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 Reformation. 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.
CHAPTER 17

TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

end of Thirty Years War
Luther initiates Protestant Reformation
Galileo dies
Kay introduces flying shuttle to weaving
Glorious Revolution in England
Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations

1517
1642
1648
1688-1690
1733
1776

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one on a separate sheet of paper.

absolute monarchy
Adam Smith
Anglican church
Catholic Reformation
Cervantes
Enlightenment
social sciences
Johannes Gutenberg
John Kay
Deism
Marianne Ehrmann
mercantilism
Niccolo Machiavelli
parliamentary monarchy
Scientific Revolution
Thirty Years War
Louis XIV
Mary Wollstonecraft
Jean Calvin
Jesuits
95 Theses
Denis Diderot
William Shakespeare
Martin Luther
liberty and equality
Lutheranism
Encyclopaedia Britannica
Glorious Revolution
humanism
Frederick the Great
witchcraft
Treaty of Westphalia
Boccaccio
Rabelais
predestination
Edict of Nantes
indulgences
Catherine the Great
Frederick the Great
Protestantism
Isaac Newton
Henry VIII
capitalism
Leonardo da Vinci
Northern Renaissance
Elizabeth I
René Descartes
Copernicus
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Mark Protestant countries with a P and Catholic countries with a C.

Mark absolute monarchies with an A and parliamentary governments with a P.

Where were most Catholic countries located? Where were most Protestant nations? Is there any apparent connection between religious preference and the existence of absolute monarchy? Can you offer an explanation?
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Which of the following was associated with the Italian Renaissance?
   A) Shakespeare
   B) Galileo
   C) Vesalius
   D) Pirandello
   E) Niccolo Machiavelli

2. Which of the following accounts, in part, for the decline of the Italian Renaissance?
   A) The successful invasion of Italy circa 1500
   B) The Protestant Reformation
   C) The invasion of the peninsula by France and Spain
   D) The economic depression that ended artistic patronage
   E) The rejection of humanism

3. Who was responsible for the invention of movable type in the West?
   A) Albrecht Durer
   B) Nicolaus Copernicus
   C) Erasmus
   D) Johannes Gutenberg
   E) John Harvey

4. Which of the following was NOT associated with the founding of a Protestant church in the 16th century?
   A) Jean Calvin
   B) Henry VIII
   C) Ignatius Loyola
   D) Martin Luther
   E) 95 Theses

5. Which of the following statements most accurately describes the nature of popular support for Luther's religious reform movement?
   A) Luther failed to attract the support of the German princes because he advocated the overthrow of their authority in favor of unification under the Holy Roman Empire.
   B) German princes who turned Protestant could increase their independence from the emperor, seize church lands, and control the church in their territories.
   C) The poor supported Luther's movement in return for Luther's promise of redistribution of land and property.
   D) German merchants refused to support Lutheranism, because the reform movement was less favorable to money making than Catholicism.
   E) Support for Lutheranism was uniform across the Holy Roman Empire.
6. Commodities that many European peasants and artisans around 1600 ordinarily owned included

A) porcelain.
B) pewterware.
C) silver.
D) silk screens.
E) several feather beds.

7. Who was the author of the scientific treatise *Principia Mathematica*?

A) Andreas Vesalius
B) Isaac Newton
C) John Harvey
D) Francis Bacon
E) Descartes

8. What monarch was associated with the establishment of enlightened despotism in Prussia in the middle of the 18th century?

A) Joseph II
B) Catherine the Great
C) William III
D) Frederick the Great
E) Louis XIV

9. What Enlightenment social scientist advocated that government avoid regulation of the economy in favor of individual initiative and market forces?

A) John Keynes
B) Jacques Turgot
C) Adam Smith
D) David Hume
E) John Locke

10. What crop was introduced to Europe in the 17th century and substantially improved the food supply?

A) Cucumbers
B) Peas
C) Millet
D) Potatoes
E) Corn
SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. Renaissance culture stressed themes of ________, a focus on humankind as the center of intellectual and artistic endeavor.

2. The ________ focused in France, the Low Countries, Germany, and England, opened up after 1450.

3. In 1517 a German monk named ________ nailed a document containing 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg.

4. The general wave of religious dissent against the Catholic Church was called ________.

5. ________, a Frenchman who established a base in the Swiss city of Geneva, insisted on God’s predestination as a basic religious principle.

6. Under the ________, church councils revived Catholic doctrine and refuted key Protestant tenets.

7. The ________ trials of the 16th century reflected new resentments against the poor and new uncertainties about religious truth.

8. The reigning economic theory called ________, held that governments should promote the internal economy in order to improve tax revenues and to limit imports from other nations.

9. The English civil wars produced a final political settlement in 1688, the so-called ________, in which parliament won basic sovereignty over the king.

10. The aftermath of the Scientific Revolution spilled over into a new movement known as the ________, centered particularly in France, but with adherents throughout the Western world.
TRUE/FALSE. Write 'T' if the statement is true and 'F' if the statement is false.

1. Northern humanists were more religious than their Italian counterparts, trying to blend a concern for people with continued Christian devotion.

2. Among other things, Martin Luther argued that priests should marry.

3. Mercantilism held that natural forces determined economic developments and that these laws would provide a natural price structure without state interference.

4. Peasant desire to win greater economic security and better nutrition led to widespread adoption of the potato from the late 17th century onward.

5. There was a large growth in the number of feminist thinkers, like Mary Wollstonecraft in England, who argued that new political rights and freedoms should extend to women.

6. The Scottish philosopher Adam Smith set forth a number of invariable principles of economic behavior, based on the belief that colonies should economically enhance their mother country.

7. In England Henry VIII set up the Anglican Church, initially because of his disagreement with many of the tenets of Catholicism.

8. In Prussia, Frederick the Great, building on the military and bureaucratic organization of his predecessors, introduced greater freedom of religion while expanding the economic functions of the state.

9. Growing commercialization created the beginnings of a new proletariat in the West, people without access to wealth-producing property.

10. The period of empirical advances associated with the development of wider theoretical generalizations culminating in the 17th century was called the Scientific Revolution.