Western Europe Extends Its Influence

Paris is well worth a Mass.
—Henry of Navarre, King of France (ruled 1589–1610)

The year 1453 is a useful starting date for the early modern period in European history. That year, Constantinople fell to the Turks and the Ottoman Empire became a major power. The mid-1400s saw the end of a wave of plagues, the conclusion of the Hundred Years’ War between France and England, and the invention of the Gutenberg printing press followed by an increase in literacy. The Italian Renaissance was well underway by this time. The artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci, painter of the Last Supper and Mona Lisa, was born in 1452, while fellow artist Michelangelo, painter of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome and sculptor of the David, would be born in 1475. After the long, slow political and economic development of the Middle Ages and recovery from numerous challenges, several countries in Europe of 1453 were becoming hegemonic powers as increasingly wealthy nations launched major explorations and established colonies around the world.

Christianity, a dominant force in Western Europe, would split into many factions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The quote above was attributed to French king Henry IV, often known as Henry of Navarre, after he converted to Catholicism for the sake of solidifying his throne. His action demonstrates the willingness of monarchs to think like the Politiques, moderates who approached ruling with practicality rather than theology. Henry IV’s rule saw increasing emphasis on national sovereignty, which became more and more absolute in France until reaching a high point with Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715). Henry IV also sanctioned religious toleration of the Huguenots, French Calvinists. The forms of government that developed in this period varied from the absolutism of France to parliamentary government in England.

Many important developments of the period 1450-1750 involved European expansion overseas. Two of these will be covered in Chapter 16: new maritime empires in the Americas and the establishment of the Columbian Exchange.

Protestant Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church faced many challenges in the European shift from feudalism to nationalism. International in organization and influence,
and boasting a large bureaucracy of its own, the Church was also noted for corruption. Efforts to curb corruption resulted in numerous Church councils and reform movements, such as the Cluniac Reforms (950–1130). Efforts at reform, however, were unsuccessful.

Theological disagreements began to surface as well. *John Wycliffe* and the *Lollards* in England in the late fourteenth century argued that priests were unnecessary for salvation. Wycliffe was vilified for translating parts of the Bible into the English vernacular to make it available to the mass of believers, who neither read or understood Latin. The *Hussites*, followers of *Jan Hus* in Bohemia, were declared heretics for beliefs similar to Wycliffe’s. Jan Hus himself was burned at the stake. *Huldrych Zwingli* in Geneva campaigned for a religion that would follow the exact teachings of the scriptures. He was opposed, for example, to such ideas as celibacy of the clergy because the rule was imposed long after the scriptures were written.

The power of the Church suffered during the so-called Babylonian Captivity (1309–1378), when the papacy was located in France rather than in Rome. The “Captivity” gave French rulers greater influence over the Church, even the ability to decide who should be pope. Newly centralizing rulers who coveted Church lands and authority began confiscating wealthy Catholic monasteries and sometimes established their own churches. In the eyes of believers, the Church suffered further when it failed to stop the Black Death. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph connecting the Reformation with the problems of the medieval Church. See pages 224–225.)

**Lutheranism** In 1517, *Martin Luther*, a monk in Wittenberg, Germany, a part of the Holy Roman Empire, presented his *95 Theses* to Church leaders at the university there. Luther objected to the sale of *indulgences*, which granted a person absolution from the punishments for sin. Along with theological interests, the Church had economic and political interests in continuing the sale of indulgences: the Church needed the money generated by the practice. Moreover, the Elector of Brandenburg needed money to maintain his position in the Holy Roman Empire. Luther also hoped to reform other abuses within the Church, such as *simony*, the selling of church offices. Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther in January 1521. Luther and his followers, who were known as Protestants because of their protests against Church practices, soon established a separate church, which became known as the Lutheran Church.

Luther was not a political revolutionary. He did not threaten to replace any government. Nor did he respond to pleas from German peasants to support their rebellions. He was a theological revolutionary. His ideas had social impact on the clergy, as well as on women. Lutheranism taught that women could have direct access to God just as men could and that women had significant roles in the family. However, Protestants generally did not organize convents. As a result, Protestant women did not have the opportunity to become leaders in convents the way Roman Catholic women did.
Calvinism The French theologian John Calvin broke with the Church around 1530. In 1536, he authored *The Institutes of Christian Religion* and helped reform the religious community in Geneva, Switzerland. The elect, those predestined to go to heaven, ran the community, which was based around plain living, simple church buildings, and governance by the elders of the church. Calvin’s followers in France were called Huguenots. Other offshoots of Calvinism included the *Reformed Church of Scotland*, led by John Knox, and the *Puritans* in England and later in Boston, who wanted to purify the Church of England of Catholic remnants. Historian and sociologist Max Weber pointed out that an important socio-economic impact of Calvinism is contained in the phrase “Protestant work ethic.” Calvinists were encouraged to work hard and reinvest their profits; prosperity ostensibly showed their position among the elect.

Anglicanism The last of the three major figures of the Reformation was the king of England Henry VIII (ruled 1509–1547). Henry wanted a male heir to succeed him. So after his wife gave birth to several daughters, Henry asked the pope’s permission to annul his first marriage so he could marry another woman, Anne Boleyn. But the pope, worried about the reaction of the very powerful emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, who was the nephew of Henry’s wife, refused. Henry, with the approval of the English Parliament, went his own way by setting himself up as head of the new Church of England, or Anglican Church, one that would be free of control by the pope in Rome. Two of Henry’s daughters, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I, would later rule.

Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church, all-powerful in Europe since the fall of Rome, did not sit quietly by and let the Reformation groups take over. Instead, it embarked on a vigorous Counter-Reformation to fight against the Protestant attacks. A three-pronged strategy yielded such gains for the Church that it remains the largest Christian denomination in the world:

- The Church increased the use of the *Inquisition*, which had been established in the late twelfth century to root out and punish nonbelievers. The Inquisition sometimes allowed the use of torture to achieve its ends.
- The *Jesuits*, or Society of Jesus, a religious order founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, undertook missionary activity in Europe and abroad.
- The *Council of Trent* (1545–1563) corrected some of the worst of the Church’s abuses and concentrated on reaffirming the rituals such as marriage and other sacraments improving the education of priests, and publishing the *Index of Prohibited Books*, *writing that the Church considered dangerous to one’s faith if read*.

The Counter-Reformation was successful in that Catholicism remained predominant in the areas of Western Europe near the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, later colonies of the European powers often followed the lead of the home country in religion. Therefore, most of the people in the Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonies became Catholic.
Charles V abdicated as ruler of the Holy Roman Empire in 1555, discouraged by his inability to stop the spread of Lutheranism. He left Spain to his son Philip II and the Holy Roman Empire to his brother Ferdinand. Philip II took the Catholic crusade to the Netherlands and ruled its 17 provinces from 1556 to 1581. He later tried to conquer and convert England, but in 1588, English naval power, aided by bad weather, famously defeated his Spanish Armada.

Wars of Religion

Europe’s growing religious diversity often led to wars. In 1546 and 1547, the forces of Charles V fought the German Lutheran Schmalkaldic League. This conflict resulted in the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which allowed each German state to choose whether its ruler, and therefore its inhabitants, would be Catholic or Lutheran. Those subjects who did not wish to accept a ruler’s choice of religion could move to another state where their preferred religion was practiced.

In France, meanwhile, the Catholic monarchy warred with the Huguenots for nearly half a century until Henry IV switched from Protestant to Catholic in 1593, evidently believing that “Paris is well worth a Mass.” He became the first Bourbon on the French throne and, at least temporarily, granted religious tolerance in the 1598 Edict of Nantes.
The final great religious war was the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), which involved most of Europe. The war culminated in the Peace of Westphalia, which allowed each area of the Holy Roman Empire to decide on one of three religious options: Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, or Calvinism. The war led to economic catastrophe. Troops fighting in the war were compensated by being allowed to loot. The war also resulted in diseases and hunger, depopulating Bohemia, the Netherlands, and the Italian and German states. The war’s conclusion in 1648 left the religious map of Europe much as it is today, with France, Spain, and Italy still predominantly Catholic; England with a Protestant state church; and the northern areas of Europe becoming either Lutheran or Calvinist. The treaty provision allowing rulers of various areas of the Holy Roman Empire to choose a denomination gave the countries and duchies much more political autonomy than they had had previously. Consequently, the states of Prussia (now part of Germany) and Austria began to assert themselves, although they still formally belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia began its reliance on a strong military partially in response to the devastation caused by the Thirty Years’ War.

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Emergence of the Modern Nation State Under New Monarchs

The new monarchies of the Renaissance developed in Europe as a result of the desire of certain leaders to centralize power by controlling taxes, the army, and many aspects of religion. The new monarchs included the Tudors in England, the Valois in France, and Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain. In each area, bureaucracies increased and the power of the middle class grew at the expense of lords and the churches. For example, the new monarchies moved to curb the private armies of the nobility.

By the end of the sixteenth century, this centralization coalesced into a system of government that led to absolute sovereignty in England and France. In England, the Stuart king James I (ruled 1603–1625) wrote The True Law of Free Monarchy, asserting that the monarch was free to make the laws—an assertion with which Parliament did not agree. In France, Henry IV (ruled 1589–1610) listened to his advisor Jean Bodin, who advocated the divine right of the monarchy, the claim that the right to rule was given to a king by God. These developments foreshadowed the developments of a national monarchy and the modern, centralized nation-state in these areas. Yet by the eighteenth century, Parliament predominated in England, and divine-right monarchy predominated in France until the French Revolution.

English Civil War and Evolution of Constitutionalism

The English Civil War, sometimes called the Puritan Revolution, broke out in 1642 between supporters of the Stuart monarchy and supporters of Parliament, many of whom were Puritans. The dispute was mainly over what powers Parliament should have in relation to those of the monarch. However, the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the Magna Carta (1215) and the foundation of the English Parliament in 1265. A more recent document, the Petition of Right (1628), restated the proposition that the monarch could not levy taxes without Parliament’s consent, imprison persons without charge, or quarter soldiers in a private home without permission. Although Charles I signed the document, he proceeded to ignore it and did not call a meeting of Parliament for 11 years. By 1642, he was at war with Parliament, a war in which he would lose both his throne and his head.

Although Parliament and its leaders Oliver Cromwell and his son Richard Cromwell were in the ascendancy during much of the Civil War, in 1660 a compromise was reached to allow for the return of the monarchy. Charles II, who had been in exile in France, became the new Stuart king.

His son, James II, succeeded Charles in 1685, resulting in a complete break with Parliament once again. Many in England feared that James II was about to convert to Catholicism and force the country to follow suit. In 1688, a group of lords invited William and Mary, the Protestant monarchs of the Netherlands, to become joint rulers of England. As a result of this event,
known as the Glorious Revolution, James II fled the country. In 1689, William and Mary signed the English Bill of Rights, which assured individual civil liberties. For example, legal process was required before someone could be arrested and detained. The Bill of Rights also guaranteed protection against tyranny of the monarchy by requiring the agreement of Parliament on matters of taxation and raising an army. Although the Toleration Act of 1689 granted freedom of worship to non-Anglicans, the law said that the English monarch had to be Anglican since he or she would be head of the Church of England.

Two philosophers explored the idea of a social contract, an agreement under which people gave up some of their rights in exchange for the benefits of living in a community under the protection of a government. In The Leviathan (1651) Thomas Hobbes feared weak government. He emphasized the need for a government that was strong enough to protect people from each other. In Two Treatises of Government (1690) John Locke feared excessive government. He emphasized the need for a government with enough restraints on it to protect people from tyranny. Locke argued that people had a right and even a duty to rebel against a government that exceeded its legitimate power.

Absolutism Increases in France

In contrast to developments in England, the French government became more absolute in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Building on the ideas advocated by Jean Bodin, advisor to Henry IV, Louis XIII (ruled 1610–1643) and his minister Cardinal Richelieu moved to even greater centralization of government and development of the system of intendants. These intendants were royal officials sent out to the provinces to execute the orders of the central government. The intendants themselves were sometimes called “tax farmers” because they oversaw the collection of various taxes in support of the royal government. During the reign of the “Sun King,” Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715), the intendants helped to implement the financial system put into place by his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Among other reforms, Colbert sought to make French manufactured goods more competitive by creating the Five Great Farms, an area free from internal taxes.

Louis XIV strongly espoused a theory of divine right and ruled as a virtual dictator. His arms were twofold, just as those of Richelieu had been: he wanted to hold absolute power and expand French borders. Therefore, the spacious and elegant palace at Versailles became a political instrument where he entertained the nobles and kept them from conducting business elsewhere, such as fomenting rebellion in their home provinces. Like Peter the Great’s city, Saint Petersburg, Louis XIV’s grand buildings at Versailles helped to highlight his power. The palace at Versailles, for example, could accommodate hundreds of guests in its apartments and gardens. During the rule of Louis XIV, some ten thousand employees worked in the palace or on the grounds. Louis declared that he was the state: “L’état, c’est moi.” He combined in a very real sense both the lawmaking and the justice system in his own person—he was absolute. In
the long run, his and his successors’ refusal to share power with the nobility weakened the French government. (Test Prep: Create a table comparing Louis XIV and Peter the Great. See page 338.)

Desiring to expand the borders of France, Louis XIV reorganized his army to carry on a number of wars. For example, he gained the throne of Spain for the Bourbon family, thereby precipitating the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714). However, the Peace of Utrecht (1713) stipulated that the same person could not hold the thrones of France and Spain simultaneously. In paying for his wars, Louis XIV contributed to the economic problems of France—financial woes that contributed to the French Revolution of 1789. (Test Prep: Create a cause/effect chart linking the policies of Louis XIV to the French Revolution. See page 399.)

**Scientific Revolution**

While the Renaissance was gradually ending in southern Europe around 1600, in the north scientific thinking was on the upsurge. For example, in 1620 English scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon developed an early scientific method called *empiricism*, which insisted upon the collection of data to back up a hypothesis. Science was helped by the correspondence of leading scholars with one another, even during the religious wars, and by the establishment of a Royal Academy of Science in France and England. Sir Isaac Newton, combining Galileo’s laws of terrestrial motion and Johannes Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, published a work on gravitational force called *Principia* (1687). The ideas in *Principia* impacted science and mathematics and helped lead to a new vision of the world. Many intellectuals thought that science showed that the world was ordered and rational and that natural laws applied to the rational and orderly progress of governments and society. This thinking is a key to the period of the Enlightenment.

**The Enlightenment** Leaving aside the old theological debates of Scholasticism, which concerned the relationship of faith to reason, the new debates turned on how best to apply reason to discover natural law and thus make infinite progress. Writers outside the scientific community, such as the philosophes, philosophers who popularized some Enlightenment ideals, worked to apply the principles to government and society. For example, the French writers Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau praised religious toleration and the English form of representative government; Denis Diderot edited a vast series of articles on science, the arts, and philosophy called the *Encyclopédie*. In America, such a philosophe was Benjamin Franklin, a writer and thinker who also dabbled in science. (To learn more about the Enlightenment period, see Chapter 21, “The Enlightenment, Nationalism, and Revolutions.”)

**Mercantilism, Early Capitalism, and Adam Smith**

In the seventeenth century, Europeans generally measured the wealth of a country in how much gold and silver it had accumulated. Hence, countries set
policies designed to sell as many goods as they could to other countries—in order to maximize the amount of gold and silver coming into the country—and to buy as few as possible from other countries—to minimize the flow of precious metals out of the country. This theory, known as mercantilism, called for heavy government involvement in the economy.

The accumulation of capital, material wealth available to produce more wealth, in Western Europe grew as entrepreneurs entered long-distance markets. Some merchant families became bankers, including the Medici of Florence, Sforzas of Milan, and Fuggers of Augsburg. Some entrepreneurs, partly to escape guild regulations, took cloth to rural households for local women to make into garments, beginning the practice of “putting-out,” also known as cottage industry. Capital changed hands from entrepreneurs to laborers, putting laborers in a better position to become consumers. Despite restrictions by the Church lending money at high rates of interest became commonplace. Actual wealth increased, too, as gold and silver were brought in from the Western Hemisphere.

Into this economic milieu of the eighteenth century stepped Adam Smith. Influenced by the new Enlightenment thinking and belonging to a group of economists called physiocrats, Adam Smith turned against mercantilism. In The Wealth of Nations (1776), Smith challenged the mercantilist belief that a nation’s wealth should be measured by its accumulation of amount of gold and silver. The accompanying graph shows the imports of gold and silver from the Americas.

**Spain’s Gold and Silver Imports from the Americas, 1503-1660**


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silver. Hence, the extensive government regulations to promote exports and discourage imports were misguided. Smith argued that freer trade and greater trust in the laws of supply and demand would make everyone wealthier. He believed that allowing people to follow their self-interest, with some limits, would enable the market to regulate itself as if guided by an “invisible hand.”

**Commercial Revolution** The Commercial Revolution that developed in the early modern period saw the transformation of commerce from local, small-scale trading mostly based on barter to large-scale international trade using gold and silver. The high rate of inflation, or general rise in prices, at this time is called the Price Revolution. The Commercial Revolution affected all regions of the world and resulted from four key factors: the development of European overseas colonies; the opening of new ocean trade routes; population growth; and inflation, caused partly by the pressure of the increasing population and partly by the increased amount of gold and silver that was mined and put in circulation.

Aiding the rise of this extended global economy was the formation of **joint-stock companies**, owned by investors who bought stock or shares in them. People invested capital in such companies and shared both the profits and the risks of exploration and trading ventures. Offering **limited liability**, the principle that an investor was not responsible for a company’s debts or other liabilities beyond the amount of an investment, made investing safer. The developing European middle class had capital to invest from successful businesses in their home countries. They also had money with which to purchase imported luxuries. The Dutch, English, and French all developed joint-stock companies in the seventeenth century, including the British *East India Company* in 1600 and the Dutch East India Company in 1602. In Spain and Portugal, however, the government did most of the investing itself through grants to certain explorers.

**Europeans in the Indian Ocean Trade Network**

Demographic pressures pushed Europeans into exploration and trade. As the population grew, not all workers in Europe could find work or even food. Not all sons of the wealthy could own land because **primogeniture laws** gave all of each estate to the eldest son. In the early seventeenth century, religious minorities searched for a place to settle where people were tolerant of their dissent. All of these groups, as well as those just longing for adventure and glory, were eager to settle in new areas, resulting in a global shift in demographics.

Europe was never totally isolated from East and South Asia. The Indian Ocean trade routes had long brought silk, spices, and tea to the Mediterranean by way of the Red Sea. Islamic traders had long known land routes from China to the cities of Baghdad and Constantinople and from there to Rome. In the sixteenth century, however, more and more Europeans became active in the Indian Ocean, with hopes of finding gold and new converts as their twin motives. This often competed with Middle Eastern traders from Oman and other kingdoms in the *Omani-European rivalry*. Christopher Columbus’s