

# The reign of charles v

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Charles V reigned over a vast empire in a tumultuous age. The New World was a relatively recent discovery, and several other factors point to the idea that Charles V's reign coincided with a global transition into the modern age. Although Charles V's focus was primarily domestic (in the sense of Europe and the surrounding territory), the meeting of traditional values and modern ideology was one of many issues Charles faced, independence was another. Consolidating and re-consolidating his power was a problem that sapped much of Charles V's, and by extension his empire's, time and resources.

From the papacy to the fiercely independent German coalition of prince-states, Charles often had to take extra measures to enforce his policy in an empire that varied greatly from one polity to the next. Religion was another obstacle faced by Charles. The Protestant Reformation (steeped in the last vestiges of a somewhat anti-clerical Renaissance movement) appealed to many not only as more pious faith, but as a tool to be used for political maneuvering and opposition against an emperor whose motto was "Further beyond" (in regards to spreading the Christian faith).

These concerns coupled with the always-present threat of foreign invasion made ruling over his empire an incredibly demanding and difficult task. Add to that the largely impractical and complex political process of the time, the question of finance, and a peasantry discontent synonymous with the values of the modern age, and you have a long and arduous list of problems faced by Charles. Although Charles the V was focused primarily on reform and maintenance rather than expansion, his conquering of the Aztecs and Incas can be considered brutal success and added greatly to the territory of New Spain.

Cultural, economic, and political disparity throughout the empire, the search for financial backing (as well as questionable fiscal habits), foreign threat, and the problem of enforcing his often conventional policy in an era of change make the reign of Charles the V one worth studying. The empire preceded over by Charles encompassed many different cultures and made the vision of one wholly unified political entity hugely unfeasible, " By tradition he ruled only with the consent of the Imperial Diet, whose sheer size and diversity of interests made agreement almost impossible" (Maltby 22).

As heir to not only the Habsburg dynasty, but a host of other territories (some of which his authority was unrecognized), Charles had to undertake the task of administrating over unique polities that themselves had issues administrating. Peasant unhappiness had long been an issue in medieval Europe, and combined with the scarcity of labor (due to the Black Death) peasants took on a new feeling of self-worth and importance. This often culminated in open revolt and passive resistance when the peasant class's demands were discarded as usual.

This caused issues in management for the individual polities and on a larger scale for Charles. Charles had to deal with a huge difference in political process between any given polity, from the loose organization of the German States to the Cortes. Charles dealt with this largely on a by-issue basis, choosing to solve one problem at a time. This was in line with Charles's cautious nature, for a decision made to solve one problem could not be

considered without regard to how it would affect the others, such is the nature of the interconnected problems facing him.

Even unifying factors such as the church had trouble bringing together polities that were more often concerned with individual well being and privilege than with the welfare of the empire. Charles had too many issues to deal with at once, so he employed viceroys (regional governors) as extensions of imperial will. Many of Charles' problems stem from the lack of a unifying force in the empire, as unrealistic as it would be to imagine one at that time. A constant and expensive threat faced by Charles was that of foreign invasion.

Charles was faced with defense of a "Vast patchwork of principalities that were neither geographically contiguous nor similar... in culture or tradition" (Maltby 8). The frequent clashes with France and its monarch Francis the I mark the most prominent campaign in "terms of blood and money" (Maltby 32). Charles developed a personal rivalry with Francis as evidenced by his repeated offers to settle huge disputes with a duel. Sometimes called the Habsburg-Valois rivalry, France was located dead in the center of Charles's empire.

And with France's resources and military ambition rivaling that of Charles, conflicts between the two were frequent and costly. France's interest in the Italian peninsula fueled its military conquests and was a continuation of French interest in the area dating back to Charles VIII's invasion in 1494. The French were defeated in 1525 (culminating in Francis's capture and the treaty of Madrid), inconclusively in 1529 (leading to the Treaty of Cambrai),

and again inconclusively in 1538 with a truce (although the conflict would later start up with a renewed Frankish-Ottoman alliance).

Charles owed much of his military success to his elite corps the tercios, a cohesive combination of " pikes with shot.. that would dominate European battlefields until the Thirty Years War" (Maltby 40). Some of the war successes and failures during conflict were directly related to advance intechnologysuch as the bastion. Another threat, and one that endangered his very values, was that of the Islamic Ottoman empire. Starting out as one of many Christian raiding advocates of Islam, the Ottoman empire made territorial acquisitions at an alarming rate, especially alarming to the heavily Christian population at the time.

The Ottoman empire found an able leader in Suleyman " The Magnificent" whose campaigns ended twice at Vienna due to logistical reasons. Failure to conquer the entirety of Charles's empire did not stop the sultan from dominating the Mediterranean and also unleashing the pirates upon Charles, some of who caused serious issues for him (Barbarossa) via harassment and guerrilla techniques. Charles's conflict with religion can be seen in his dealings with the Protestant Reformation (and a general anti-clerical position) as well as his subjugation of the papacy.

Holding the title of Holy Roman Emperor had personal meaning to Charles, and his actions were often motivated by his desire to advance and protect the Christian faith. He met with opposition by not only the Protestant Reformation, but by a rebellious papacy concerned first with its own survival and second with the Christian faith. Although the papacy under Clement VII

was largely pacified by instilling the Medici in Florence, the Reformation was not so easily quieted.

The values behind the reformation attracted opportunists, condemners of the church, and peasant revolts alike, but the movement found a special foothold in the Germanic provinces. Besides using the new religion as a means of resisting imperial control, the princes had a more practical motivation, that by breaking with the church they could " Increase their revenues, strengthen their reserves of patronage, and gain control of... institutions.... without alienating their subjects. " (Maltby 49).

Actual proponents of the movement believed that it " offered a truer interpretation of the Gospels than that provided by the traditions of the Old Church" (Maltby 49). Whatever their justification, Charles V adopted a number of different stances concerning the Protestant Reformation.

Domestically, the Inquisition was still active, and destroyed Spanish Protestantism (what little there was), and they also persecuted effectively any other movement that strayed from the accepted doctrine of the time.

Concerning his less secure territorial acquisitions, Charles's stance ranged from tolerance to viewing Luther's doctrine as " False" and " Evil", but the conflict manifested itself in the struggle between the Protestant formed Schmalkaldic League and Charles. Formed to be a united Protestant front against the still majority Christian Orthodoxy, The League was allowed to exist only as long as Charles was busy with the Ottomans. Once that threat had been neutralized (via treaty), Charles turned his attention elsewhere, namely to what he viewed as religious rebellion, the Schmalkaldic League.

Charles, backed by papal troops, eradicated the league (who was plagued by authoritative indecisiveness) in a fashion reminiscent of the crusades.

However the ever-present problem of enforcing his policy appeared in Charles's victory over the league. Many of the prince-states that re-converted remained largely protestant in population, placed no constrictions on the spread or practice of the faith, and some outright reverted back to Protestantism. Charles's legacy is often tainted by his fiscal actions.

The empire needed mass amounts of money not only to function, but to finance Charles's martial actions. Charles's often depended on the system of redress after compensation, expected donations, and random windfalls. But by far his most relied upon source for money, were the banks. Charles borrowed heavily from many banks to support his endeavors. Often Charles could not repay the loan by the deadline, which led to a slew of re-negotiations, raised interest rates, and fees instituted by the banks to ensure profit.

The relationship between them was initially symbiotic. Charles needed money and the banks were happy to profit off of the high interest rates and continued to supply him even when his credit dropped in the later years of his reign. Later in Charles's reign however, the banks realized he was no longer a safe nor profitable investment, which often forced him to resort to coercion to get the necessary funds. The diverse nature of the problems meant that no one solution would encompass the broad spectrum of issues facing Charles and his empire.

Ranging from financial troubles, to foreign threat, to having core values that conflict with the changing times of that age, Charles allowed caution and his deep Christian values to guide him through those troubled times until his abdication and retirement to a monastery. Charles' reign certainly had its share of successes and failures, and Charles has been described as " not quite a good man, and not quite a great man" (Maltby 129), but he is certainly one worth re-examining, even four centuries later.