



Western Civilization from 1650 to the Present

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TOPIC 4.2. THE AGE OF EXPANSION

Supplement to Chambers, *The Western Experience*, Chapter 18: The Wealth of Nations, pp. 633-665.

<p>TRANSITION FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN</p>	<p>Colonization of the Americas took place during the TRANSITION FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN EUROPE. It was a turbulent era marked by vast social, political, economic, and religious change. Although the transformation took place over several centuries (from about 1500 to 1800 and beyond), those who lived through it could not escape being drawn into the whirlwind. It was both awful and compelling.</p> <p>Writing from the vantage point of the 19th century, Charles Dickens wrote in <i>The Tale of Two Cities</i>:</p> <p><i>IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way- in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.</i></p>
<p>MEDIEVAL v. MODERN Social Structure</p>	<p>A comparison of the medieval and modern worlds:</p> <p>The social structure of MEDIEVAL EUROPE was HIGHLY STRATIFIED. There were three social classes: clergy (prayers), nobility (fighters), and peasantry (diggers). Each class had a specific function and an individual's position depended almost completely upon birth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The clergy established the values of society. Those with noble birth held positions near the top of the church hierarchy, lived lives of luxury, and administered the church – including its vast economic resources. Those who came from the peasantry lived humble lives in small villages on the manors and administered to the spiritual needs of the people by saying Mass, dispensing sacraments, and taking care of the sick. ■ The nobility provided protection to society. They owned most of the land, which was tilled by peasants, built castles as strongholds against their enemies, and fought with armies of vassals to defend the local population and their land-holdings. Wielding considerable power and authority locally, nobles dominated medieval society and profited unjustly from the peasants' labor. ■ The peasantry fed society and did all of its work. In exchange for protection, they cleared the land, tilled the soil, plowed the fields, harvested the crops, built the bridges, and repaired the roads. Taxed heavily by the nobility and clergy, who were exempt from taxation, peasants lived miserable lives of poverty and degradation. Yet they were proud of what they did and were not lacking in self-esteem.
<p>Political System</p>	<p>In contrast to this, MODERN SOCIETY is LESS STRATIFIED. We still have three social classes: upper class (very wealthy), middle class (merchants, shopkeepers, professionals), and working class (wage earners). However, an individual's position does not depend upon birth. It is determined by wealth and education, and upward and downward mobility are possible.</p> <p>The political system of MEDIEVAL Europe was FEUDALISM. Dependent upon the relationship between members of the nobility, it offered security, political organization, law enforcement, and justice to society. The lord and his vassals were the highest authorities in the land and it was not a good idea to challenge them.</p>

<p>Economic System</p>	<p>In contrast to this, the principal political system of the MODERN WESTERN WORLD is DEMOCRACY. Dependent upon representative government, it satisfies the same basic needs of society as feudalism (security, political organization, law enforcement, and justice). However, democratic governments are based upon popular sovereignty, so authority rests with the people and not with a ruling class. Armed with such constitutional rights as freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of assembly, we are empowered to challenge the government and to rebel against tyranny.</p> <p>The economic system of MEDIEVAL EUROPE was MANORIALISM. Agriculture was the basis for wealth and lands were divided up into self-sufficient manors. Cultivated by the peasants, using the three-field system, the manors provided everything an individual needed locally: food, shelter, clothing, tools, livestock, entertainment, religious services, etc. Since travel was hazardous and forbidden to most, peasants frequently spent their entire lives within the confines of a single manor. Barter was the usual form of exchange.</p> <p>In contrast to this, the principal economic system of the MODERN WESTERN WORLD is CAPITALISM. Property is the basis for wealth and entrepreneurs use a variety of investment and banking techniques to manage a diversified economy of agriculture, commerce, industry, and services. Money is the basis for exchange.</p>
<p>Values and Religious Life</p>	<p>MEDIEVAL VALUES and religious life focused on the SPIRITUAL AFTERLIFE. ROMAN CATHOLICISM was the only form of Christianity in the West and it provided a unifying force. Religious authority rested with the Church and it was organized in HIERARCHICAL fashion, headed by pope, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests. Laymen, who were illiterate, had nothing to say about church matters. The Church served as INTERMEDIARY between God and humanity, and the seven sacraments, dispensed by a priest or bishop, were essential for salvation. The Church steered its flock, from cradle to grave, through a succession of SACRAMENTS: Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction. Without the Church, mankind would be doomed. Departure from orthodox belief was considered HERESY and was not tolerated. The Church's INQUISITION subjected suspected heretics to interrogation, torture, and death.</p> <p>In contrast to this, MODERN VALUES focus on the MATERIAL HERE AND NOW. PROTESTANTISM, in its diverse forms, is the prevailing style of religious life. The BIBLE or PERSONAL CONSCIENCE is the basis for religious authority, rather than the Church. Protestants are organized predominately along CONGREGATIONAL lines, give the laity a voice in church governance, and believe that NO INTERMEDIARY is required between God and humanity. To Protestants, FAITH IS THE BASIS FOR SALVATION, rather than sacraments, so the clergy are significantly less important. Finally, departure from orthodox belief has eventually come to be TOLERATED.</p>
<p>STEPS IN TRANSITION</p> <p>Crusades</p> <p>National Monarchies</p> <p>Middle Class</p> <p>Capitalism</p>	<p>Steps in the transition from the medieval to the modern world:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The CRUSADES broke down the isolation of the medieval world. They enabled travelers to exchange ideas, to become reawakened intellectually, and to revive long-distance trade. 2. The rise of NATIONAL MONARCHIES, especially in England, France, and Spain, provided the centralized governments, increased security, and larger treasuries needed for long-distance trade, exploration, and colonization. 3. The rise of the MIDDLE CLASS increased the amount of personal property (capital) available for business investment, improved long-distance trade, and provided more resources to finance the treasuries of the national states. 4. The rise of CAPITALISM caused a commercial revolution which produced new banking establishments that combined lending with manufacturing enterprises; credit

<p>Renaissance</p>	<p>facilities that offered bills of exchange, checks, and bank notes; new industries such as mining, smelting, and woolen; and new forms of business organization, including regulated companies, joint stock companies, and chartered companies.</p> <p>5. The RENAISSANCE (1300-1600) brought a flowering of culture, a change in focus from inward to outward, increased individualism, and secularism. During this period, medieval Europe witnessed a basic change in the form and spirit of civilization from feudalism to national state (from decentralized, authoritarian, hierarchical to centralized, democratic, individualistic) and from spiritual to secular.</p>
<p>Reformation</p>	<p>6. The REFORMATION (1500-1650) meant a change FROM UNITY TO DIVERSITY in religious beliefs and practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546) contributed the following concepts to Protestant theology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The priesthood of all believers ▪ The Bible as the basis for religious authority ▪ A sacramental system limited to Baptism and Holy Eucharist ▪ Faith alone as the basis for salvation ▪ An enlarged view of calling that made the secular life respectable. <p>These ideas lessened the grip of the Roman Catholic Church on men’s minds and opened the way for freedom of thought.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564), part of the second generation of reformers, institutionalized Protestantism with his ideas relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Predestination ▪ A feeling of obligation in one’s calling ▪ The Protestant ethic (industry, thrift, hard work, and ceaseless activity) ▪ Church government based on elected bodies ▪ The advocacy of rebellion against tyranny.
<p>ONLINE RESOURCES</p>	<p>For more information on this topic, explore one or more of the following online resources:</p> <p>The Age of Discovery: Overview of the Age of Exploration and Discovery.</p> <p>England in the Age of Discovery: Summary of English attempts to colonize North America.</p> <p>The Age of Exploration: Interesting history of exploration put together by the Mariners’ Museum. Begins with ancient Egypt and continues through 1776.</p>
<p>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>	<p>Drawing on the resources you have had an opportunity to explore (textbook, course documents, online resources, library resources), answer one or more of the following questions:</p> <p>How do you explain the paradox that the transition from medieval to modern Europe was “the best of times” and “the worst of times?” Who would have considered it the best of times? Who would have considered it the worst of times? Do you think we also live in the best of times and the worst of times? Please explain your answer.</p> <p>What motives for leaving their homes do you think the transition from medieval to modern Europe presented to many Europeans?</p> <p>Track down some family history and tell us the specific conditions in Europe or elsewhere that brought your ancestors to America. Try to put their migration into a larger historical perspective by doing some online research, if necessary.</p>