

The rise of the peasant rebellion in 1524's Germany can be linked to several things, prominent among which were the little rights the rural folk possessed and the reformation inspiring them to demand and fight for those rights. There was dissatisfaction resulting from the differences in beliefs of the lower and upper classes. Upper class Germans, seeking to maintain power, largely opposed these peasant protests with military action; there was no reason for concessions, and the status quo was ideal. Those who believed that all was lost joined up with the rebels, though some were forced on threat of death. One nobleman, Christoffel von Lichtenstein, spoke of how he was forced to swear an oath of allegiance to the peasants even as he begged and pleaded to be given some degree of leniency. **(Document 2)** Lichtenstein's fate was a fate experienced by many other noblemen in the Holy Roman Empire as the rebellion progressed, as by threat of death they were forced to join up with rebels, those they saw as brigands, and offer support to them. Nobles who escaped execution or forced conversion were able to continue to criticize the Lutheran movement and the Lutheran teachings, and how they led to the culmination of an armed peasant rebellion. One such figure was Leonhard von Eck, Chancellor of Bavaria, who argued that it was the peasant's unfounded dissatisfaction with the status quo that had led to the unnecessary rebellion. **(Document 3)** As indicated by Count Wilhelm von Henneberg, however, the rebellion was at first welcomed by the nobility, as the peasants attacked the Catholic priests and monasteries first; this was welcomed by the nobility, who saw it as a weakening of Church power over their handlings of the country. **(Document 4)** Of course, the revolt eventually turned on the nobility. The peasants were not content to attack the Church; they decided also to attack the government to gain the rights they believed they deserved. The ideas of the reformation inspired the peasants to believe that the only true authority was that which rested in God, as is evidenced by dialogue during the Peasant's Parliament in Swabia and the words of Thomas Muntzer, a preacher. **(Document 7)** At the Peasant's Parliament, the declaration of recognition of only God's authority undermined any other worldly institutions and likely inspired the peasants that they had religious sanctity in their actions. Thomas Muntzer argued in his letter, similarly, that those who were not with the peasant rebels resisted God's will, also striving to convince those who had not taken up arms to rebel as well. Peasants such as these argued that God was with them, and that they were directed under the ideas of the reformation to be made more equal with the nobility in the eyes of God. **(Document 5)** They were serfs, they worked the land and received little compensation, and now they were being told that God, the highest power in the world, was with them in their quest to be free and rich. Such was not to be the case, and the rebellion's failure in the face of overwhelming military force employed by the Holy Roman Empire, which killed thousands of peasants, dashed all hopes of being granted power by God. The Holy Roman Empire's Diet decreed that peasants could return to their former lives if they surrendered, and the maintained the status quo. **(Document 1)** This was favorable to the Empire, as any retribution against the peasants, or any concessions to the peasants would have challenged the fragile order that existed. Indeed, with the deaths of so many, it was necessary for economic reasons that the peasants be allowed to return peacefully. The rebellion's outcome inhibited continued growth of certain religious movements in the Holy Roman Empire, and many Protestants, including Luther himself, dissociated themselves from the rebels. The peasant goals of greater rights and destruction of the institutions of the Catholic church and German government were not achieved, despite the cause of the rebellion having been inspiration by reformation ideals. The rebellion was a failure.