the engagement of this topic is the mixed feelings or misrepresentations that some Christians express about Martin Luther, the Chief Pioneer or Prince of what we call Protestantism. While it is an established fact in a section of Christianity that Luther was a political reformer, others see him as a religious reformer. Such divergent opinions are capable of distorting historical facts and have the tendency of promoting erroneous ideas about the ideal that Luther stood for. Therefore, the concern of this paper is to investigate the socio-economic, political and religious contexts which spurred reactions by some intellectual church men that eventually culminated in the 16th century reformation. This attempt becomes imperative in order to have a clearer picture of the situations before the reformation and to assess the strategies adopted by the reformers, especially Martin Luther in order to determining the veracity of the claim that Luther's reformation was politically motivated.

## **Introduction**

Church reformation has always been a recurrent issue since the European Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The prevalent anomalies that deformed the church in the Middle Age spurred reactions that resulted in planting the seed that remains a blossoming Oak tree today. The church of God which was birthed through the power of the Holy Spirit on that eventful day of Pentecost experienced many stages of development. Initially, it was a gradual development under the umbrella of Judaism – the religion of the Jews. This happened for many years after her inception because the Roman world could not differentiate between Judaism and Christianity. Since the former enjoyed some measure of toleration, the latter was able to operate without being noticed until the martyrdom of Stephen (one of the Seven in Acts 6) by a sect that Saul of Tarsus belonged to. This sent signal to the non-Jews to the realization that the two religions were different.

Gradually, another phase of development cropped up. Hostilities graduated into various degrees of persecution which lasted for many centuries until the dramatic conversion of Emperor Constantine who gave the church a new lease of life by declaring her religiolcita – a legal religion through the “Edict of Milan”.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, Christianity assumed the status of official religion in the Roman Empire.

With this new status, it became fashionable for people to identify with the church without proper conviction of their salvation. From the third century onward there was a marked departure in the life and practices of the church when compared to what obtained during the Apostolic Age i.e. 98-117AD and the initial period of the Early Church, (118-300AD).

By the middle Age, the Church's influence had reached its zenith due to her expansion, emergence of religious groups like monasteries, religious orders and establishment of educational institutions. Coupled with this is the waning influence of the Roman emperors due to the invasions of the Barbarians and the Arabs. This made the Popes and Bishops to exercise both spiritual and political powers. This intermingling later spelt doom for the church as the secular power in most cases influenced the decision of the church. Many unbelievers got into positions of authority in the church through the support of Emperors.<sup>2</sup> No wonder the church was viewed as a harlot ready to sell her beauty to the highest bidder.

In addition, so many idols were said to have been brought into the church in the name of icons that were recognized. These remote causes and later the immediate ones such as the moral laxity of the papacy and clergy as well as their financial exaction provided the bedrock on which reformation thrived.

However, some Catholic faithful and Christians of other denominations have expressed misgivings about the acclaimed importance of the 16<sup>th</sup> century attempt at restoring the church to Apostolic Christianity given the monumental disunity that it caused the church; as well as the presence of moral bankruptcy in protestant churches today.

Therefore there is the need to investigate the situations that informed Luther's reformation in order to validate its justification.

### **Situations in Pre- Lutheran Reformation Dispensation**

In this section of our discussion, focus shall be on examining the religious and socio-political contexts which served as bedrock for the reformation.

<sup>1</sup>Harry Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976), 105.

<sup>2</sup>S. M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History* (Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 82.

### Political Underpinnings

The political factor, though by itself might never have led to actual revolt, but had some decisive effects. It was a situation whereby the ruler's choice determined the established religion of his territory. But the medieval idea had been one empire with one religion; and the actual condition cannot be better described than in the words of a jurist-historian that "We could frame no acceptable definition of a state which would not comprehend the medieval church"<sup>3</sup>. A typical evidence of the political context of the reformation is the growing spirit of nationalism.

The new rising national powers of Europe bitterly opposed the claims of the Roman church to have universal authority over both religious and civil matters and perhaps saw in the reformation an opportunity to break free of the "civil power" of the Roman church. During the middle ages, 951-1499 modern civilization began to emerge. This period, many things had come to be improved like communication and development of agriculture economy. All these things later developed into commerce and growth of villages and cities, great political kingdoms came together and had powerful kings. This period, the Pope exercised both secular and spiritual powers on the Roman world. But with the rise of the national or political states, the powerful kings who emerged began to challenge and question the supremacy and authority of the Pope e.g. England, Spain, France and Britain clashed with the papacy and refused to pay taxes to the Pope because the Pope sometimes used the taxes against their interest and partly because the method of collecting such taxes was dubious.<sup>4</sup>

### Socio-Economic Factor

During the later centuries of the Middle Ages, clerical possessions were enormous; churchmen owned a proportion which has been variously estimated at one-fifth or one-third of the whole landed property; yet they claimed to be free of taxation by the state.<sup>5</sup> This naturally led to extreme friction; the preamble of Boniface VII's celebrated bull *Clericis Laicos* (1996), in which he strongly asserted this claim for immunity that the laity was bitterly hostile to the clergy is a matter of ancient tradition which is also plainly confirmed by the experience of modern times.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, equal friction arose from the farther claim, which had gradually grown up and was finally fixed by John XXII (1316-34) that all church benefices belong to the Pope, who may appoint whom he will. This naturally led to a systematic trade in benefices. Another factor that led to reformation was the Church's attitudes to money collection in the church. Everything was sold for money in the church – pardons, masses, candles, curacies, indulgences and the

<sup>3</sup>C. Owen, *The Reformation* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1990), 13.

<sup>4</sup>Houghton, 79.

<sup>5</sup>H.J. Grimms, *The Reformation 1500-1650* (England: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 19.

<sup>6</sup>Grimms, 19.

episcopacy. Justice was sold in all the church courts even more frequently than by secular judges. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it was notorious that the archdeacons derived a large proportion of their income from bribes. These economic causes for reformation are most pithily summed up in the hundred Grievances of the German nation, laid before Adrian VI (1522-23) by the German Princes.<sup>7</sup> The point being made here is that virtually every office or service in the church was monetized. This quest for wealth made an observer to assert that the church became a harlot throwing her beauty for the highest bidder.

### **Immoral Practices by the Leadership of the Church**

The years leading up to the Reformation were plagued by moral corruption and abuse of position in the Church.<sup>8</sup> The priesthood was guilty of several abuses of privilege and responsibility, including simony (using one's wealth or influence to purchase an ecclesiastical office), pluralism (holding multiple offices simultaneously) and the failure to reside in the parish where they were supposed to minister. The practice of celibacy which was imposed by the church on the priesthood was often abused or ignored, leading to immoral conduct on the part of the clergy. Worldly minded, ignorant priests corrupted their position by neglect or abuse of power.<sup>9</sup>

During the fifteenth century, the worldliness and corruption in the church reached its peak. For example, Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) established the practice of selling indulgences to be applied to the dead. Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) one of the most controversial of the Renaissance Popes was said to have fathered seven children, including Lucrezia and Cesare Borgia, by at least two mistresses.<sup>10</sup>

### **Improper Use of Church Resources**

Instead of the leadership of the church to utilize the money collected as levies from various churches in Europe for the benefits of the tax payers, the monies were often spent on secular matters. These included addressing the unrest and wars between princes, uprising among the peasants and execution of wars in non-papal territories. Besides, members of the church from other parts of Europe at this time also resented the collection of money for the building of the church in Rome – St. Peter's Basilica.<sup>11</sup> They felt bitter about it because most of the churches were poor and could not repair their own churches, nor could they employ the services of a priest to cater for the spiritual growth of the congregation.

<sup>7</sup>S.M. Mepaiyeda, *Church Reformation: A Historical Reflection* (Ibadan: Aflame Publishing House, 2013), 15.

<sup>8</sup>Grimms, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Mepaiyeda, 15.

<sup>10</sup>J.L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985), 7.

<sup>11</sup>A.M. Renwick, *The Story of the Church* (London: Varsity Press, 1960), 102.

## The Renaissance

The renaissance was a movement that constituted the transition from the medieval to the modern world. It began in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy as a result of a renewed interest in the classical or humanistic culture of Greece and Rome.<sup>12</sup> Religion in the renaissance became less important as man turned their attention to the enjoyment of the here and now. The renaissance also contributed to the reformation in more positive ways. The invention of the moveable type of printing press by Johann Gutenberg in about 1456 provided a medium for the spread of ideas. Renaissance scholars north of the Alps shared many of the same interests – a love for ancient sources, an emphasis on the human being as an individual, and a belief in the rational abilities of the human mind.<sup>13</sup>

These “northern Christian humanists” however, were less interested in the classical past than in the Christian past. They applied the techniques and methods of renaissance humanism to the study of the scriptures in their original languages, as well as the study of “church fathers” such as Augustine. The chief concern for human beings was for their souls. Their emphasis was ethical and religious rather than aesthetic and secular.

The result of this emphasis was an interest in a return to the scriptures and restoration of primitive Christianity.

## Doctrinal Issues

The immediate issue that prompted Martin Luther to post his ninety-five theses for debate in 1517 was the concept of indulgences.<sup>14</sup> The doctrine of indulgences, first formulated by Sixtus IV in the thirteenth century, was associated with the sacrament of penance and the doctrine of purgatory. While the sacrament was believed to provide forgiveness of sin and pardon from punishment, it was thought that there was a temporal satisfaction that the repentant sinner must fulfill in this life or in purgatory. The indulgence was a document that one could purchase for a sum of money that would free him or her from the temporal penalty of sin. Luther became convinced that the Bible is the only true authority in Christianity (*sola scriptura*) and eventually rejected the Roman Catholic sacrament system and doctrine altogether.

Secondly there were false foundations of Papal authority. This has to do with the source of the power of the pope that the rock on which the church was built was Peter, and in the early centuries the Roman Bishop enjoyed no more than a primacy of honour.<sup>15</sup> While most Reformers professed a readiness to accept a reformed papacy that served to edify the church, they resisted vehemently an Antichrist who

<sup>12</sup>Renwick, 13.

<sup>14</sup>F.G. Llewellyn, *Heroes of the Reformation* (London: Wickliffe Press, N/D), 40.

<sup>15</sup>Llewellyn, 40.

occupied the office.<sup>16</sup> Other reformers even dissociated themselves from this doctrine with the argument the papacy is the creation of man and not God.

In addition there was the ecclesiastical captivity of the Word of God because the Bible which supposed to be the final authority was substituted by papal magisterium, church dogma, or the sophistries of school men, canonists and allegorists. This was a leading target of Martin Luther's whereby he denied the infallibility of general councils. The Reformers liberated the Bible by vernacular translation (notably Luther's German Bible), expository preaching (recommended by Zwingli), and straightforward grammatical/historical exegesis (best exemplified in Calvin's commentaries). Thus, were the scriptures enthroned as judge of all ecclesiastical traditions and the sole source of authentic doctrine, as well as experienced as the living power of God in judgement and grace.

Furthermore, the mediation of Mary and the intercession of the saints were doctrinal issues in the church which caught the attention of the Reformers. To them, Christ alone was exalted as man's advocate before God and God's appointed priest to bear our sins and minister to our frailty. Furthermore in accordance with New Testament usage, all believers were declared to be by baptism a royal priesthood, free to fulfill a priestly service to others in need of the Word of life

### **Martin Luther: Background, Academic Exposure and Inspiration for Reformation**

Luther was born in November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, Germany, into an affluent copper miner's family.<sup>17</sup> His father, Hans, came from peasant stock but had gone into mining, rising from poverty to a position of prosperity and respect, though he never became wealthy.<sup>18</sup> Some of Luther's early education was received from members of the Brethren of the Common Life. In 1501 he entered the University of Erfurt, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1502 and becoming Master of Arts three years later. He was trained in the "modern" school of philosophy, which followed the teachings of William of Ockham, a great English thinker of the fourteenth century. One of the basic principles of Ockham's thought was a separation between faith and reason, in contrast with the position of Thomas Aquinas, who had tried to carry as far as possible the rational consideration of the truths of the faith. In Ockham's view, reason was inadequate to apprehend theological truth, which should, therefore, be accepted by faith alone. Luther's teachers also professed the Ockhamist doctrine of the unlimited potentiality of the human will to earn merit for salvation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Llewellyn, 41.

<sup>17</sup>Llewellyn, 35.

<sup>18</sup>Llewellyn, 35.

<sup>19</sup>James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (India: Oasis Int'l Ltd, 2002, 49.



Luther's motivation for becoming a monk is debated by some writers. However, it is certain that he feared the judgment of God and was seeking a way to ensure peace for his soul. Having finished his studies in the Arts faculty, Luther began to study law. His legal studies ended, however, as a result of an experience he had on July 2, 1505. Returning to school from a visit home, he was caught in a great thunderstorm. When a bolt of lightning threw him to the ground, he was so terrified that he made a vow to St. Anne that, if she preserved him, he would become a monk.<sup>20</sup> About two weeks later, he entered the monastery of the Augustinian Hermits at Erfurt as a novice. He threw himself into the monastic life. He was a model monk, regularly observing prayers, mass, his duties, and confession. However, he did not find peace in any of these things. He was deeply afraid of God's judgment. As a monk, he manifested exemplary devotion to his calling, and in 1506 became a full-fledged member of the order. He showed so much promise that his superiors selected him for the priesthood, and he was ordained in 1507 and was later sent to teach theology at the newly established University of Wittenberg.<sup>21</sup>

As part of his spiritual journey, beginning in his days at the monastery in Erfurt and culminating in his study at the University of Wittenberg, Luther began to seek refuge in Christ. He had been taught to believe "the righteousness of God revealed" in Romans 1:17, the only key to escape the wrath of God, which would be poured out on sinners. However, as he studied the text, Luther determined that the "righteousness of God" is that which is given to those who have faith.<sup>22</sup> This doctrine of justification by faith alone became the chief platform of Luther's ministry, writing, and life. Luther says, "I felt that I had been born anew and that the gates of heaven had been opened. The whole scripture gained a new meaning. And from that point on the phrase 'the justice of God' no longer filled me with hatred, but rather became unspeakably sweet by virtue of a great love".<sup>23</sup>

When the Dominican John Tetzel entered Germany selling indulgences, a device of the church through which man could escape punishment for his sins, Luther reacted to this trade that he considered misleading and dangerous. Tetzel was a Dominican monk hired by the Archbishop Albert to sell indulgences in Germany.<sup>24</sup> His improper preaching of justification prompted Luther to write his 95 Theses. Tetzel's message was summed up in a line attributed to him, "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs".<sup>25</sup>

Pope Leo X (1475-1521) sat on the throne in Rome at the time of the Reformation. He approved the sale of indulgences that led to Tetzel's work in Germany and was

<sup>20</sup>J.L. Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity" Vol. 2, no. 1, 1985, 16.

<sup>21</sup>P. A. Bishop, "Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation", 3, <sup>22</sup><https://www.hccfl.edu/media/173616/ee2luher>; accessed 30 October, 2017

<sup>23</sup>Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity," 19.

<sup>24</sup>Gonzalez, "The Story of Christianity," 19-20.

<sup>25</sup>Liardon, 140-141.

<sup>26</sup>For details of the 95-theses, see Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 7, 160-67.

greatly disappointed to see sales drop off as a result of Luther's preaching. Although he tried to ignore the situation at first, Leo eventually issued a papal bull excommunicating Luther.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it was actually the Roman Church that caused the split between Catholics and Protestants.

Martin Luther was not the first person to protest against the abuses of the medieval Catholic Church nor was he the first to point out the ridiculous nature of the indulgences. However, the political situation in Germany, the rising middle class of literate people, the use of the new printing press, and the spiritual growth of Luther combined to set the world on an unexpected course. The theses posted by Luther on October 31, 1517 were soon distributed all throughout Europe.

In his theses, Luther protested against the behavior of the indulgence sellers. He was careful not to condemn the pope himself and seems to believe the pope could not possibly be aware of the abuses carried out in his name. However, he declares, "The true treasury of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God" (Thesis 62). "Furthermore, he makes it clear that the Pope cannot remit any sin except by declaring the remission of God. Forgiveness presupposes true repentance, and can only be found in the merits of Christ".<sup>27</sup> Luther's presentation of the true gospel empties the papacy of its power to coerce and collect through the offer of remission of sins.

### Reactions to Luther's Criticisms

The 95 theses generated reactions both in the church and academic space. Public disputations held to determine the validity of the criticisms. This happened between Luther and his supporters against John Eck, a professor of Theology at the Catholic University of Leipzig in 1519. Expectedly the Pope reacted by requesting that Luther be summoned to Rome to answer to charges of heresy and disobedience but a staunch member of German Parliament, Fredrick the Wise, who feared that Luther might not come back alive pleaded that the trial of Luther should hold in Germany. The Pope's delegation to the Diet of Worms was led by Cardinal Cajetan.<sup>28</sup>

Luther began writing in defense of his theses and he also produced works of theology, commentaries, and devotional books. His opposition to the established church made powerful enemies, but the Elector of Saxony protected him. In April 1521 he was taken before Emperor Charles the V and the Diet of Worms. When he was commanded to recant of his writings, he gave this famous answer:

<sup>26</sup>B. L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 237.

<sup>27</sup>Llewellyn, 40.

<sup>28</sup>Mepaiyeda, 45.

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scriptures or by clear reason, . . . I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against one's conscience". God help me. Amen."<sup>29</sup> Thus, April 18, 1521 had been described as the greatest day in Luther's life. The occasion has been described as 'one of the sublimest scenes which earth ever witnessed, and most pregnant with blessings'.<sup>30</sup> Although there was much debate about what to do with Luther, his enemies eventually produced an edict, which was signed by the Emperor himself. This Edict of Worms gave legal force to the papal bull against Luther. It denounced him as a devil and pronounced upon him the ban of the empire. It commanded the burning of his books and forbade the sheltering of his person. He and all his followers were to be handed over to the emperor so they might be punished according to the laws of the empire. Thankfully, the political situation in Europe would make it impossible for the edict to be enforced in Saxony where Luther lived though he had been accused of heresy and disobedience to established political authority. With this situation the message of the Reformation had made its way from the cell of an obscure monk to the pinnacle of world power.

Luther left Worms after 10 days and began his journey back to Wittenberg. Along the way he was abducted by a group of armed men. Luther was taken alone to the Castle Wartburg.<sup>31</sup> This arrangement had been made at the request of Prince Fredrick, who wanted to steal his most famous citizen away to a safe place so that none of his enemies could get him.

Luther did not waste time during his retreat in the Wartburg. He wrote extensively. His most notable accomplishment was the translation of the New Testament into German. This was the first installment in a work that was to span many years and culminate in the translation of the entire Bible. Of all the great things did through Luther, this is perhaps the most significant. Philip Schaff expresses the importance of this work by saying: "The Bible ceased to be a foreign book in a foreign tongue, and became naturalized, and hence far more clear and dear to the common people. Hereafter the Reformation depended no longer on the works of the reformers, but on the book of God."<sup>32</sup>

### **Assessing the Political Dimension of Luther's Reformation**

The most dramatic and forceful advance of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century took place in Germany. According to God's providence the land was perfectly prepared to burst forth with the fruit of change. The German people were tired of giving to the church only to have their money taken away by Rome. They were offended by the wicked lifestyle of many priests and monks. The semi-autonomous rule enjoyed

<sup>29</sup>Grimms, 139.

<sup>30</sup>Grimms, 139.<sup>31</sup>Grimms,143.

<sup>32</sup>Schaff Philip, History of the Christian Church, Vol 7. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 702.

by the German princes gave rise to a new nationalistic spirit and paved the way for political protection of those who would do the work of reform. As in the first century, the fullness of time had come. The Word of God was to be unsheathed once again and the world was to witness a rebirth of biblical Christianity.

At its heart, the Reformation was an evangelical movement. It began with the good news of Christ working effectively in the hearts of individuals for salvation. It was the result of "piety and prayer". While politics and intellectual progress were key factors, it was not merely a political or intellectual movement. As we look at various aspects of the German Reformation, it is important to remember that the reform was the result of the transformation that had taken place in the lives of men and women by the grace of Almighty God! Just as the Christian faith is not only for the clergy, the work of the Reformation was carried out by more than pastors and biblical scholars. A handful of powerful German princes were involved in the advancement of the gospel of Christ in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>33</sup>

Chief among these princes was the Elector Frederick of Saxony<sup>34</sup> (1463-1525). His successful efforts to rule his territory with justice and prudence earned him the nickname Frederick the Wise. He was a pious son of the church who participated in all religious rituals of his day and amassed a huge collection of Christian relics. He was the founder of the University of Wittenberg and its main benefactor when Luther came to teach there. He never came out and sided directly with the Reformation, but as a matter of principle he defended Luther and the work that was taking place in Saxony. Furthermore, he was displeased with the lives of the priests and the abuses of the Church. Historians see a childlike faith in Frederick that continued to grow. Just prior to his death Frederick changed his will. In the new document he declared he was redeemed by the precious blood of his beloved Savior.<sup>35</sup>

Upon Frederick's death, his brother Duke John succeeded him as Elector of Saxony (1468-1532). John, whose nickname was "the Constant", was bolder than his elder brother. He determined to support the cause of the Reformation even if it cost him everything. During his reign, the Lutheran church was officially established. He played an important role at the Diet of Speyer and the Diet of Augsburg. At the latter of these meetings he was warned that he may lose his electorship because of his protestant stand, Duke John replied "I will do what is right unconcerned about my electoral dignity. I will confess my Lord, whose cross I esteem more highly than all the power on the earth".<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Lewellin, 45.

<sup>34</sup>Lewellin, 45.

<sup>35</sup>Lewellin, 45

<sup>36</sup>Mepaiyeda, 51.

Perhaps the boldest political figure in the history of the German Reformation is Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse (1504-1567). The young Philip first met Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Later he met and corresponded with Melanchthon and became a staunch Protestant.<sup>37</sup>

The most powerful Catholic prince during the German Reformation period was Charles V<sup>38</sup> (1500-1558). Charles already held many titles when he was elected to serve as Holy Roman Emperor in 1519 and began to rule over a huge empire. Charles was a politician more than anything else and tolerated the Lutherans when it worked to his advantage. However, he was a strong Catholic and would have suppressed the Reformation with force from the beginning if it were possible. Despite his initial support for Lutheranism, Charles was alleged to have turned his back at the movement in later years.

With this support that Luther had from the political class in Germany, he ceased the opportunity to appeal to the nobles to defend the cause of his reforms attempt which they granted based on pure conscience and the principle of solidarity with a fellow German citizen whom they held in high esteem. No wonder, following the resolution reached at the Diet of Speyer that Lutherans should either be restricted or totally disallowed in Catholic regions, Lutheran princes, rebuffed such a command. Six of them, along with representatives from 14 of the free German cities, signed a famous protest in which they expressed their belief that they need not obey the emperor in matters of religion and conscience. From this famous protest, the evangelical Christians were given the name "Protestant".<sup>39</sup>

Moreover it must be noted that the political and religious histories of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century are inseparably intertwined. This is clearly seen in the Peasants' War (1523-1525). There had been uprisings prior to the Reformation because of the ill-treatment many of the common people received from their masters and princes. However, at the time of Reformation, the peasants identified their cause with the restoration of pure Christianity.<sup>40</sup>

Luther himself acknowledged that some of the peasants' grievances were legitimate and encouraged the princes to make concessions. However, when it became apparent that many of the peasants were being led into open rebellion and they were claiming Luther's blessing and the rights of the gospel as their reason, the reformer took up his pen and wrote against them. He advised the princes to "stab, kill and strangle" them.<sup>41</sup> At his advice Philip of Hesse, Duke Henry of Brunswick, the Elector John, and Dukes George and John of Saxony crushed the peasant armies

<sup>37</sup>Mepaiyeda, 51.

<sup>38</sup>Gonzalez, 40.

<sup>39</sup>J.H.D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*. Translated by H. White. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1846), 520.

<sup>40</sup>Gonzalez, 41-42.

<sup>41</sup>Gonzalez, 41-42.

without mercy. The number of those killed was greater than 100,000.<sup>42</sup> This event left a deep scar in Germany and on Luther.

### Concluding Remarks

From the discussion so far, there are indications that Martin Luther started a religious and evangelical reform and rose against any attempt to becloud his vision by political agitations. Judging from his quest to understand God better which necessitated his sojourn to Augustinian monastery and his discovery of justification by faith that gave him a new theological understanding that salvation does not depend on merits achievable through works, as was being propagated by the Roman Catholic Church of Luther's age, one can assert that his reformation was religiously motivated.

That Christianity thrived under the umbrella of Judaism before the Roman world could decipher later the dichotomy between the two religions is not a justification for anyone to tag it a movement within Judaism. The same holds for Lutheranism. Whatever might be the disposition of the German political class to Luther's reform is not a good ground to submit that he was fighting a political cause. In addition, the fact that most ecumenical church councils in ecclesiastical history were convened by emperors should not be enough reason to brand the councils purely political because of theological exigencies that formed their remote causes. Furthermore, the attempt by the Roman Catholic Church to respond to Protestantism otherwise known as Counter-Reformation, was an indication that Luther's criticisms were more of religious than political. The birth of reforming Orders such as the Barnabites, Theatines, Capuchin Monks and Jesuits among others who gave attention to the issues raised by Protestants in the areas of welfarism, care-giving and education in order to arrest mass movement of the Catholic peasants to protestant circles.

The central question in relation to our modern world is, 'How can there be a modern-day reformation of the weak, sick, compromised and persecuted church using the principles that came into play during the reformation era?' The church today is bedeviled by spiritual laxity and moral decadence among the leaders and the followers. These could be seen in the areas of moral bankruptcy in the church, commercialization of Christianity and absurd revisionist agenda.

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<sup>42</sup>Gonzalez, 41-42.

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