Chapter 24
The Transformation of Europe

THE CHAPTER IN PERSPECTIVE

Profound changes began to overtake Europe beginning in the sixteenth century. Christianity, which had served as the main unifying element in Europe after the collapse of the Roman empire, was permanently fragmented by the Protestant Reformation. The age also witnessed the rise of strong centralized states. Capitalism ensured that the competition between these new states would be fought on the economic as well as the political and religious fronts. The scientific revolution and Enlightenment signaled a startling intellectual transformation. The three centuries following 1500 were highly disruptive, but they also worked to strengthen Europe as well.

OVERVIEW

The Fragmentation of Western Christendom

The religious unity of western Europe was challenged when Martin Luther, a German monk who was appalled by the hypocrisy and immorality of the Roman Catholic church, attacked the practice of selling indulgences. Beginning in 1517 his Ninety-Five Theses, aided immeasurably by the printing press, spread throughout Europe. While Luther proposed specific reforms, such as closing the monasteries and translating the Bible, his most radical stance was his refusal to recognize papal authority. To Luther the only true source of Christian religious authority resided in the Bible. Others outside Germany would take approaches that were at times very different from Luther’s. The English Reformation was much more political than religious in nature because of the political mind-set and needs of Henry VIII. In Geneva the French lawyer John Calvin would carry his reforms even further than Luther had. Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion summarized and organized early Protestant thought.

It would be a mistake to view the Catholic efforts at reform as merely a reaction to Luther and Calvin. However, the Catholic Reformation was slow and halting before picking up steam during the middle years of the sixteenth century. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) both redressed specific abuses and reaffirmed traditional Catholic theology. When St. Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus in 1540, the Catholic Reformation was supplied with very active missionaries. The Jesuits stressed education and carried their missionary zeal to India, China, Japan, the Philippines, and the Americas. The growing tension between Catholics and
Protestants displayed itself in the witch-hunts, which were strongest in the areas where the religious confrontation was greatest. Over sixty thousand suspected witches, mainly women, lost their lives. The Religious Wars, which reached their peak in 1588 with the failure of the Spanish Armada to conquer England, were another symptom of this struggle. In the end neither side was wholly victorious, and compromises of varying religious, political, or geographical natures were forged.

The Consolidation of Sovereign States

The religious competition that was at the heart of the Reformation also played a role in the political centralization of increasingly powerful European states. One state that did not share in this political centralization was the Holy Roman Empire. Despite the able efforts of Charles V, the Holy Roman Empire could never overcome its internal fragmentation and its powerful external enemies to become the leading European state that its name implied. Monarchs such as Henry VIII of England, Louis XI and Francis I of France, and Fernando and Isabel of Spain made use of innovations in finance and strong standing armies to become much more powerful than their medieval predecessors. Not surprisingly, these states often tested each other militarily. Sometimes, as with the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), the results were devastating. However, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 introduced the notion that the different states were sovereign and equal, with the right to run their own domestic affairs. This treaty hardly ended warfare. The Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) was in many ways the first global war. Nevertheless, the European notion of the balance of power ensured that no nation grew powerful enough to dominate its neighbors. Finally, this period of military confrontation between sovereign nations actually provided a greater incentive for technological innovation than in imperial China, India, or the Islamic lands.

These more powerful states developed on two distinct political paths. France, after the chaos of the civil-religious wars of the last half of the sixteenth century, recovered along absolutist lines in the seventeenth century. Louis XIV ruled from his magnificent palace at Versailles with no political, legal, social, or religious obstacles to his authority. Most European leaders, with varying degrees of success, attempted to copy Louis’s absolutism. England and the Netherlands followed a very different approach. The constitutionalism of these states featured governments that had limited powers and that recognized the rights of the individual and representative bodies. While less popular among rulers of the time period than absolutism, constitutionalism would have the greater long-term influence.

Early Capitalist Society

The development of capitalism, fueled by an expanding population and economy, also transformed European society during these formative centuries. Better nutrition and a decline in deaths caused by epidemic diseases led to a population explosion. In the three hundred
years after 1500 the population of Europe increased from 81 million to over 180 million. Capitalism, an economic system tied to the flexibility of the free market, emerged during these centuries. Although the desire to acquire wealth was hardly a new phenomenon, the merchants of early modern Europe made use of innovations in transportation and communication to alter their society to a much greater extent than ever before. The development of banks and joint-stock companies facilitated the growth of businesses and trade. Merchants avoided the control and eventually reduced the power of the guilds by implementing the putting-out system. This advancement in turn brought changes to the countryside, many of which were devastating. Nevertheless, this burgeoning capitalism found its greatest proponent in Adam Smith.

Science and Enlightenment

The intellectual world of early modern Europe did not escape this period of upheaval. Even the old Ptolemaic universe with its spheres and epicycles came under attack beginning with Copernicus’s publication of his On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres in 1543. The true magnitude of Copernicus’s work is that it was more than simply an interesting hypothesis; rather, it was the beginning of the destruction of an old worldview and the origins of a new one. If Copernicus was correct, then human beings were not at the center of the universe. Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei built on the momentum started by Copernicus. The publication of Isaac Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy in 1686 synthesized all the earlier discoveries into a universal system built on the theory of gravity. Enlightenment thinkers carried on the search for reason and logic that was such a part of the scientific revolution. Thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu, Smith, and Voltaire looked for reason in human behavior and institutions. These philosophes carried their own ideas and those of the scientific revolution to a much larger audience. The desire for reason even carried over into the religious realm with the Enlightenment emphasis on deism. Incredible human potential ensured that the theory of progress remained one of the hallmarks of the Enlightenment.

This chapter presents the dramatic transformation of Europe between 1500 and 1800 from a subregion of Eurasia to a dynamic global powerhouse. The expansion of European powers overseas is addressed in chapters 22 and 23. Here we will consider some of the internal changes that enabled the nations of western Europe, in particular, to assume such preeminence. This transformation occurred simultaneously and on multiple levels.

- Religious transformation. The Protestant Reformation, launched by Martin Luther in 1517 in Germany, successfully challenged the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church on western Christendom. The printing press, recently introduced to Europe from China, advanced the ideas and texts of the Reformation throughout Europe.
- Political transformation. Powerful nation-states evolved with the resources and institutions to advance national interests abroad. At the same time, two models for
political order emerged, represented by the absolutist monarchies of France and Spain and the constitutional monarchies of England and the Netherlands.

- Economic transformation. The emergence of capitalism is evident in changes to the structures of banking, finance, and manufacturing. Adam Smith advocated a free market economy, with prices and wages determined through competition.
- Intellectual transformation. New technologies and new scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fueled debate about the nature of the universe and called into question the authority of the Church in such matters. This discussion eventually led to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, an intellectual movement that raised important questions about the nature of humanity, religion, and political authority.

I. The fragmentation of western Christendom
   A. The Protestant Reformation
      1. Martin Luther (1483-1546) attacked the sale of indulgences, 1517
         a. Attacked corruption in the Roman Catholic Church; called for reform
         b. Argument reproduced with printing presses and widely read
         c. Enthusiastic popular response from lay Christians, princes, and many cities
         d. By mid-sixteenth century, half the German people adopted Lutheran Christianity
      2. Reform spread outside Germany
         a. Protestant movements popular in Swiss cities, Low Countries
         b. English Reformation sparked by King Henry VIII's desire for divorce
      3. John Calvin, French convert to Protestantism
         a. Organized model Protestant community in Geneva in the 1530s
         b. Calvinist missionaries were successful in Scotland, Low Countries, also in France and England
   B. The Catholic Reformation
      1. The Council of Trent, 1545-1563, directed reform of Roman Catholic Church
      2. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) founded 1540 by Ignatius Loyola
         a. High standards in education
         b. Became effective advisors and missionaries worldwide
   C. Witch-hunts and religious wars
      1. Witch-hunts in Europe
         a. Theories and fears of witches intensified in the sixteenth century
         b. Religious conflicts of Reformation fed hysteria about witches and devil worship
         c. About sixty thousand executed, 95 percent of them women
2. Religious wars between Protestants and Catholics throughout the sixteenth century
   a. Civil war in France for thirty-six years (1562-1598)
   b. War between Catholic Spain and Protestant England, 1588
   c. Protestant provinces of the Netherlands revolted against rule of Catholic Spain

3. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the most destructive European war up to WWI
   a. Began as a local conflict in Bohemia; eventually involved most of Europe
   b. Devastated the Holy Roman Empire (German states): lost one-third population

II. The consolidation of sovereign states
   A. The attempted revival of empire
      1. Charles V (reigned 1519-1556), Holy Roman Emperor
         a. Inherited a vast empire of far-flung holdings (see Map 24.1)
         b. Unable to establish a unified state
         c. Pressures from France and Ottomans halted expansion of the empire
   B. The new monarchs of England, France, and Spain
      1. Enhanced state treasuries by direct taxes, fines, and fees
         a. State power enlarged and more centralized
         b. Standing armies in France and Spain
         c. Reformation increased royal power and gave access to wealth of the Church
      2. The Spanish Inquisition, Catholic court of inquiry, founded 1478
         a. Intended to discover secret Muslims and Jews
         b. Used by Spanish monarchy to detect Protestant heresy and political dissidents
   C. Constitutional states and absolute monarchies
      1. Constitutional states of England and the Netherlands
         a. Characterized by limited powers, individual rights, and representative institutions
         b. Constitutional monarchy in England evolved out of a bitter civil war, 1642-1649
         c. Both had a prominent merchant class and enjoyed unusual prosperity
         d. Both built commercial empires overseas with minimal state interference
      2. Absolutism in France, Spain, Austria, and Prussia
         a. Based on the theory of the divine right of kings
         b. Cardinal Richelieu, French chief minister 1624-1642, crushed power of nobles
      3. The Sun King of France, Louis XIV (reigned 1643-1715)
a. Model of royal absolutism: the court at Versailles
b. Large standing army kept order
c. Promoted economic development: roads, canals, promoting industry and exports

4. Rulers in Spain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia saw absolute France as a model

D. The European states system
   1. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years' War
      a. Laid foundation for system of independent sovereign states
      b. Abandoned notion of religion unity
      c. Did not end war between European states
   2. The balance of power
      a. No ruler wanted to see another state dominate all the others
      b. Diplomacy based on shifting alliances in national interests
   3. Military development costly and competitive
      a. New armaments (cannons and small arms) and new military tactics
      b. Other empires--China, India, and the Islamic states--did not keep apace

III. Early capitalist society
A. Population growth and urbanization
   1. Population growth
      a. American food crops improved Europeans' nutrition and diets
      b. Increased resistance to epidemic diseases after the mid-seventeenth century
      c. European population increased from 81 million in 1500 to 180 million in 1800
   2. Urbanization
      a. Rapid growth of major cities, for example, Paris from 130,000 in 1550 to 500,000 in 1650
      b. Cities increasingly important as administrative and commercial centers

B. Early capitalism and protoindustrialization
   1. The nature of capitalism
      a. Private parties sought to take advantage of free market conditions
      b. Economic decisions by private parties, not by governments or nobility
      c. Forces of supply and demand determined price
   2. Supply and demand
      a. Merchants built efficient transportation and communication networks
      b. New institutions and services: banks, insurance, stock
3. Joint-stock companies like EEIC and VOC organized commerce on a new scale
4. Capitalism actively supported by governments, especially in England and Netherlands
   a. Protected rights of private property, upheld contracts, settled disputes
   b. Chartered joint-stock companies and authorized these to explore, conquer, and colonize distant lands
5. The putting-out system, or protoindustrialization, of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries
   a. Entrepreneurs bypassed guilds, moved production to countryside
   b. Rural labor cheap, cloth production highly profitable

C. Social change in early modern Europe
1. Early capitalism altered rural society: improved material standards, increased financial independence of rural workers
2. Profits and ethics
   a. Medieval theologians considered profit making to be selfish and sinful
   b. Adam Smith: society would prosper as individuals pursued their own interests
   c. Capitalism generated deep social strains also: bandits, muggers, witch-hunting
3. The nuclear family strengthened by capitalism
   a. Families more independent economically, socially, and emotionally
   b. Love between men and women, parents and children became more important

IV. Science and enlightenment
A. The reconception of the universe
1. The Ptolemaic universe: A motionless earth surrounded by nine spheres
   a. Could not account for observable movement of the planets
   b. Compatible with Christian conception of creation
2. The Copernican universe
   a. Nicolaus Copernicus suggested that the sun was the center of the universe, 1543
   b. Implied that the earth was just another planet
B. The Scientific Revolution
1. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)
   a. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) demonstrated planetary orbits to be elliptical
   b. With a telescope, Galileo saw sunspots, moons of Jupiter,
mountains of the moon

c. Galileo's theory of velocity of falling bodies anticipated the modern law of inertia

2. Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
   a. Published *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1686
   b. Offered mathematical explanations of laws that govern movements of bodies
   c. Newton's work symbolized the scientific revolution—direct observation and mathematical reasoning

C. The Enlightenment

1. Science and society
   a. Enlightenment thinkers sought natural laws that governed human society in the same way that Newton's laws governed the universe
   b. John Locke: all human knowledge comes from sense perceptions
   c. Adam Smith: laws of supply and demand determine price
   d. Montesquieu: used political science to argue for political liberty
   e. Center of Enlightenment was France where philosophes debated issues of day

2. Voltaire (1694-1778)
   a. French philosophe, champion of religious liberty and individual freedom
   b. Prolific writer; wrote some seventy volumes in life, often bitter satire

3. Deism popular among thinkers of Enlightenment, including Voltaire
   a. Accepted the existence of a god but denied supernatural teachings of Christianity
   b. God the Clockmaker ordered the universe according to rational and natural laws

4. The theory of progress—the ideology of the philosophes

5. Impact of Enlightenment
   a. Weakened the influence of organized religion
   b. Encouraged secular values based on reason rather than revelation
   c. Subjected society to rational analysis, promoted progress and prosperity
Study Questions:

1. What theological concerns prompted Martin Luther’s challenge of the authority of the Catholic Church? What specific reforms did he advocate?
2. What were the circumstances of the English Reformation?
3. By the end of the 16th century, which European countries had become Protestant and which had remained Catholic?
4. What are some of the reasons suggested for the widespread persecution of suspected witches in the 16th and 17th centuries?
5. Why was Charles V, despite such vast holdings, unable to establish a durable empire? What forces worked against such an empire in the 16th century?
6. How did European monarchs increase their power in the early modern era? What are some of the common characteristics of the new monarchs?
7. What is the fundamental difference between absolute monarchy and a constitutional government?
8. What factors encouraged the evolution of a constitutional government in England and the Netherlands?
9. How did Louis XIV maintain control over the nobles of France? What were some of the structures of absolutism during his reign?
10. What factors led to the dramatic population growth of Europe between 1500 and 1700?
11. What are the characteristics of capitalism during the early modern age? What financial innovations supported the growth of European capitalism?
12. Three great minds collaborated to shatter the ancient Ptolemaic view of the Universe. Discuss the contributions of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. Who made the greatest contribution? Who took the greatest risk?
13. In what was can we say that Issac Newton symbolized the role of the scientific revolution? What was his role in the Enlightenment?
14. What were the principal concerns of the Enlightenment? What solution did they propose?