

The Transformation of the West, 1450 - 1750

Chapter 17

EQ: How did society, politics and religion change after the Dark Ages in Europe and what affected/caused those changes?

Introduction

- **BIG CHANGES** – Though society remained largely agrarian in Europe, commercial activity changed life in Europe and began manufacturing
- European kingdoms/governments increased power as a result of state sponsorship in these efforts
- Intellectually, science became a centerpiece for the first time in world history
- Internal conflicts in European society increased in areas of education and religion

The Italian Renaissance

- Italy took the forefront in revolutionizing European society in the 14th and 15th centuries...though largely an artistic movement, the Renaissance challenged medieval social structures while reviving the ideas of ancient Greece and Rome
- Renaissance writers such as Boccaccio and Petrarch wrote in Italian, NOT Latin (BIG scandal!) while emphasizing secular topics in their writings
- Artists such as Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Donatello painted and sculpted more realistic human forms (think naughty bits!)
- Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* challenged feudal politics, emphasized Greek and Roman political ideas (democracy and autocracy) and paralleled Chinese Legalist philosophies

The Italian Renaissance (con't)

- Thinkers moved towards Humanism, a focus of mankind as the center of social endeavors, which began to conflict religious doctrine
- Humanists at first did not directly attack the church, they just saw that more and more of what mankind did was the result of their effort, not divine intervention as the church would claim
- Italians began to become more commerce driven than the rest of feudal Europe, focusing on improving banking methods and becoming more capitalist driven
- Politically, rather than expounding leadership through hereditary or divine right, more focus fell on what leaders could do for society or expanding culture (glory through wars with other peoples)

The Renaissance Moves North

- By the end of the 16th century, Italy declined as the center of the Renaissance mainly due to the invasions of French and Spanish kings and the expansion of Atlantic trade
- The Northern Renaissance centered itself in France, England and the Low Countries...classical Greek and Roman ideas (arts, architecture, history and literature) were all the rage to N. Europeans and became the center of education endeavors
- Northern Humanists tended to be more religious than Italians (no naughty bits), attempting to blend secular ideas with religious ones
- Kings of N. Europe also became patrons of the arts while trying to limit the control of the church and sponsored trading companies and colonial ventures abroad
- The same focus of political change impacted N. Europe, as states became more centralized, however, still somewhat feudal (peasants were still peasants, lords still had economic control)

Changes in Family and Technology

- Thanks to contact with the east, technology improved...guns became more widespread, forged iron became stronger, ancient systems of pulleys and pumps made mining easier, printing presses were built for moveable type
- A European family emerged, where people married at later ages (before, marriage was teen or even younger, now it was later 20s) and emphasized nuclear families (parents and just children) rather than extended families (parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncle, cousins etc. living together)
- This new emphasis helped to not only control birth rates but also opened up greater property ownership amongst average people



The Reformation

- As the 1500s started, so did challenges to the Catholic Church...in 1517 a German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses (propositions) to the door of a church in Wittenberg...his main arguments were that the church was becoming corrupt, selling indulgences for salvation of ones sins AND that the word of God alone, in the Bible, was enough for people to gain salvation, NOT what a church can provide!
- Luther's arguments became the foundations of a movement called Protestantism
- Many Germans supported him, as they resented papal authority and taxes and many regional princes saw this as an opportunity to seize autonomy for their kingdoms, as the Holy Roman Emperor (traditional ruler of Germany) remained a papal figurehead
- The Reformation also had social impacts, as it led to peasants become more rebellious towards landlords

The Reformation Leads to WAR

- The conflicts between Catholics and Protestants led to several wars during the 16th and 17th centuries
- In France, Henry of Navarre established the Edict of Nantes, giving religious tolerance to Protestants (first proclamation by a king, it cost him his life)
- The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) between Protestant Germany and its allies vs. the Holy Roman Emperor and Spain was another religious caused conflict...it severely weakened Germany's population...it was resolved by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and also resulted in territories choosing religion and the Netherlands declaring independence from Spanish control
- The English Civil War of the 1640s also involved issues with Catholics and Protestants, that mainly festered for years after Henry VIII converted...the end result saw more tolerance for Protestantism than Catholicism



The Commercial Revolution

- Western economic structure underwent fundamental changes in the 16th century, spurred by global trade expansion (think Chapter 16!)
- Northern European empires took the different approach to economic expansion, favoring private state sponsored enterprises rather than full, complete control of economic expansion by just the state itself
- More ordinary people became involved in economic expansion and manufacturing growth...peasants still farmed but some would begin to find work in textile manufacturing or mining
- Luxury goods came in high demand in Europe and not just for the elite... as products became more readily available, more ordinary people accumulated possessions... "in the past a peasant and his family slept on the floor and had only a pan or two as kitchenware" whereas later on in this era "a farmer might have a fair garnish of pewter in his cupboard. There or four feather beds, so many coverlets and carpets..." etc. (Pg 387)...the average Western European peasant/artisans owned 5x more than his southern/eastern European counterpart.

Social Protest

- Growing commercial efforts created a new class, the proletariat (people without access to wealth producing property) or middle class...many were manufacturers or laborers (blue collar)...they crowded into urban areas, beginning new waves of overcrowding in cities...many became poor (think Dickens)
- Those that maintained their wealth came to fight for their rights (right to vote, right for property, etc.) which became the precursors for Enlightenment ideas (stuff we learned in AP Gov)
- A fervor of witchcraft persecution grew out of church movements in smaller communities in western Europe and New England, which seriously tested the roles of women...poorer women usually felt the brunt of these events!



SCIENCE!!!

- In the late 16th century, Copernicus (we think, though he may have been a thief) revealed that the earth revolved around the sun, not sun around the earth like the church believed
- As a result of his efforts, several other scientific thinkers (Kepler, Galileo) emerged and affirmed his theories while making sci-tech advances of their own...others like William Harvey and Andreas Vesalius explored the inner-workings of man and creature
- Science advances were accompanied justifications, such as Francis Bacon's postulations on empirical research and experimentation, Rene Descartes' skepticism of human reasoning and the laws of nature (which became the grounds for modern philosophy), Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* which was literally the first encyclopedia of scientific and mathematic theories (yay Calculus!)
- John Locke!!
- Despite accusations of witchcraft against nearly all of the above, their ideas flourished and began a new wave of education in European societies...universities dedicated to their teachings opened

Political Changes

- The feudal system finally came completely unraveled by the end of the 17th century...individual monarchs gained greater powers in waging warfare and collecting taxes, relying less on the elites and more on the masses...this system became known as absolute monarchy
- France became the leading kingdom under this system, ruled by Louis XIV (*Je suis l'etat*)...he distracted the nobles with parties at his court at Versailles while establishing a bureaucracy of mainly trusted lawyers and merchants...they promoted mercantilism, lowered or even eliminated internal tariffs and increased foreign import tariffs, carefully regulated manufacturing (state controlled), built state schools and controlled all aspects of France's colonies abroad
- This system spread to not only Spain but most notably eastern Europe and Germany (Prussia, Austria/Hungary [Hapsburgs]), areas which were still under the control of the Holy Roman Empire, and each kingdom developed vigorous militaries to expand/defend their kingdoms against foreign forces seeking their territory

Political Changes

- England and the Netherlands took a different tact...the developed as parliamentary monarchies...England's came as a result of the English Civil War, the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689 in which the parliament no longer depended on the king to meet and upheld its right to tax or monitor state policies independent of the crown.
- Parliaments drew their authority and ideas from the people, as was depicted in the teachings of JOHN LOCKE!!! "people invariably have the right to revolt against unjust rule"
- In the end, both forms of government led to the formation of nation-states, kingdoms with people of common culture, language and ancestry...and in general, common people did not actively participate in most governments (even parliament)...they believed that government was meant to act in their best interests, and if it didn't SEE THE ABOVE STATEMENT!

The West by 1750

- **THREE** great currents of change continued to transform Europe during the 18th century:
 - 1. Commercialization
 - 2. Cultural Reorientation and Enlightenment
 - 3. Nation-State Politics (though of lesser significance than the above)
- Each current produced greater changes to society and solidified the West for the upcoming ages of Colonialism, Imperialism and Industrialization

The Enlightenment

- The French took the lead in KNOWLEDGE through the Enlightenment...they supported scientific thinking and the beliefs that rational thinking was enough to support new discoveries in science
- Social Sciences developed, with new schools examining law/ government, human behavior (crime), and yes, ECONOMICS! (Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*, laissez faire principles)
- Denis Diderot wrote the *Encyclopedie*, a general collection of all types of knowledge
- And then there was early feminism, supported by Mary Wollstonecraft (Britain), Madame de Beaumere (France) and Marianne Ehrmann (Germany)...all advocated for greater freedoms and political rights for women and that men were the reason why women held such a lowly position in society
