VMUN **2026**

Joint Crisis Committee

Colombia

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Vancouver Model United Nations
The Twenty-Fifth Annual Session | January 23rd-25th, 2026

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Joint Crisis Committee (JCC)! My name is Richard Li, and I am beyond excited to be serving as the Crisis Overlord for this year's JCC! Throughout my four-year MUN journey, I have learned to consider different perspectives, refined my speaking and writing abilities, and shared countless unforgettable moments with other delegates. From striking speeches to committee jokes, I will cherish these memories forever. I am confident that the JCC will foster the same opportunities for learning and friendship.

JCCs are by far my favorite committee offering with their exciting partisan division, high-stakes decision-making, and high-paced conflict. Crises are unlike any other committee type, offering a unique and unforgettable experience. Whether you are a first-time participant or seasoned delegate, the JCC team works our hardest to produce an engaging simulation of the Thirty Years' War and all its conflict and chaos.

At VMUN 2026, the Joint Crisis Committees are a hybrid simulation, consisting of two blocs and one interconnected crisis: the conflict between the Habsburg Alliance and the Anti-Habsburg Alliance. Delegates should conduct research regarding 17th-century European politics, military strategy, and religious conflict during the Thirty Years' War. A thorough understanding will equip delegates to participate in dynamic discussions and propose creative solutions.

I wish you all the best of luck in preparation! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at jcc@vmun.com. We wish you all the best during the conference.

Sincerely,

Richard Li
JCC Overlord

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For JCC, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

Formatting

Position papers should:

— Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee

— Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins

— Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders

— Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research
(not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted **by January 12, 2026, at 23:59 PT**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is jcc@vmun.com.

Thirty Years' War

Overview

The Kingdom of Bohemia stands on edge. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants are at a boiling point with the recent Defenestration of Prague.[1] And with the legacy of Jan Hus and the Hussites carrying over for generations, memories of fire, rebellion, and a stubborn refusal to bow entirely to Rome now resurface. The people, many bound by the Catholic Habsburgs, stay restless. Protestant nobles, burghers, and townsfolk alike guard their liberties with suspicion, wary of any attempt to strip them away.

Previously, the Letter of Majesty of 1609 established a fragile peace between Catholics and Protestants when Emperor Rudolf II issued it under pressure from a rebellion. The decree provided Protestant believers with both protection and a promise, which established independence for their churches and religious freedom.[2] Catholics, however, saw this decision as a violation of Christendom which they accepted only through forced compliance.

By 1617, tensions deepened when the Bohemian crown passed to Ferdinand of Styria. Educated by the Jesuits and pious to the point of severity, Ferdinand was a man who saw compromise as weakness and heresy as treason against God.[3] His very name inspired dread among Protestants. Whispers spread through Prague's halls and taverns alike: Ferdinand swore to revoke the Letter, crush their freedoms, and return Bohemia to Catholic obedience with an iron hand.

Ferdinand began his cleansing quietly with decrees issued from Vienna. But on the streets, the consequences were anything but routine. Soon, whispers would turn to outrage as the new king worked to close Protestant churches. In towns where Protestant congregations had gathered for years, soldiers hammered boards across entrances where villagers stood in silence. Priests were forced to abandon their pulpits mid-sermon. Families who had worshiped in those same sanctuaries for generations now watched helplessly as guards declared their churches unlawful. Altars were dismantled, sacred books seized, and communion vessels confiscated as evidence of illegal practice.

For Protestants, these actions were not administrative disputes over property, but deliberate humiliations by the church to mock the Letter of Majesty. Each embarrassment was but a reminder that the Protestant faith rested on the mercy of a Catholic monarch. What had once been celebrated as a victory of tolerance now seemed worthless, little more than ink on fading parchment.

Word traveled fast. Messengers spread the news and caused the stories to become more vivid with each retelling. The merchants in Prague markets whispered that when one church faced suppression, it proved all churches were vulnerable to similar treatment. Blacksmiths uttered curses against the emperor while working. Tavern-goers

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[1] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Defenestration of Prague | 1618," in Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Defenestration-of-Prague-1618; Prague is the capital of Bohemia.
[2] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Letter of Majesty | Europe [1609] | Britannica," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Letter-of-Majesty.
[3] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ferdinand II."

whispered that since Ferdinand broke his promises without hesitation, he would stop at nothing to disregard any oath or law. Anger reached its boiling point in the great halls of the Bohemian Estates. Nobles pounded their fists against wooden tables while speakers delivered angry speeches about betrayal. The closures damaged more than the physical barriers of timber doors and stone walls, but shattered the delicate bond between Protestants and their Habsburg monarch.

United under their faith, and seeing their liberties slipping away through decrees and sealed orders, the people of Bohemia believed themselves to be under siege. Ferdinand's reign no longer represented justice or stability, but a fight against Protestantism.

Timeline

30-313 — Christianity emerges from Judaism in the province of Roman Judea and gradually spreads across the Roman Empire.[4] Early Christians are often persecuted and scapegoated until the Edict of Milan.[5]

313 — Roman Emperors Constantine and Licinius legalize Christianity across the Roman Empire and guarantee their rights by legislating the Edict of Milan.[6]

325 — The first Council of Nicaea, formed to address heresy against God, establishes a unified Christian doctrine and the Nicene creed, establishing the roots of Catholic orthodoxy.[7]

February 27, 380 — Emperor Theodosius I declares Nicene Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. Roman Catholicism is officially institutionalized and centralized.[8]

December 25, 800 — Charlemagne is crowned as the first "emperor of the Romans" by Pope Leo III, forming the precedent for a Holy Roman Empire.[9]

1054 — The Great Schism occurs, which is the formal split between the Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) Churches.[10] Latin (Catholic) Christianity becomes dominant in Western Europe.

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[4] PBS, "Maps, Archaeology & Sources - Chronology | from Jesus to Christ | FRONTLINE | PBS," Pbs.org, 2014, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/cron.html.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Anand Siddhartha, Swami and P R Trivedi, *World Encyclopaedia of Interfaith Studies* (New Delhi, India: Jnanada Prakashan, In Association With The Global Open University, Nagaland, 2009), 378.
[9] Julius Sykes, "Roman Holiday: December 25, 800, and the Philosophical Origins of Charlemagne's Purple Reign - Office of the Vice President for Research | University of South Carolina," sc.edu, n.d., https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/research/news_and_pubs/caravel/archive/2015/2015-caravel-purple-reign.php.
[10] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "East-West Schism," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, April 4, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054.

May 18, 1291 — The last Crusader city in the Holy Land, Acre, falls to Muslim forces, ending the Crusader era; Europe turns inward to state-building, church reform, and internal religious controls.[11]

January 10, 1356 — Emperor Charles IV formalizes the electoral system for the Holy Roman Emperor.[12] This strengthens the autonomy of the seven prince-electors, making imperial enforcement of religious unity more difficult.

October 31, 1517 — Martin Luther proposes his "Nintety-Five Theses," calling on the Catholic church to address the clergy's indulgences. This launches the Protestant Reformation; Luther emphasizes *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), and individual conscience.[13]

April 18, 1521 — During the Diet of Worms (a deliberative assembly), Martin Luther refuses to recant before Emperor Charles V and is declared an outlaw.[14] Lutheranism, an early form of Protestantism, becomes a growing religious movement across Europe.

June 25, 1530 — Lutheran leaders present a formal statement of faith to the Emperor during the Augsburg Confession.[15] Lutheranism and Protestantism both become a recognized religious alternative.

September 25, 1555 — The Peace of Augsburg, signed between Charles V and the Schmalkaldic League in response to the 1524 German Peasants' Revolt, grants legal recognition to Lutheranism and stipulated that rulers could choose their state's religion.[16] This establishes religious freedom but excludes Calvinism and sets the precedent of religious division in the Holy Roman Empire.

February 1608 — Led by Frederick IV of the Palatinate, Protestant states ally militarily to form the Protestant Union.[17] The formation of this union signals deepening division, rooted in the distrust of a growing Roman-Catholic movement, and readiness for war between Catholics and Protestants.

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[11] Mark Cartwright, "The Siege of Acre, 1291 CE," World History Encyclopedia, September 17, 2018, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1267/the-siege-of-acre-1291-ce/.
[12] Ernest F. (Ernest Flagg) Henderson, "The Avalon Project: The Golden Bull of the Emperor Charles IV 1356 A.D.," avalon.law.yale.edu, 2008, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/golden.asp.
[13] Britannica, "Ninety-Five Theses | Work by Luther," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, October 24, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/event/Ninety-five-Theses.
[14] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Diet of Worms | Germany [1521]," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Diet-of-Worms-Germany-1521.
[15] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Augsburg Confession | Lutheran Confession," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, September 27, 2011, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Augsburg-Confession.
[16] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Peace of Augsburg | Germany [1555]," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Augsburg.
[17] Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Protestant Union | German Military Alliance | Britannica," www.britannica.com, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestant-Union.

July 10, 1609 — Catholic states, led by Bavaria, respond to the Palatinate with their own alliance known as the Catholic League.[18] Europe becomes armed and divided along confessional lines as tensions rise.

June 5, 1617 — Ferdinand of Styria is elected the King of Bohemia.[19] A staunch Catholic, he begins restricting Protestant rights despite previous promises. This triggers alarm in Protestant regions, especially Bohemia.

May 23, 1618 (Initiating Crisis) — Protestant nobles throw two Catholic officials from a third-story window in Prague Castle in response to the shutting of Protestant chapels.[20] Although they survive by landing in manure, the act triggers the Bohemian Revolt and the Thirty Years' War.

Historical Analysis

The Spread of Catholic Christianity

Christianity expanded beyond the former Roman Empire territories during the early Middle Ages through missionary work and royal backing for religious legitimacy. The baptism of Clovis I, who ruled as King of the Franks in 496 CE, marked a crucial turning point, as the Frankish kingdom became the first significant Germanic power to adopt Latin Christianity, thus establishing France as a fundamental part of Western Christendom.[21] Pope Gregory the Great dispatched Augustine of Canterbury to England in 597, which started the process of Christian conversion among English kingdoms, while monastic networks expanded throughout Ireland, Scotland, and England.[22]

The Christian faith began to spread throughout Central Europe starting from the 9th and 10th centuries. Cyril and Methodius, who were brothers, introduced Christianity to Great Moravia, a state that included Bohemia, through Slavic language adaptations during the 860s.[23] After Moravia lost its political independence, the missionaries managed to preserve their work, which spread most strongly to Bohemia. Eastern Europe was slowly converted too. Through his conversion to Catholicism in 966, Duke Mieszko I of Poland joined Western Christendom while establishing Rome as his political authority.[24]

The Holy Roman Empire functioned as the central political authority that sustained Christianity throughout Central European territories. The coronation of Charlemagne as Emperor in 800 CE set the standard for Catholic kingship, which required papal endorsement.[25] Through successive imperial support, the emperors supported

[18] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Defenestration of Prague | 1618," in Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Defenestration-of-Prague-1618; Prague is the capital of Bohemia.

[19] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ferdinand II | Biography, Accomplishments, & Facts | Britannica," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ferdinand-II-Holy-Roman-emperor.

[20] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Defenestration of Prague | 1618," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Defenestration-of-Prague-1618.

[21] R A Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 177–95.

[22] Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, pp. 116.

[23] Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 334–48.

[24] Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy : Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' C. 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 272.

[25] Fletcher, The Barbarian Conversion, 329.

missionary work among Germans and Slavs, and the bishops of the empire combined spiritual duties with secular rule by governing extensive territories as prince-bishops.[26] Through Christianity, the empire unified different ethnic groups by establishing a common religious bond.

The institutions alongside warfare reinforced Christianity's deepening presence in Western European society. The Papal Reform Movement of the 11th century achieved two main goals by removing Church corruption and establishing papal dominance which strengthened Roman control.[27] Through the Reconquista movement in Iberia, Catholic monarchs positioned themselves as protectors of faith against Muslim occupation while French and English rulers built Gothic cathedrals to demonstrate their religious devotion and ruling power.[28] After 1095 the Crusades enabled the papacy to unite European powers for Holy Land conquest thus creating a brief period of unified purpose in Christendom.[29]

Catholic Christianity reached all regions of Central and Western Europe by the year 1291, bringing both cultural unity and political acceptance. Nevertheless, it created multiple conflicts between papal and royal authorities, between local customs and universal teachings, and between rulers who interpreted religion differently to build their power.[30] The unresolved conflicts of this period led to the eventual breakdown of the late medieval and early modern periods.

Christianity in the Late Middle Ages

The fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291 brought about the end of more than just Crusader rule, but marked the collapse of the Christian European dream of religious dominance over the Holy Land, continental unity under a shared spiritual cause, and the expansion of Christendom.[31] The loss of Acre and the Last Crusaders' defeat led Europe to lose its single front against enemies beyond its borders. Following the ensuing power vacuum, kingdoms, such as the Holy Roman Empire and England, redirected their ambitions against their neighboring states or focused on their domestic populations.

The late Middle Ages marked a time when states combined under a single authority and citizens were divided into many classes—a governmental system known as feudal monarchy.[32] Executive power would be centralized, drawing power away from the traditional papal authority of the Catholic Church. For centuries, popes exercised absolute authority that extended from spiritual guidance to temporal rule.[33] The papacy influenced public, moral,

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[26] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom : Triumph and Diversity, A. D. 200-1000* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 168–172.

[27] R I Moore, *The First European Revolution* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 15, 19, 91-92.

[28] Fletcher, The Barbarian Conversion, 329; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 30.

[29] Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press Of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).

[30] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Roman Catholicism - the Church of the Early Middle Ages | Britannica," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism/The-church-of-the-early-Middle-Ages.

[31] Mark Cartwright, "The Siege of Acre."

[32] Stenton F M, "THE CHANGING FEUDALISM of the MIDDLE AGES," History 19, no. 76 (1935): 289–301, https://doi.org/10.2307/24401321.

[33] Walter Ullmann, "The Papacy as an Institution of Government in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 78–101, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0424208400005131.

and judicial practices while prince-bishops expanded their wealth via church taxes, leading to a growing dissatisfaction, especially among territories in the Holy Roman Empire.

The arrangement faced its first test during the Avignon Papacy (1309–1377), when Pope Clement V relocated the papal seat to Avignon because of pressures by the French nobility, putting the church under French control and weakening its global authority.[34] The crisis worsened during the Western Schism (1378–1417) when rival popes in Rome and Avignon, later joined by a third in Pisa, contested papal authority.[35] Although the schism settled and the papacy moved back to Rome, the Catholic Church, which claimed to unite the faith, played a significant role in the severe religious divisions between Christians due to the Schism, thus weakening the Church's spiritual legitimacy.

The Rise of Protestantism

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, European society demonstrated all the indications of an impending crisis from a period of socioeconomic, political, and religious conflicts. The Black Death during the mid-14th century led to a significant decline in the population, resulting in labor shortages and increased wages, disrupting the strict feudal system.[36] The feudal hierarchy faced destabilization when landowners and nobles tried to regain control through enclosures, rent increases, and legal restrictions, which created deep rural resentment.[37] The growth of urban centers and the emerging merchant class produced economic disparities within towns due to guild monopolies.[38] This led to regional economic volatility. Furthermore, the Church, which served as the foundation of medieval society, encountered growing public disapproval because of its corrupt practices, which led to spiritual disillusionment among all social classes.[39] The combination of economic discontent, social class conflicts, and moral discontent created a dangerous situation that led to reform movements and revolutionary transformations.

When the Church lost its moral influence, it also lost its ability to direct religious doctrines. The religious reformer Jan Hus, along with other Bohemian reformers, criticized religious corruptions in Bohemia, a kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire, as the exploitation of the faithful, reflected most blatantly in the practice of selling indulgences, certificates sold by the clergy that promised the reduction of time in purgatory in exchange for money.[40] The inquisition and execution of Jan Hus in 1415 caused the Hussite Wars, a series of civil wars between the Bohemian protestants and royalty, to erupt as a first battle in the long religious self-governance movement.[41] Although the Catholic Church regained control in the end, the Hussite movement maintained a lasting impact across generations of Bohemians.

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[34] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Avignon Papacy | Summary, History, & Facts," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/event/Avignon-papacy.

[35] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Western Schism | Roman Catholic History," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, October 14, 2015, https://www.britannica.com/event/Western-Schism.

[36] R. H. Britnell, "Feudal Reaction after the Black Death in the Palatinate of Durham," *Past & Present*, no. 128 (1990): 28–47, https://www.jstor.org/stable/651008.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Avner Greif, Paul Milgrom, and Barry R Weingast, "Coordination, Commitment, and Enforcement: The Case of the Merchant Guild," *Journal of Political Economy* 102, no. 4 (1994): 749, https://doi.org/10.2307/2138763.

[39] Charles West, *Corruption in the Middle Ages and the Problem of Simony*, *University of Edinburgh Research Explorer* (Caliandra, 2024), 83, https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/corruption-in-the-middle-ages-and-the-problem-of-simony.

[40] Matthew Spinka, "Jan Hus | Bohemian Religious Leader," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jan-Hus.

[41] Joshua J. Mark, "Hussite Wars," World History Encyclopedia, November 18, 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/Hussite_Wars/.

Martin Luther initiated the Lutheran Reformation when he posted his Ninety-five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517.[42] Through his criticism of indulgences and papal power, he gained support across the Holy Roman Empire and its surrounding regions. Lutherans believe scripture alone should determine religious doctrines, without any need for an individual human being influencing the principles of Christian faith—a direct opposition to the papal hierarchy and authority, eliminating the need for the clergy.[43] For various rulers, Lutheranism brought spiritual renewal together with political opportunities, which allowed them to acquire church lands while gaining independence from Rome and strengthening their authority. One prominent example was when Henry VIII declared independence from Rome during the 1530s to establish the Anglican Church which developed its Protestant character under royal governance.[44] Though he was not an avid supporter of the Lutheran doctrine, he weaponized its beliefs in response to the papacy's challenge on his royal authority as the sole superior being. Ultimately, the Church of England consolidated its power through the state.

The Catholic Church responded with its Counter-Reformation through the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the Jesuit order, among other new dynamic religious orders.[45] The Church implemented reforms to stop abusive practices while establishing doctrinal standards alongside extensive missionary and educational work. The Empire restored Catholicism and suppressed Protestantism in much of Poland, Bohemia, Spain, and the southern Netherlands.[46] Ultimately, Catholic monarchs viewed themselves as protectors of Christianity, but Protestant leaders mobilized their populations through promises of religious freedom.

Religious Divide

The Holy Roman Empire demonstrated the deepest religious divide through Europe because it contained hundreds of separate states with limited autonomy. The Peace of Augsburg (1555), signed to prevent religious conflicts like the previous Schmalkaldic War (1546–47) and the Princes' War (1552), introduced the religious principle "*cuius regio, eius relgio*" which allowed Lutheran and Catholic rulers to enforce their own faith beliefs on their subjects.[47] The agreement failed to address Calvinism, a growing religious movement that only spurred the fragmentation, rights of religious minorities, and choice of personal belief from its provisions, creating a fragile balance between Catholicism and Lutheranism; this was especially the case in the central region of the Holy Roman Empire, where the balance was created not from mutual respect but necessity.

The divisions also extended beyond religious differences. Habsburg Spain worked to maintain Catholic dominance throughout Europe.[48] France experienced decades of religious combat between Catholics and Huguenots until the Edict of Nantes granted Protestant faith groups restricted religious tolerance in 1598.[49] The

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[42] Britannica, "Ninety-Five Theses."

[43] Theodore E.W. Engelder, *Popular Symbolics: The Doctrines of the Churches of Christendom and of Other Religious Bodies Examined in the Light of Scripture* (Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 28.

[44] Geoffrey Elton, "Henry VIII - the Breach with Rome," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VIII-king-of-England/The-breach-with-Rome.

[45] The "Counter-Reformation | Definition, Summary, Outcomes, Jesuits, Facts, & Significance," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, https://www.britannica.com/event/Counter-Reformation.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "GHDI - Document," germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org, n.d., https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4386.

[48] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Spain - Spain under the Habsburgs | Britannica," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Spain-under-the-Habsburgs.

[49] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Wars of Religion | French History," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 25, 2016, https://www.britannica.com/event/Wars-of-Religion.

Dutch Republic witnessed Calvinist provinces engage in a prolonged fight for independence from Catholic Spain which evolved into both religious and national warfare.

The situation in Bohemia reached its most critical point at that time. Protestant ideas gained popularity among Bohemian nobles and townspeople who now faced rising tensions with their Catholic Habsburg royal family.[50] The memory of Jan Hus and the Hussite fight for independence sustained their status as defining features of Bohemian national identity. The representative assembly of Bohemia known as the Estates, insisted on religious freedoms that would protect Protestant worship practices. Habsburg Emperors Rudolf II and Matthias made their decision to restore Catholic domination in the early 17th century to consolidate political power by punishing dissenters and establishing unity throughout the empire via religion.[51]

Protestant estates started to form secret organizations because they feared the emperor would suppress them. A group of Protestant princes throughout the Empire created the Protestant Union in 1608 to defend their privileges through military power. The tensions between Catholics and Protestants, fueled by the growing oppression against Protestants, became so intense during 1609 that Emperor Rudolf II issued the Letter of Majesty, which granted Bohemian Protestants specific religious freedoms.[52] The agreement represented a compromise with both sides treated with suspicion. This fragile peace would eventually collapse. The power struggle between political and religious factions in Bohemia and other regions began to increase, and, as the continent stood on the brink of one of the most catastrophic conflicts in its history, open rebellion had become all but inevitable.

Current Situation

Overview

The situation in Bohemia reached its most critical point in 1609. Protestant ideas spread rapidly throughout Bohemian nobles and townspeople which created escalating tensions with the Catholic Habsburg royal family. The memory of Jan Hus and the Hussite wars lingered as defining features of Bohemian identity, and the Estates, the kingdom's representative assembly, demanded religious freedoms to protect Protestant worship. Habsburg emperors Rudolf II and Matthias attempted to eliminate Protestant gains while working to bring back Catholic control in the early 17th century.

Out of fear of imperial suppression, Protestant estates and princes of the Holy Roman Empire started a secret organization known as the Protestant Union in 1608 as a military alliance which would protect their privileges through force if required. The tensions between Rudolf II and his Protestant subjects reached a peak in 1609 when he signed the Letter of Majesty to provide Bohemian Protestants with rights, albeit restricted. Unfortunately, the agreement remained unstable as both Catholics and Protestants doubted its enduring nature. Both sides maintained their military readiness while the fragile peace between them remained unstable.

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[50] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Czechoslovak History - the Counter-Reformation and Protestant Rebellion," Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/topic/Czechoslovak-history/The-Counter-Reformation-and-Protestant-rebellion.
[51] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Rudolf II | Bohemia, Prague, Art Patronage," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rudolf-II-Holy-Roman-emperor.
[52] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Letter of Majesty | Europe [1609] | Britannica," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Letter-of-Majesty.

The Habsburg dynasty took decisive action by 1617. Ferdinand of Styria, a Catholic, received the crown of Bohemia.[53] He immediately started to eliminate Protestant freedoms, such as the religious expression or churches, while undoing all the concessions from the Letter of Majesty. The Bohemian Protestant community formed a Provisional Government to find foreign support while considering Frederick V of the Palatinate for the kingship. A religious struggle rapidly evolved into a political uprising.

The Bohemian revolt, spurred by the people's distrust in a Catholic monarch to uphold Protestant rights, exposed weaknesses in the Holy Roman Empire's framework which attracted outside nations to intervene.[54] The Habsburg family controlled European politics from its central position while their two branches ruled extensive territories. The Spanish Habsburgs controlled Iberia, Naples, Milan, and the Spanish Netherlands, while the Austrian Habsburgs maintained control of the imperial throne and extensive territories in central Europe.[55] The extensive Habsburg territorial control across Europe created fear among competing nations.

When Bohemia caught fire, the European continent split into two opposing alliances. Calvinist and Lutheran states were united by the Protestant Union formed against the Catholic League, which Catholic princes established in 1609.[56] The alliances developed their own distinct characteristics shortly after their creations. Most members placed political and territorial goals above their religious dedication. The complex network of conflicting loyalties thus transformed the Bohemian crisis into a conflict that spread across all of Europe.

Bohemia

Bohemia is currently the epicenter of the conflict. Due to its history as extremely religiously tolerant, it has long rejected imperialism. A protestant majority population, Bohemia had maintained relative religious freedom, and the Bohemian Estates held significant political power despite being ruled by the Habsburgs.[57] After the signing of the Letter of Majesty in 1609, the issue of religious freedom in Bohemia became a legal concern under Rudolph II. However, Ferdinand II has recently begun revoking these freedoms. From shutting down Protestant churches to appointing devout Catholics to centralize authority, these acts have been seen by the Estates as direct violations of their freedom of religion.[58] Tensions began to arise as decades of religious freedom had been undone by the acts of the newly crowned Emperor. In 1618, the situation escalated when Bohemian nobles stormed the Prague Castle and threw imperial servants out of a window.[59] This act, signaling open rebellion against the rule of Ferdinand II, pushed Bohemia into an active battleground for protestant subjects and imperialist rulers. Now, its leaders seek not only to defend Protestant freedoms but to dismantle the Habsburg's centralized Catholic monarchy altogether.

[53] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Ferdinand II."
[54] Britannica, "Bohemian Revolt."
[55] "Map," Die Welt der Habsburger, 2025, https://www.habsburger.net/en/map.
[56] Britannica, "Protestant Union."
[57] "The Bohemian Religious Peace" n.d. https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4501.
[58] Britannica, "Bohemia."
[59] Britannica, "Bohemian Revolt."

The Palatinate

The Electoral Palatinate, under Frederick V, stands at the center of the Calvinist movement. Having long taken on a leading role in the fight for religious freedom, during this time, the Palatinate became the ideological center of the Calvinist resistance movement and was a critical state in the formation of the Protestant Union.[60] However, because Calvinism went unrecognized under the Peace of Augsburg, its position in the law remained unclear. Its leaders, nevertheless, are committed to rejecting imperialism and expanding legal and political space for churches. The Palatinate believes the Bohemian crisis to be an imperial assault upon the freedom of religion.[61] Allied with many other anti-imperialist states, the Palatinate now finds itself in a direct confrontation with the Emperor.

Brandenburg

The Electorate of Brandenburg, under George William, occupies a critical position in the anti-imperialist bloc. Historically Lutheran and one of the largest territories in the Empire, Brandenburg holds significant political power.[62] Despite this, its court is divided between conservative Lutheran supporters and Calvinist and anti-imperialist sympathizers. While officially Lutheran, William has shown increasing frustration with the Habsburg encroachments on religious freedom and the removal of the rights of princes. Though cautious by nature, William is aware that the Habsburg victory in Bohemia and continued suppression of Protestant estates could set a dangerous precedent for the rest of the Empire.[63] Although reluctant to provoke outright war, George William seeks to assert Brandenburg's independence within the imperial structure and maintain the legal rights of Protestant princes to govern without interference. For now, Brandenburg aligns with the anti-imperialist bloc.

Saxony

The Electorate of Saxony, under John George I, is one of the most powerful Lutheran states in the Empire.[64] For decades, Saxony has committed itself to both advocating Lutheran ideals and maintaining a powerful position within the Empire. John George is a dedicated Lutheran and wary of Calvinist influence, but the recent imperial actions in Bohemia and elsewhere have forced Saxony to reconsider its loyalties. While not a founding member of the Protestant Union, Saxony has increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with the erosion of religious freedom and imperial violations of the rights of princes.[65] In particular, George I is alarmed by Ferdinand's decision to revoke religious guarantees and impose Catholic officials on Protestant lands–moves that suggest the planning of absolutist governance. Though cautious and interested in preserving order, Saxony is edging closer to the anti-imperialist cause, if only to ensure that Lutheran rights are not the next to be erased. With both military power and an electoral vote, Saxony's participation—or defection—will play a decisive role in the direction of the conflict.

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[60] Britannica, "Palatinate."

[61] "The Thirty Years' War - History Guild." September 20, 2022. https://historyguild.org/the-thirty-years-war/.

[62] Britannica, "Brandenburg."

[63] SpottingHistory. n.d. "Thirty Years War & Rise of Prussia - Germany - SpottingHistory." https://www.spottinghistory.com/historicalperiod/thirty-years-war-rise-of-prussia-germany/.

[64] Britannica, "Saxony."

[65] "Thirty Years War." n.d. https://www.heritage-history.com/index.php?c=resources&s=pseudowar&f=thirtyyears.

Transylvania

The Principality of Transylvania, under Gabriel Bethlen, is a Calvinist state with ambitions to support the reforming communities in Central Europe.[66] It is an independent principality and an Ottoman vassal state. Bethlen, a devout Calvinist, believes the Habsburgs to be threats to not just religious freedom, but also the independence of his state. For decades, Transylvania has served as a refuge for Protestants, and Bethlen has created numerous alliances with anti-Habsburg forces across Europe. The Bohemian Crisis now presents an opportunity to weaken imperial authority and fight for greater Protestant freedom across the Empire. Bethlen believes in a decentralized Empire free from Catholic imperialism, where Protestant states can exist without foreign interference.[67]

Initiating Crisis

The situation in Bohemia turned violent on May 23, 1618, as the long-standing pressure reached its breaking point. A delegation of enraged Protestant nobles galloped through Prague streets with their cloaks flowing behind them while people formed a tight semicircle around them. They entered without instruments but brought forth the bitter emotions of men who felt their religious rights were under destruction. They approached Prague Castle, where Habsburg rule dominated Bohemia.

Inside the Castle were two imperial governors, Jaroslav Bořita of Martinice and Vilém Slavata of Chlum, who sat with their secretary, Fabritius, beneath stone walls and heavy tapestries.[68] The atmosphere remained strained until the doors burst open as the nobles entered the room. The flagstones received the impact of boots as voices boomed and accusations filled the hall space like battlefield projectiles.

The Protestants demanded answers. Why had churches been closed? Why had the Letter of Majesty, which guaranteed their right to worship, been so brazenly violated? Ferdinand, through his representatives Martinice and Slavata, rejected the charges presented by the Protestants. According to them, they executed their official duties because the Letter contained no provisions that protected churches located on royal lands. The room vibrated with furious energy as the dispute intensified until participants used their fists to bang tables while chairs slid across the floor.

The nobles created an emergency court immediately because they refused to hear another evasive answer. They declared the governors, along with their secretary, guilty of treason against the kingdom and of violating sacred liberties. Then came the breaking point. Men advanced swiftly to grab both the governors and their secretary. The first man tried to escape while shouting for mercy by grabbing at his sleeves, while the other man sought to reason with the crowd. But reason had left the room. They forced the men to stand at the high council window before pushing them onto the windowsill. The bodies dropped through open space with their cloaks flying through the air before they hit the ground forty feet down. Miraculously, the men survived the fall.

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[66] Britannica, "Gabriel Bethlen."

[67] Fortchoteau. 2025. "Warrior Statesman – the Two Sides of Gabor Bethlen (Lost Lands #283c)." Europe Between East and West. April 12, 2025. https://europebetweeneastandwest.wordpress.com/2025/04/11/warrior-statesman-the-two-sides-of-gabor-bethlen-lost-lands-283c/.

[68] Thom Sliwowski, "Windows onto History: The Defenestrations of Prague (1419–1997)," The Public Domain Review, April 3, 2024, https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/windows-onto-history/.

The people began to form different opinions right after the incident occurred. Catholics viewed it as a miracle because God protected His loyal followers. Protestants dismissed the story by saying the men only survived because they landed in the contaminated area. All observers agreed that by throwing the emperor's representatives from the castle window the nobles made their rebellion noticeable to everyone. The crisis in Bohemia entered an irreversible phase after words failed to produce action.

The present crisis requires blocs to evaluate the delicate power equilibrium across Europe since backing Bohemia might trigger universal conflict while inaction would enable an opposing bloc to control Central Europe politically, militarily, and spiritually. A few nations fear religious extremism alongside military overreach, making them reluctant to send troops, while other countries identify opportunities for decisive military action. Delegates face complex challenges from alliances and rivalries on top of domestic needs as they make decisions about financial, military, or diplomatic aid for their selected side. Each choice made across this continent will produce outcomes which extend far past Bohemia on the road to what might well become one of Europe's most disastrous conflicts to date.

Discussion Questions

1. How might the importance of defending religious principles be weighed against the practical need for political compromise with opposing powers? What could the ideal outcome to the situation be?

2. How should blocs address the Bohemian revolt? What actions might spur or prevent a conflict in securing religious and political dominance across Europe?

3. To what extent should foreign powers, such as Spain, France, England, or the Ottoman Empire, be drawn into the crisis? How might their involvement help or hinder goals?

4. What moral justifications, if any, do foreign intervenors have for their involvement in the affairs of Bohemian and central Europe?

5. What should states prioritize when preparing to address the upcoming turbulence? Consider options to strategically push for decisive military victories, strengthen a network of allies for long-term security, or make fiscal reserves ready.

6. How can economic tools be utilized to sustain war efforts and weaken enemy resistance?

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