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A Multi-Causal Approach to the Thirty Years' War

Ethan Haan

Grand Valley State University, haanethan@gmail.com



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The Thirty Years' War is widely considered to be one of the last conflicts during Europe's centuries-long Wars of Religion. The conflict began with the Defenestration of Prague, and ended with the consequential Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Centered on the Holy Roman Empire and the imploding rivalry between Catholics and Protestants, the conflict eventually embraced the whole of Europe as different powers joined forces against each other for various reasons.¹

The Thirty Years' War represented the final breach in the long simmering conflict between people of very different religious persuasions under the umbrella of Christendom. This conflict also came at the cusp the evolution of European politics from the medieval to the modern, initiating a political nightmare that destabilized the whole of Europe. Due to this malaise of haggling, confusion, and conflict, the historical field that studies this conflict had earlier embraced a view of the war as being used solely by power politics around Europe at the time. Indeed, part of this may be true, but it does not tell the whole story. The most recent scholars contend that the Thirty Years' War was a war that was multiclausal in nature, exhibiting several factors such as religious beliefs, political change, and socio-economic transformation.

¹ Diarmaid MacColluch, *The Reformation*, (New York, Viking Press, 2003), 124.

The field studying the causes of the Thirty Years' War has changed itself over the years. At the advent of modern historiography in the late 19th century, the focus was initially made on specific actors in the conflict, like Wallenstein and Gustavus Adolphus, rather than on simple memories of the war.² Initially, Catholic and Protestant authors each made claims about the war that were biased to their particular side. After the advent of modern historiography at the beginning of the 20th century, the focus began to turn to what caused the war. In the 1950s, authors like Carl Friedrich asserted that religion was the main cause of the war, igniting this debate as other scholars evaluated the claim.³ Starting in the 1960s, S.H. Steinberg and others began to dismiss the argument that the war was caused by religion and argued that the war had been the result of power politics among the nations of Europe.⁴ Although this argument dominated the field since the 1960s, the last twenty-five years have seen a shift in ideas. Recent authors such as Peter Wilson as recent at 2009 still agree with Steinberg's camp at some level that power politics played an important role, but Wilson contends that the war was also caused by other factors, such as social policy and economics. Wilson

² E. A. Beller, "Recent Studies on The Thirty Years' War" *Journal of Modern History* 3, no. 1 (March 1931): 72-83.

³ Carl J. Friedrich, *The Age of the Baroque, 1610-1660*, (New York, Harper Brothers, 1962), 162.

⁴ S. H. Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War and the conflict for European hegemony, 1600-1660*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 96.

cautions against “attempts to simplify [the causes of the war] by overemphasizing one facet to the detriment of others.”⁵

However, Wilson’s thesis, while discrediting the theory that power politics drove the entire conflict, does underestimate the role that religion brought into the whole event. Wilson’s middle way fails to perceive the massive underlying drive of religious affiliation that fueled the war, and how every facet of the conflict relates back to the religious question. Wilson is not completely wrong, but a narrow multi-causal view does not answer the religious argument in its entirety. From conflict stemming from basic disagreement on governance to a keen and burning interest on the part of religious extremists to defend and expand their particular sect throughout Europe, the religious aspect of the Thirty Year’s War defines and shapes the entire conflict.

Confessional or religious interpretations of the Thirty Years’ War dominated historical analyses long after the conflict’s end in 1648. Even as late as 2009, historians like Peter Wilson who study the earlier arguments think the Protestant narrative still “viewed events following the Reformation as liberation from the Catholic yoke.”⁶ Recent historians see this approach as outdated because it is too filled with the bias of the past. As outdated as the approach was, this

⁵ Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8.

⁶ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 9.

became the standing theory until others started changing the discussion to political motivations using specific geopolitical movements in individual countries to reframe the discussion. As stated before, part of the argument presented here was that religion is underestimated in some capacity among the key causes of the war, despite misleading theories about the political motivations of specific countries. For proof of this, it is good to analyze the roots of the Reformation to get a closer look at the confessional divide and religious motivations of the war.

The Reformation got its initial start when Martin Luther nailed his 95 statements to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. Luther's argument did not phase the dominant Catholic hierarchy at first, but as his teachings spread throughout Germany, fears began to grow. Pope Leo X condemned Luther for heresy in 1520, but Luther showed his opposition by burning the papal bull in front of a crowd in protest.⁷ Seeing their position as the supreme spiritual authority threatened caused great alarm throughout the Church hierarchy, who wished to keep things within the Holy Roman Empire the way they were.

This sentiment of rebellion is evident in his open letter *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, published in 1520. Clearly writing to

⁷ MacColluch, *The Reformation*,. 124.

those in power, Luther theorizes that since every believer is a priest, rule by a church hierarchy is redundant and dangerous. Luther contends that “Christian temporal power should exercise its power without let or hindrance.”⁸ In arguing this matter, Luther believes that the power previously held by the Catholic Church (spiritual power) should be taken over and protected by the State because rule by the Pope is unwarranted since every person is equal in God’s eyes, and because temporal power is superior. When he initially began his efforts against the Catholic Church, Luther hoped that the Church would reform itself, but seeing that the Catholic hierarchy refused to do this, he turned to those in power to protect the Church and its new-found confession.⁹ This principle guided Lutheran rulers when deciding to go to war with the Catholic Hapsburgs, as the Catholic hierarchy was the direct opposite of what Luther preached. In their eyes, their victory in the war would put temporal power in its rightful place.

Much of the discourse of the Reformation also had to do with the place of secular authority. Martin Luther writes about this most extensively in his book *On Secular Authority*, published in 1523. Luther’s argument here against the Catholic Church hierarchy is that “their government [should not be] one of superiority or power, but one of service and an office.”¹⁰ This is a direct supporting argument to

⁸ Luther, Martin, and Charles M. Jacobs. (1910). *An open letter to the Christian nobility of the German nation, concerning the reform of the Christian estate, 1520*, 70.

⁹ MacColluch, *The Reformation*,. 124.

¹⁰ Luther, Martin. "On Secular Authority," In *On Secular Authority*, edited by Harro Hopfl, 3-46. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1991, 33.

Luther's linchpin doctrinal phrase of a "priesthood of all believers."¹¹ His idea of the Church being a service rather than a ruler contrasts sharply with a Catholic hierarchy that for centuries had assumed rule in all matters. Luther regards secular political power as being different from spiritual power, and while he views faith as governing all, including rulers, he makes sure that secular and religious power are two separate matters.

As the fault lines between Luther and the Catholic Church grew, divisions within the Protestant rebellion appeared as well. The same issues that dogged Luther became targets of another reformer, John Calvin. Originally French, Calvin settled in Geneva, Switzerland in 1541 after publishing his great theological work *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536, and became part of the theological camp which sought to take Luther's reforms even further afoot. Thus, the schism between Lutheran and Calvinist Protestants was born.

Calvin provides a slightly different twist from Luther's theology when it comes to civil authority. Calvin instead implores his readers to "take great care to confine that liberty which is promised and offered to us in Christ within its own limits."¹² He warns that the spiritual and the temporal governments are quite different and even separate, like Luther. The difference that Calvin asserts is that

¹¹ Luther, *An open letter to the Christian nobility of the German nation, concerning the reform of the Christian estate*,. 66.

¹² John Calvin, "On Civil Government", In *On Secular Authority*, edited by Harro Hopfl, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48.

“equally we must recognize that [these two governments] are in no way incompatible with each other.”¹³ In Calvin’s view, the task of the government was to foster the Church, not overtake it. This restrained approach further manifests itself in the role that Calvin foresees the Church taking on political power, that of a restraining “bridle”, and a spur to motivate the secular ruler’s better sensibilities when religion is concerned.¹⁴ However, Calvin still expected the civil government to govern according to the rightful teachings of the Church.

Calvin believed in a church and state that had respective private and public spheres of authority, but worked together for the common, moral good. This theology appealed to various Calvinist rulers in Germany in the early 17th century who viewed their leadership as protecting Calvin’s balance of government as a public and private partnership, while making sure the civil government ruled by the correct Christian teachings. Both Protestant theologians in any case viewed church and religion as things to be totally embedded in one’s culture, whether the role of the Church is of close cooperation with the state or completely bound by the protection of the State. With an institution as powerful as this, to dismiss its massive power and influence in starting the Thirty Years’ War would be most unwise, as the theology of the two men greatly influenced the actors that caused the Thirty Years’ War. This analysis of Protestant theology is critical because it

¹³ Calvin, “On Civil Government”. In *On Secular Authority*,. 49.

¹⁴ Calvin, “On Civil Government”. In *On Secular Authority*,. 49.

shows the wide schism between Protestant views on the power of the individual and the Catholic dependence on a large bureaucracy for its governance. Within this key contrast is the view on secular rule, with Protestants disagreeing on this in a minute way but in any case, standing in opposition to the uniform Catholic papal governance.

Catholic doctrine by 1618 was already well-versed on the defense of its version of civil government. Since the Crusades, Catholics had been active in the quest to convert as many heathen people as possible to their version of the right and true faith. This being said, its doctrine on just wars was much more specific than its Protestant counterpart. As a result of the bloody Spanish conquests of the Americas in the early 1500s, Spain's clergy felt they needed to compensate for this moral inconvenience by advocating that these wars be focused on the conversion of the heathen to the Catholic faith, justifying these conquests in the process as furthering and defending the Catholic faith.¹⁵

Examples of a widespread effort by the Catholic faithful to defend and expand the one and only faith abound throughout this time. In the mid-1540s, at the height of the Reformation, Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire made war on a contingent of Lutheran princes known as the Schmalkaldic

¹⁵ Reichburg, Gregory M. "Catholic Christianity Part I: Historical Development." In *Religion, War, and Ethics*, edited by Gregory M. Reichburg, Henrik Syse, and Nicole M. Hartwell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 77-103.

League. While the initial Lutheran resistance was crushed for the moment, the Reformation and its ideals spread to other countries in Europe. In France, it resulted in a bloody, decades-long repression of the French Protestants known as the Huguenots. In 1588, the zealous Catholic Philip II of Spain sent an armada of hundreds of ships against the defiant Protestant monarch Elizabeth I of England in an attempt to recatholicize her country.¹⁶ As can be seen from these examples, the specter of religiously motivated conflicts had been a problem in Europe for eight decades before the advent of the Thirty Years' War.

This past discourse does much to prove that religion formed the foundation of where Europe was at in 1618, and that these underlying confessional tensions fueled much of the spark to start the Thirty Years' War. This argument does have support in the scholastic community, such as Carl Friedrich. In his work on the period, titled *The Age of the Baroque 1610-1660*, published in 1952, he argues that “dynastic and national sentiments played their part, but they reinforced the basic religious urge”.¹⁷ From Ferdinand to Gustavus Adolphus, “the somber and passionate driving force behind [the conflict] was religious pathos in all its depth”.¹⁸ As seen earlier, both confessions saw the other as unjustly forcing their immoral doctrine on the other in their unrighteous pursuit

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 121-122.

¹⁷ Carl J. Friedrich, *The Age of the Baroque, 1610-1660*, (New York, Harper Brothers, 1952), 162.

¹⁸ Friedrich, *The Age of the Baroque, 1610-1660*, 163.

of God, and this pertained to individual actions as well as the collective actions of nation-states.

After the 1950s, however, the field began to change as more recent historians began to scrutinize the prevailing view. The argument that power politics primarily motivated the war comes out of historians claiming that individual state actors used the religious pretext to further their secular aims. The historian who first introduced this argument in 1966 that started this school of thought is S.H. Steinberg. Steinberg in his book on the war, *The Thirty Years War, and the conflict for European hegemony*, asserts that the religious reason for the war was a moot point, an outdated argument from the past three centuries, and instead a springboard for what “at the time became known as *raison de etat*.”¹⁹ Steinberg also asserts that constitutional issues within the Holy Roman Empire itself caused the German upheaval rather than confessional divisions.

According to Steinberg, examples of power politics as the primary cause of the war abound. For starters, Steinberg uses the differences between Catholic Spain, the Empire, and France as evidence of this argument. All three were devoutly Catholic countries, but all three had different aims in 1618. Spain at this time was preoccupied with its budding American empire and its Catholicization of it, and its policies towards the rest of Europe tended to reflect its concern for

¹⁹ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War*, 2.,. 66.

this. Vienna thought the Catholic faith as simply cementing the absolute authority of the Hapsburg Emperor.²⁰ Therefore, all policies coming out of the court at this time were aimed at doing this.²¹ Thus, French statesmen as well as others on the continent “deliberately severed the traditional bond of religion and politics and made the novel concept of *raison de etat*.”²² In the end, Steinberg argues that European states and actors in the Thirty Years' War, led by France, chose to increasingly push religious beliefs to the realm of “personal conviction,” leaving politics to be conducted by public reason “that no longer allowed for supernatural arguments in its worldly aims”.²³ The belligerents in the war may have cited religious aims in the rhetoric to pursue certain policies, but the bottom line was that once the conflict started, “the question was the same with all..[what would aid the] increase of territory and people.”²⁴ Steinberg, with his work effectively and boldly contesting all earlier scholarship on the war, definitively launched the prevailing opinion on the motivations of the Thirty Years' War being power politics instead of the outdated purely religious causation theory of Carl Friedrich and earlier scholars.

²⁰ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*,. 64.

²¹ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War*,. 97.

²² Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War*,. 98.

²³ Steinberg, *The Thirty Years War*,. 98.

²⁴ Anton Gindely, "History of the Thirty Years War." In *The Thirty Years War: Problems of Motive, Extent, and Effect*, edited by Ralph W. Greenlaw and Dwight E. Lee, 4-5. Vol. 1. (Boston: DC Heath and Company, 1964), 5.

The historian Ronald Asch agrees with at least the partial disassociation of religion from discussion of the Thirty Years' War but concentrates on different points. His major work on the causes of the war was published in 1997, more than a decade before Wilson's argument came to pass, but the trend in the field towards a consensus on a multi-causal Thirty Years' War can be seen here. A critical assertion of Asch's is that a primary cause of the friction between Europeans was that the primary political framework of Europe was changing from the fragmented medieval continent to one with states with fully sovereign territory. This transition was already underway in 1618 but far from complete, hence the massive problems facing the Holy Roman Empire in Germany with state sovereignty.²⁵ This confusion is also meshed in with confusion about property as well as other rights, especially along confessional lines. This tension between the medieval and modern systems of government is glaring, an example being in regards to how well financing the war went for the combatants. After the end of the conflict in 1648, however, lessons learned in wartime made the transition to modern government and finance smoother. Especially in the epicenter of the conflict, the Holy Roman Empire, "the German states of the late seventeenth century were more intensely governed and their rulers had more

²⁵ Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe, 1618-48*. (New York: Palgrave, 1997), 4-5.

money [for their purposes.]”²⁶ Asch in the end concludes that even as religion is not irrelevant in this conflict, the tensions regarding systems of government and sovereignty deserve far more attention, though not as completely as the Steinberg tradition would prefer.

This argument is echoed in more abstract terms by the historian Harro Hopfl. Hopfl published his account of the war's causes in 2002, five years after Asch. The subject of his work on the “reason of state” deals with specific cases of how the clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, came to grasp the increasingly sharper focus on politics and statecraft rather than religious orthodoxy. Per some Jesuits, “the term ‘reason of state’ could therefore refer to the morally unexceptionable activity of deliberating about political ways and means.”²⁷ However, as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wore on, Jesuits and other religious societies found that they needed to contend with the presence of the immoral and certainly dangerous political discourse. In the case talked about here, Jesuit theologians changed the hence previous definition of “immoral” political acts to reflect the changing of the times. No longer was discourse unlawful, but it would depend on the motive and the outcome of this discussion before the judgement of morals could be invoked.²⁸ Furthermore, Jesuit thinkers also bended

²⁶ Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe, 1618-48*,. 191.

²⁷ H. Hopfl, "Orthodoxy and Reason of State," *History of Political Thoughts* 23, no. 2 (June 2002), 225.

²⁸ H. Hopfl, "Orthodoxy *History of Political Thoughts*",. 229.

the rules on truth in regards to their earthly power positions. The birth of the concept “reason of state” came on the heels of Asch’s argument that the political world was changing with great speed at this point, forcing people to adapt quickly in their stances, like the Jesuits, and this to widespread unrest that sparked much conflict, not just the Thirty Years’ War.

The last decade of the twentieth century also featured a pivot to another cause in the multi-causal argument. Historian Sheilagh Ogilvie published in 1992 an account on the economic fallout from the war. Ogilvie asserts that one of the often-neglected causes of the war in Germany and the decades-long “general crisis” that supersedes it was the economic inequality and confusion that plagued all of Europe but the German territories in particular. The central point of her argument is that “the century prior to the crisis saw a confluence between the growth of the economy and that of the state. Economic growth increased the value of extra-economic control of economic resources,” a confluence of factors that altered the balance of power.²⁹ This confluence that the author is talking about has much to do with the transition between the medieval and the modern world. The growth of the state amid the confusion that racked the Holy Roman Empire, combined with the friction stated above meant that there were many power interests competing for the same economic resources. In the scheme of things, the

²⁹ Sheilagh C. Ogilvie, "Germany and the seventeenth-century crisis," *Historical Journal* 35, 2. 1992.

economic and administrative side of the argument has been presented as a long-burning fuse that blew apart when the conflict began and warfare unraveled the prevailing socio-economic norms of the day.

While the multi-causal theory was being played out, the religious argument continued to force itself in to the mix of causes as an important one. The field of study regarding the causes of the Thirty Years' War as late as 2002 was still finding underlying religious motivations in its analysis of primary sources. In his analysis of French diplomatic correspondence during the negotiations that ended the war with the Peace of Westphalia, published in 2002, Paul Sonnino finds that under all the political maneuvering on the part of the French against their Catholic opponents, religious tension along confessional lines still features prominently in French diplomatic discourse.

Leading from the big-picture arguments, Paul Sonnino looks at developments at the individual level. The causes of the war must be analyzed from this viewpoint. The evolving argument for there being multiple causes of the war lies in the analysis of the actions of Cardinal Richelieu of France, the key advisor to the monarch Louis XIII. The Cardinal has been credited as one of the

first to argue that the interests of the state and of religion are completely separate.³⁰

Individuals like Cardinal Richelieu, and the various entities, groups, and sects involved in the conflict make it seem like the war was not fought on just religious grounds, but also in the interest of state security and prosperity, multiple causes. The central pillar of this argument is reflected in Wilson's text as well, that religion "had to compete with political, social, linguistic, gender, and other distinctions."³¹ According to this school of thought, first founded by Steinberg and refined by later historians, certain state actors such as France but also others, discarded a singular motive in favor of multiple reasons such as power politics, economic goals, domestic prosperity, and a change in the role of governments.

Sonnino also analyzes the discourse between Richelieu's successor Cardinal Mazarin, and the main French negotiator for the Peace of Westphalia, De'Avaux, both displayed worry about maintaining Catholic influence in Germany, adding a religious undertone to the statecraft argument. While the French were fighting the Hapsburgs, they did not wish to see an Austria too weak to buttress Protestant power,³² but just wanted the Hapsburgs to be humbled in their foreign policy aspirations. French negotiators in fact, made great pains to

³⁰ Paul Sonnino, "From D'Avaux to Dévot: Politics and Religion in the Thirty Years War," *The Historical Association* (2002), 192.

³¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 9.

³² Paul Sonnino, "From D'Avaux to Dévot," 199.

contend that the French policy at this time was not to go invade Germany to destroy the Catholic religion,³³ their spiritual brothers. The French felt that abandoning Catholicism abroad would be disastrous for their religious peace at home as well, potentially reigniting Protestant uprising that tore France apart a few decades before (the Huguenot problem, as mentioned before). The evidence presented that is so recent reinforces the argument that the “political reasons were [not] predominate, independent from religious motives...”³⁴ The scholarship presented that falls in a later time period also indicates that the field has not been completely sold on embracing one, superior, cause of the Thirty Years' War.

Wilson also channels the religious argument as presented by Carl Friedrich in the most recent analysis of the war: Wilson's book *The Thirty Years' War: Europe's Tragedy*, where he analyzes the religious tendencies of individual actions. One of the individuals who shaped the conflict the most is Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus. His massive invasion of Germany to drive out the Hapsburgs in the early stages of the war, ushering Sweden's long-term involvement in the war and his position as a Protestant martyr give much evidence to his aims being religious in nature. The Swedish Nils Ahnlund published a biography on the monarch in 1940, twelve years before Friedrich and at the end of the period where

³³ Paul Sonnino, "From D'Avaux to Dévot: Politics and Religion in the Thirty Years War,." 201.

³⁴ Nils Ahnlund, "Gustav Adolph the Great", tr. M. Roberts. (Princeton, 1940). In *The Thirty Years' War: Problems of Motive, Extent, and Effect*, 57-58.

scholars were still using religious motivations as causations of the war. According to the author, “Gustav Adolph strove to bring the interests of Sweden into harmony with the general interests of Protestantism.”³⁵

Gustavus Adolphus was very much a believer in the “evangelical cause” and proved to be a powerful tool and constant influence on diplomatic exchanges. Sweden’s heavily Lutheran leanings tended to influence their foreign policy, as the king and his advisors were motivated by the Lutheran teaching that the State needed to assume its temporal authority over the Church because the Catholic hierarchy was abusing its spiritual power.

This fear was echoed, but in a different way, by Calvinist Frederick V, Elector Palatine and later King of Bohemia. A staunch Calvinist, Frederick believed wholeheartedly in a Catholic plot to unite the whole of Germany under strict Catholic rule. He believed in German freedom and Protestant freedom³⁶, and this arose out of the Calvinist theory of close cooperation of the Church and State. As head of the Protestant Union, he viewed his actions, such as accepting the crown of Bavaria, as protecting the generally Calvinist desires of the Bohemian people and protecting them from the Catholic menace, as being God’s divine will for him.³⁷

³⁵ Ahnlund, “*Gustav Adolph the Great*”,. 56.

³⁶ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*,. 247.

³⁷ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*,. 247.

As much religious fervor as Gustavus Adolphus and Frederick V had for the Protestant cause, Catholicism in Europe was not lacking in its influence among European rulers. At the center of the conflict and arguably Gustavus Adolphus' equal on the Catholic side was Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II. Ruling from 1619 to 1637, he ascended the Hapsburg throne as the Bohemian revolt was spreading. As crown prince in charge of some Hapsburg territory, he was known for ruthless recatholicizing his territory from Protestant encroachment, expelling Protestant teachers and closing schools and churches.³⁸ As Protestants rapidly were driven into exile, the Hapsburgs tried to form the remaining upper classes into "a solidly Catholic political and social elite."³⁹

On a smaller scale, Maximilian I of Bavaria also sought to return Catholicism to the dominant confession within Europe. Like his brother-in-law, Emperor Ferdinand, Maximilian was a devout Catholic as well and "felt that the Catholics had given too much ground already since [The Peace of Augsburg] and that it was...time to take a firm stand to prevent the Empire from sliding into chaos."⁴⁰ Maximilian lived throughout the entire conflict and was the Emperor's most effective subordinate, making sure that his desires were carried out across

³⁸ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 72.

³⁹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 357.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 220.

the Empire. His actions came from his strong belief that Catholicism needed to be defended as the right and only Christian faith.

Reflecting this, Ferdinand, and Maximilian's deliberate and far-reaching program of religious persecution for the defense of Catholicism enflamed tensions throughout Europe and stiffened the resolve of Protestant exiles in the Netherlands and other areas in northern Germany to continue their struggle.⁴¹ Other areas of the Empire soon became subject to these terms as well, and this caused the plight of German Protestants to force foreign intervention when there would not be any normally. Thus, the very root of the Hapsburg cause, with which many Protestants regarded with fear and anger, betrayed a serious and all-consuming religious undertone and motivation in the conflict. This is reflected in the earlier writings of Carl Freidrich, showing Wilson pulls from many different contributors to construct his argument.

Despite the transformative power of Peter's Wilson's thesis, his quest for the synthesis of the entire scholarly field regarding the conflict fails to appeal to that "basic religious urge" that propelled the war. The older historical works are much closer to the truth than the Steinberg political theory.

Wilson's 2009 book has been to date the most recent definitive study on the causes of the Thirty Years' War and caps off more than a half century of

⁴¹ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*,. 357.

deliberations to come to the conclusion that the conflict was inherently complicated and multi-causal in its roots. Indeed, Wilson uses the vast majority of the authors cited in this study as evidence in his notes.⁴² The field of study studying the causes of the war has gradually come to this conclusion, Wilson was simply the one who fit all the pieces together. Confessional interpretations of the war reigned while the religious tension was still relevant in the several centuries after the war. Even through the 1950s, this argument still held true as historians looked to the confession of the individual to analyze their policies. In 1966, the pendulum swung to the other side, with S.H. Steinberg strongly arguing that the religious motive was just a big distraction and that power politics and constitutional issues in the Holy Roman Empire was the true primary cause. Since the 1990s, improved research on the socio-economic picture and further analysis caused the pendulum to right itself in a more inclusive position, contending that the war was caused by multiple factors.

Wilson's path of analysis reflects this pendulum swing towards middle ground on the causes of the war, however, the fatal flaw of this analysis is that Wilson in his 2009 book as well as in other publications such as his 2008 *International History Review* article, ignores the basic religious urge that almost everyone acknowledges is there, if not the supreme reason. In this post-religious

⁴² Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 855-925.

world, historic scholarship should take care to never underestimate the religious urges that propel events throughout history.

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