Ch. 18: The Transformation of Europe, 1500-1750

I. Religious and Political Innovations

a. Religious reformation, 1517-1563

i. In 1500 the Catholic Church, benefiting from Eur. prosperity, was building new churches (including St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome). Pope Leo X raised money by authorizing the sale of indulgences.

ii. German monk Martin Luther challenged the Pope on indulgences and other practices he considered corrupt/non-Christian. Luther’s 95 Theses began the Protestant Reformation, arguing that salvation could be by faith alone, that Christian belief could be based only in the Bible and Christian tradition.

iii. John Calvin formulated a different theological position in The Institutes of the Christian Religion. He argued that salvation was God’s gift to the predestined elect and that Christian congregations should be self-governing and stress simplicity in life & worship. (Protestant work ethic.)

iv. Protestant Ref. appealed not only to religious sentiments, but to Germans who disliked the Italian-dominated Catholic Church and to peasants & urban workers who rejected the religion of the nobles/masters.

v. Catholic Church agreed on a number of internal reforms & reaffirmation of fundamental beliefs in Council of Trent. These responses to Prot. Ref., along w/ activities of new Society of Jesus (Jesuits) comprise Catholic (Counter) Reformation.

vi. Prot. Reformation led to a number of “wars of religion,” concluding in 1648.

b. The failure of empire, 1519-1556

i. 1516-1519, Charles of Burgundy inherited Castile & Aragon (w/colonial empires), Austrian Habsburg possessions, & position of Holy Roman Emperor. Charles V formed a coalition to defeat the Ottomans @ Vienna in 1529, but could not unify many territorial possessions.

ii. Lutheran German princes rebelled against French-speaking Catholic Charles, seizing Church lands & starting German Wars of Religion. Charles abdicated, giving Spain to son, Philip, & weakened HRE to brother Ferdinand.

iii. Papacy & HRE had lost ability to impose political & religious unity. European monarchs benefited & increased their own power.

c. Royal centralization, 1500-1750

i. Rise of Eur. kingdoms guided by long-lived, capable monarchs in Spain France, & England, and by talented advisers like Cardinal Jiminez (S), Jean-Baptiste Colbert (F), and Robert Walpole (E).

ii. Monarchs & advisers limited power of church & subordinated both Protestant & Catholic Church to state. Also, because church & state closely identified, monarchs imposed religious uniformity: Philip II used Spanish Inquisition against Protestants, Louis XIII & XIV suppressed French Huguenots (Prot.)
iii. England: Henry VIII put church under royal control when he split from Rome & made himself head of the Church of England. Breach also paved way for confiscation of Church property. Split over divorce from wife #1 - more political than theological.

iv. Monarchs also strengthened power by establishing strong national institutions (ex., uniform laws) & by tearing down defensive fortifications of nobles & independent cities.

v. Development of common national languages through vernacular translation of Bible & vernacular novels & plays also contributed to nat’l unity.

d. Absolutism and constitutionalism
i. Absolutism: absence of any constitutional check on a ruler’s power. Constitutionalism: system of gov’t subjecting ruler’s power to limits specified by law & custom.

ii. France: Bourbon kings circumvented representative assembly (Estates General) & developed absolutist gov’t. Louis XIV’s finance minister Colbert increased revenue through efficient tax collection & promoting eco. growth; Louis entertained & controlled nobility by requiring them to attend court @ Versailles.

iii. England: conflict between Parliament & king led to civil war & establishment of Puritan republic under Oliver Cromwell. After Stuart restoration, Parliament enforced its will on the monarchy by driving James II from throne in Glorious Revolution of 1688 & forced successors, William & Mary, to sign the English Bill of Rights limiting the power of the crown.

II. Building State Power
a. War and diplomacy
i. Constant warfare led to a military revolution: cannon, muskets, & commoner foot soldiers became the mainstays of armies. Armies grew in size, & most countries maintained a standing army (England: navy.)

ii. To manage armies & use troops effectively, new command structures, signal techniques, & marching drills were devised.

iii. Naval developments: warships w/multiple tiers of cannon & 4-wheel cannon carriages to aid reloading. England’s lead was demonstrated w/ defeat of Spanish Armada in 1588 - Spain no longer dominated Europe.

iv. W/ defeat of Spain, France rose as strongest power on continental Europe; rival England had superior naval power. During War of Spanish Succession, England allied w/ Austria & Prussia & prevented French house of Bourbon from taking over Spanish throne.

v. W/ War of Sp. Succession & Russia’s emergence as a power after Great Northern War w/Sweden, 4 powers - France, Britain, Austria, & Russia - maintained a balance of power for about 2 centuries.

b. Politics and the economy
i. Rulers needed new revenue to pay costs of wars; most successful made profitable alliances w/ commercial elites. Spanish undermined economy by
driving out Jews, Muslims, & Protestants, so that bullion gained from American empire was spent to pay creditors & on manufactured goods & food.

ii. Northern provinces of the Netherlands gained independence from Spain & became a dominant commercial power. United Provinces of the Free Netherlands, particularly Holland, favored commercial interests, craftsmen, & manufacturing enterprises. Amsterdam became a center for finance & shipping.

iii. After 1650, England used navy to break Dutch dominance in overseas trade. English govt improved financial position by collecting taxes directly & creating central bank.

iv. French govt streamlined tax collection, promoted domestic industry w/protective tariffs, & improved transportation network. French did not introduce direct tax collection, tax land of nobles, or secure low-cost loans.

III. Urban Society and Commercial Technology
   a. Urban social classes
      i. Great disparity between wealthy few & many poor in cities.
      ii. Wealthy urban bourgeoisie thrived on manufacturing, finance, & trade (including grain). Bourgeoisie forged mutually beneficial relationships w/monarchs & built family & ethnic networks to facilitate trade between different parts of the world.
      iii. Urban poor included "deserving poor" (permanent residents) & large #s of "unworthy poor" (migrants, peddlers, beggars, criminals).
      iv. Commoners married relatively late because young men served long apprenticeships & young women worked to earn dowries. Bourgeois also married late (men finished education first). Late marriage enabled couples to be independent of their parents & helped keep birth rate low.

   b. Commercial techniques and technology
      i. New commercial techniques included large banks, joint-stock companies, & stock exchanges.
      ii. Earlier technology was refined & applied widely. Water wheels & windmills improved; canals built; large-capacity cargo ships built; mapmaking improved.

IV. Rural Society and the Environment
   a. The struggle for food
      i. Average standard of living declined sharply in century after 1530.
      ii. Reasons: wars, transformation of cropland to grazing, shorter growing seasons due to Little Ice Age.
      iii. By 1700 new American crops (potatoes, maize) helped alleviate food shortage.

   b. Deforestation
      i. High consumption of wood for heating, cooking, construction, shipbuilding, & industry led to severe deforestation in late 17th/early 18th centuries. Cost went up.
ii. As price rose, coal was used instead of wood. Some efforts to conserve & replant, especially to provide wood for naval vessels.

iii. Deforestation especially affected rural poor who relied on free access to forests for wood, building materials, nuts & berries, & wild game.

c. Peasants and gentry
   i. Peasants free (not serfs), but suffered from pattern of debt which forced them to sell land to bourgeois class (who gained gentry status as landowners).
   ii. Bourgeois gentry gradually increased land ownership; many entered nobility by marriage or by purchasing titles.
   iii. Severe poverty, heavy taxes & perception of inequity led to numerous peasant rebellions. Revolts were firmly suppressed.
   iv. 1750: most Europeans, urban & rural, lived in wretched poverty.

V. The Realm of Ideas
   a. Traditional thinking and witch-hunts
      i. Concepts of natural world derived from local folk traditions & Judeo-Christian beliefs. Most believed that natural events could have supernatural causes.
      ii. Belief in supernatural is illustrated by witch-hunts of late 16th & early 17th centuries. Over 100,000 people (3/4 of them women) were tried & about ½ were executed on charges of witchcraft.
      iii. Modern explanations... hunts were manifestations of fear of unattached women or in terms of social stress. Some scholars believe that poor & marginal people may have believed they were capable of witchcraft & welcomed notoriety & attention gained from public confession.
   b. The Scientific Revolution
      i. Intellectuals derived understanding of natural world from Greco-Roman writings. These suggested that everything on earth was reducible to 4 elements: that sun, moon, planets & stars were light & pure, floating in crystalline spheres & rotating around earth in perfectly circular orbits.
      ii. Observations of Copernicus & other scientists including Galileo undermined the geocentric, earth-centered (Ptolemaic) model of the universe & led to introduction of Copernican sun-centered (heliocentric) model.
      iii. Copernican model was originally criticized/suppressed by Protestants & Catholic Church. Despite opposition, printed books spread these & other new scientific ideas among intellectuals.
      iv. Isaac Newton’s discovery of the law of gravity showed why planets go around sun in elliptical orbits. His discoveries led to development of Newtonian physics (calculus, laws of motion)... Newton & other scientists did not believe that their discoveries were in conflict w/ religious belief.
   c. The Early Enlightenment
      i. Advances in scientific thought inspired Eur. gov’ts & groups of individuals to question reasonableness of accepted practices in fields from agriculture to
laws, religions, & social hierarchies. This intellectual movement, which assumed that social behavior & institutions were governed by scientific laws, is called the Enlightenment.

ii. Enlightenment thinkers were also influenced by the Reformation, by accounts of other cultures (including Jesuit accounts of China), & by the English Revolution & political philosophy of John Locke (tabula rasa, social contract, natural rights...)

iii. Locke said that rulers derived their power from the consent of the governed & that if monarchs overstep the law, citizens have a duty to rebel.

iv. New scientific methods provided enlightened thinkers with a model for changing society. Thinkers were not homogeneous; they drew inspiration from disparate sources & espoused a variety of agendas. Most were optimistic that application of reason would lead to human progress.

v. Ideas aroused opposition from many absolutist rulers & from clergymen, but printing press made possible the survival & dissemination of new ideas.

VI. Conclusion

a. Europe underwent a number of revolutionary changes between 1500 and 1750. These changes were an extension of developments that had begun in the Late Middle Ages & would lead to the political & industrial revolutions of the latter part of the 18th century. The process of change may have brought progress, but it was a violent process that involved war, persecution, suffering, and an uneven distribution of wealth.

b. Seen from a global perspective, these changes appear to be part of the process by which the balance of political, economic, and military power shifted slowly but inexorably toward the Europeans.