

## **Time to Restore An Orderly and Peaceful Society**

We live in turbulent times. Since Martin Luther published his 95 Theses and challenged the authority of both the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor, Germany and Europe have been swept up in an escalating cycle of violence and disorder. Has such upheaval been justified? Has Luther's Reformation lead to a better society for 16<sup>th</sup> century Europeans? We believe the answer is no. We do not doubt the sincerity of Luther and his followers, but we argue that the needs of society for peace and order take precedence over the rights of individuals to act according to their consciences.

Europe is currently immersed in religious wars that Luther's actions set loose. Catholics and Protestants battle to establish the dominance of their faiths. Protestant sects even fight other Protestant groups because each believes they have the only true interpretation of God's will. The result is massive destruction of property, untold deaths, and the general disruption of civilized society. This avalanche of violence began immediately after Luther's trial in 1521 when German mobs began demolishing Church property and killing Catholic laymen and priest. Once the respect for authority was challenged, it encouraged general disorder. The lawlessness example of Luther's followers incited the great Peasant Revolt of 1524 that caused the deaths of over 100,000 peasants.

Luther would argue that the Catholic Church was so corrupt that religious men could not remain silent. We acknowledge that the Church needed to be reformed; however, that does not justify the wholesale destruction of the institution of the Church itself. The Catholic Church has for centuries and through many troubled times provided strength, virtue, and stability to Europe.

Luther would argue that he has not, and will not, advocate political rebellion, and that he seeks only the establishment of a new German church. He has spoken publicly against peasants who revolted against the political leaders of Germany. However, when Luther urged his followers to "wash their hands in the blood of the clergy" he made violence attacks against authority acceptable. Once the masses begin to strike out against those who have made the rules, it is very difficult to restrain their actions. General lawlessness and chaos have resulted that threatens to plunge Europe into a new dark age.

Luther bears much of the blame for the general disruption of life and society in which we currently find ourselves. People should seek change respectfully without rejecting valuable societal institutions or encouraging the masses to violence. We call on religious people everywhere to recognize that the radical actions taken in the name of religion have created a society that daily violates the teachings of Jesus in unspeakable ways. Its abuses of humanity are many times worse than those that Protestant leaders have criticized. We must return to a respect for established authority so that we can work together peacefully to create a better world.