

CHAPTER 17

The Transformation of the West 1450-1750

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter is about big changes in western Europe during the early modern period. The core areas of Western civilization changed dramatically between 1450 and 1750. While remaining an agricultural society, the West became unusually commercially active and developed a strong manufacturing sector. Governments increased their powers. In intellectual life, science became the centerpiece for the first time in the history of any society. Ideas of the family and personality also altered. The changes resulted from overseas expansion and growing commercial dominance. The internal changes, such as the Renaissance and Enlightenment, were marked by considerable internal conflict, with focal points centered on the state, culture, and commerce, with support from technology.

The First Big Changes: Culture and Commerce. During the 15th century, Europe moved to a new role in world trade. Internally, the developments of the Renaissance continued, to be followed in the 16th century by the Protestant Reformation and Catholic response. A new commercial and social structure grew.

A New Spirit. The Renaissance brought a new spirit of discovery and achievement to Europe.

The Italian Renaissance. The Renaissance began in Italy during the 14th and 15th centuries as individuals challenged medieval intellectual values and styles. Italy's urban, commercial economy and competitive state politics stimulated the new movement. Petrarch and Boccaccio challenged established canons and wrote in Italian instead of Latin. They emphasized secular topics such as love and pride. New realism appeared in painting, and religion declined as a central focus. During the 15th century, the Renaissance blossomed further. In a great age of artistic accomplishment, da Vinci and Michelangelo changed styles in art and sculpture. In political theory, Machiavelli advanced ideas similar to those of the Chinese legalists. Historians favored critical thinking over divine intervention for explaining the past. Examples were drawn from Greece and Rome. Humanism, a focus on humanity as the center of endeavor, was a central focus. Renaissance ideas influenced politics and commerce. Merchants and bankers moved into profit-seeking capitalist ways; city-state rulers sought new forms dedicated to advancing well-being.

The Renaissance Moves Northward. By the 16th century, Italy declined as the center of the Renaissance. French and Spanish invasion cut political independence, while new Atlantic trade routes hurt the Mediterranean economy. The Northern Renaissance, centered in France, the Low Countries, Germany, and England, spread to eastern Europe. Northern humanists were more religious than the Italians. Writers—Shakespeare, Rabelais, and Cervantes—mixed classical themes with elements of medieval popular culture. Northern rulers became patrons of the arts, tried to control the church, and sponsored trading companies and colonial ventures. Interest in military conquest increased. In cultural life, classical styles replaced Gothic. Education changed to favor Greek and Roman classics, plus Christian morality. A spirit of individual excellence and defiance of tradition was widespread. Renaissance influence can be overstated. Feudal political forms remained strong. Ordinary people were little touched by the new values, and general

economic life was not much altered.

Changes in Technology and Family. By 1500, fundamental changes were under way in Western society. Contacts with Asia led to improvements in technology. Printing helped to expand religious and technological thinking. A European-style family emerged. Ordinary people married at a later age, and a primary emphasis on the nuclear family developed. The changes influenced husband-wife relations and intensified links between families and individual property holdings. Later marriage was a form of birth control and helped to control population expansion.

The Protestant and Catholic Reformations. The Catholic church faced serious challenges. In 1517, Luther taught that only faith could gain salvation, and he challenged many Catholic beliefs, including papal authority, monasticism, and priestly celibacy. He said that the Bible should be translated into the vernacular. Luther resisted papal pressure and gained support in Germany, where papal authority and taxes were resented. Princes saw an opportunity to secure power at the expense of the Catholic Holy Roman emperor. They seized church lands and became Lutherans. Peasants interpreted Luther's actions—he vehemently disagreed—as a sanction for rebellion against landlords. Urban people thought Luther's views sanctioned money making and other secular pursuits. Other Protestant groups appeared. In England, Henry VIII established the Anglican church. Frenchman Jean Calvin, based in Geneva, insisted on the principle of predestination of those who would be saved. Calvinists wanted the participation of all believers in church affairs and thus influenced attitudes toward government. They also stressed education to enable believers to read the Bible. The Catholic church was unable to restore unity, but much of Europe remained under its authority. The Catholic Reformation worked against Protestant ideas, revived doctrine, and attacked popular beliefs. A new order, the Jesuits, spearheaded educational and missionary activity, including work in Asia and the Americas.

The End of Christian Unity in the West. The Protestant and Catholic quarrels caused a series of religious wars during the 16th and 17th centuries. In France, Calvinists and Catholics disputed until the edict of Nantes in 1598 gave Protestants tolerance. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) pitted German and Swedish Protestants against the Holy Roman emperor and Spain. German power and prosperity did not recover for a century. The peace settlement allowed rulers and cities to choose their official religion. It also gave the Protestant Netherlands independence from Spain. During the 17th century, religion was an important issue in English civil strife; most Protestants, but not Catholics, gained toleration. The long religious wars led to very limited concepts of religious pluralism. The wars also affected the European power balance and political structure. France gained power, the Netherlands and England developed international trade, and Spain lost dominance. Some rulers benefited from the decline of papal authority, but in some states, Protestant theory encouraged parliamentary power. Popular mentalities changed as individuals became less likely to recognize a connection between God and nature. Religion and daily life were regarded as separate. Religious change also gave greater emphasis to family life; love between spouses was encouraged. Women, however, if unmarried, had fewer alternatives when Protestants abolished convents. Finally, literacy became more widespread.

The Commercial Revolution. Western economic structure underwent fundamental redefinition. Greater commercialization was spurred by substantial price inflation during the 16th century. New World gold and silver forced prices up, and product demand surpassed availability. Great trading companies formed to take advantage of colonial markets; the increasing commerce stimulated manufacturing. Specialized agricultural regions emerged. All the developments stimulated population and urban growth. The prosperity was shared by all classes in western Europe, but there were victims of the changes. Commercialization created a new rural and urban proletariat that suffered from increased food prices. For the more prosperous, commercialization supported a more elaborate family life and demystification of nature. The many changes stimulated popular protest during the first half of the 17th century. Witchcraft hysteria reflected economic and religious uncertainties; women were the most common targets.

Social Protest. The Renaissance, Reformation, and economic change had produced many divisions within Europe by the 17th century. The Renaissance created a new wedge between the elite and the masses; the former pulled away from a shared popular culture. Popular rebellions demonstrated the social tension as groups called for a political voice or suppression of landlords and taxes. The risings failed because wealth and literacy had spread widely among classes who became suspicious of the poor.

Science and Politics: The Next Phase of Change. A revolution in science, peaking in the 17th century, sealed the cultural reorientation of the West. At the same time, more decisive forms of government arose, centering on the many varieties of the nation-state.

Did Copernicus Copy? Through astronomical observation and mathematics, Copernicus discredited the belief that the Earth was the center of the universe. His discovery set other scientific advances in motion. However, historians have recently discovered similar findings by two Arab scholars. We do not yet know whether Copernicus copied from them or came to his conclusions independently.

Science: The New Authority. In the 16th century, scientific research followed late medieval patterns. The appearance of new instruments allowed advances in biology and astronomy. Galileo publicized Copernicus's findings and Kepler later provided more accurate reaffirmation of his work. Galileo's condemnation by the Catholic church demonstrated the difficulty traditional religion had in dealing with the new scientific attitude. Harvey explained the circulatory system of animals. The advances were accompanied by improved scientific methodology. Bacon urged the value of empirical research, and Descartes established the importance of a skeptical review of all received wisdom. The capstone to the 17th-century Scientific Revolution was Newton's argument for a framework of natural laws. He established the principles of motion, defined the forces of gravity, and refined the principles of scientific methodology. The revolution in science spread quickly among the educated. Witchcraft hysteria declined and a belief grew that people could control their environment. New attitudes toward religion resulted. Deism argued that God did not regulate natural laws. Locke stated that people could learn all that was necessary through their senses and reason. Wider assumptions about the possibility of human progress emerged. In all, science had become central to Western intellectual life, a result not occurring in other civilizations.

Absolute and Parliamentary Monarchies. The feudal balance between monarchs and nobles came undone in the 17th century. Monarchs gained new powers in warfare and tax collection. France became the West's most important nation. Its rulers centralized authority and formed a professional bureaucracy and military. The system was called absolute monarchy; Louis XIV was its outstanding example. His nobles, kept busy with social functions at court, could not interfere in state affairs. Following the economic theory of mercantilism, Louis XIV supported measures improving internal and international trade, manufacturing, and colonial development. Similar policies occurred in Spain, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary. Absolute monarchs pushed territorial expansion; Louis XIV did so from the 1680s, as did Prussia during the 18th century. Britain and the Netherlands formed parliamentary regimes. A final English political settlement occurred in 1688 and 1689; parliament won basic sovereignty over the king. A developing political theory built on this process; it was argued that power came from the people, not from a royal divine right, and that they had the right to revolt against unjust rule.

The Nation-State. Both absolute and parliamentary monarchies shared important characteristics. They ruled peoples with a common language and culture. Ordinary people did not have a role in government, but they did feel that it should act for their interests. The many competing nation-states kept the West politically divided and at war.

In Depth: Elites and Masses. During the 17th century, the era of witchcraft hysteria ended. One explanation is that elites, no longer believing in demonic disruptions, made new efforts to discipline mass impulses. Ordinary people also altered belief patterns, becoming more open to scientific thinking. The process, for both elites and the mass of people, raises a host of questions for social historians. The elite certainly were important agents pushing change, but ordinary individuals did not blindly follow their lead. The European-style family, with its many implications for relations between family members, was an innovation by ordinary people.

The West by 1750. The great currents of change—commercialization, cultural reorientation, the rise of the nation-state—continued after 1750, producing new ramifications furthering overall transformation of the West.

Political Patterns. Political changes were the least significant. England and France continued with their previous patterns. Developments were livelier in central European states under the rule of enlightened despots. Frederick the Great of Prussia introduced greater religious freedom, expanded state economic functions, encouraged agricultural methods, promoted greater commercial coordination and greater equity, and cut back harsh traditional punishments. The major Western states continually fought each other. France and Britain fought over colonial empires; Prussia and Austria fought over land.

Enlightenment Thought and Popular Culture. The aftermath of the Scientific Revolution was a new movement, the Enlightenment, centered in France. Thinkers continued scientific research and applied scientific methods to the study of human society. They believed that rational laws could describe both physical and social behavior. New schools of thought emerged in criminology and political science. Adam Smith maintained that governments should stand back and let individual effort and market forces operate for economic advance. More generally, the Enlightenment produced a basic set of principles concerning human affairs: humans are naturally

good, reason was the key to truth, intolerant or blind religion was wrong. If people were free, progress was likely. A few Enlightenment thinkers argued for more specific goals, for economic equality and the abolition of private property and for women's rights. There were other important currents of thought. Methodism demonstrated the continuing power of spiritual faith. New ideas in all fields spread through reading clubs and coffeehouses. Attitudes toward children changed to favor less harsh discipline, a sign of a general new affection between family members.

Ongoing Change in Commerce and Manufacturing. The general economic changes brought the beginnings of mass consumerism to Western society. Paid, professional entertainment as part of popular leisure also reflected the change. In agriculture, the methods of medieval times altered. New methods of swamp drainage, use of nitrogen-fixing crops, improved stock breeding, and many new cultivation techniques appeared. New World crops, like the potato, increased the food supply. The agricultural advances, along with the growth of internal and international commerce, spurred manufacturing. The domestic system of household production gave farmers additional work. Important technological innovations, like the flying shuttle in weaving, improved efficiency. After 1730, the changes in economic activity caused a rapidly growing population. Many landless individuals found jobs in manufacturing. More people lived longer, resulting in later marriages.

Innovation and Instability. Western society had become increasingly accustomed to change in commercial, cultural, and political affairs. New currents affected family structure and roused political challenges. A new version of an agricultural civilization had appeared and was ready for more change.

Global Connections: Europe and the World. As Europe changed, its outlook toward the world changed as well. Increasingly, Europeans believed they were superior to other peoples. This development had a powerful effect on both Europeans and the other civilizations they encountered.

KEY TERMS

Italian Renaissance: 14th- and 15th-century intellectual and cultural movement in Europe that challenged medieval values and instigated the modern age.

Niccolo Machiavelli: Author of *The Prince*, a realistic discussion of seizing and maintaining power.

Humanism: A focus on humanity as the center of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

Northern Renaissance: Cultural and intellectual movement of northern Europe; influenced by earlier Italian Renaissance; centered in France, the Low Countries, England, and Germany; featured greater emphasis on religion than did the Italian Renaissance.

Francis I: King of France; a Renaissance monarch; patron of the arts; imposed new controls on the Catholic church; ally of the Ottoman sultan against the Holy Roman emperor.

Johannes Gutenberg: Introduced movable type to western Europe in the 15th century; greatly expanded the availability of printed materials.

European-style family: Emerged in 15th century; involved later marriage age and a primary emphasis on the nuclear family.

Martin Luther: German Catholic monk who initiated the Protestant Reformation; emphasized

the primacy of faith in place of Catholic sacraments for gaining salvation; rejected papal authority.

Protestantism: General wave of religious dissent against the Catholic church; formally began with Martin Luther in 1517.

Anglican Church: Form of Protestantism in England established by Henry VIII.

Jean Calvin: French Protestant who stressed doctrine of predestination; established center of his group in Geneva; effect included wider public education and access to government.

Catholic Reformation: Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation; reformed and revived Catholic doctrine.

Jesuits: Catholic religious order founded during the Catholic Reformation; active in politics, education, and missionary work outside of Europe.

Edict of Nantes: 1598 grant of tolerance in France to French Protestants after lengthy civil wars between Catholics and Protestants.

Thirty Years War: War from 1618 to 1648 between German Protestants and their allies against the Holy Roman emperor and Spain; caused great destruction.

Treaty of Westphalia: Ended Thirty Years War in 1648; granted right of individual rulers and cities to choose their own religion for their people; the Netherlands gained independence.

English Civil War: Conflict from 1640 to 1660; included religious and constitutional issues concerning the powers of the monarchy; ended with restoration of a limited monarchy.

Proletariat: Class of people without access to producing property; usually manufacturing workers, paid laborers in agriculture, or urban poor; product of the economic changes of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Witchcraft hysteria: 17th-century European violence reflecting uncertainties about religion and about resentment against the poor; especially affected women.

Scientific Revolution: Process culminating in Europe during the 17th century; period of empirical advances associated with the development of wider theoretical generalizations; became a central focus of Western culture.

Copernicus: Polish monk and astronomer; discredited Hellenistic belief that the sun was at the center of the universe.

Johannes Kepler: Resolved basic issues of planetary motion and accomplished important work in optics.

Galileo: Publicized Copernicus's findings; used the telescope to study moon and planets; added discoveries concerning the laws of gravity; condemned by the Catholic church for his work.

John Harvey: English physician who demonstrated the circular movement of blood in animals and the function of the heart as a pump.

René Descartes: Philosopher who established the importance of the skeptical review of all received wisdom; argued that human wisdom could develop laws that would explain the fundamental workings of nature.

Isaac Newton: English scientist; author of *Principia Mathematica*; drew various astronomical and physical observations and wider theories together in a neat framework of natural laws; established principles of motion and defined forces of gravity.

Deism: A concept of God during the Scientific Revolution; the role of divinity was limited to setting natural laws in motion.

John Locke: English philosopher who argued that people could learn everything through their senses and reason; argued that the power of government came from the people, not from the divine right of kings; people had the right to overthrow tyrants.

Absolute monarchy: Concept of government developed during the rise of the nation-state in western Europe during the 17th century; monarchs held the absolute right to direct their state.

Louis XIV: Late 17th- and early 18th-century French king who personified absolute monarchy.

Mercantilism: 17th- and 18th-century economic theory that stressed government promotion of internal and international policies to strengthen the economic power of the state.

Glorious Revolution: English political settlement of 1688 and 1689 that affirmed that parliament had basic sovereignty over the king.

Frederick the Great: Prussian king who introduced Enlightenment reforms; included freedom of religion and increased state control of economy.

Enlightenment: Intellectual movement centered in France during the 18th century; argued for scientific advance, the application of scientific methods to study human society; believed that rational laws could describe social behavior.

Adam Smith: Established new school of economic thought; argued that governments should avoid regulation of economies in favor of the free play of market forces.

Mary Wollstonecraft: Enlightenment English feminist thinker; argued that political rights should be extended to women.

Indulgences: Roman Catholic theological tenant for the remission of sins.

Predestination: The belief that God has ordained all events to come.

Parliamentary monarchy: Originated in England and Holland, 17th century, with kings partially checked by significant legislative powers in parliaments.

Frederick the Great: Prussian king of the 18th century; attempted to introduce Enlightenment reforms into Germany; built on military and bureaucratic foundations of his predecessors; introduced freedom of religion; increased state control of economy.