

3 – THE AGE OF EXPANSION, ABSOLUTISM, AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

OVERVIEW

Europeans took the global lead in exploration and expansion primarily because of “God, gold, and glory.” In the fifteenth century, a genuine desire to bring the “heathen” people of foreign lands into the fold of the Catholic Church existed. Religion, though, was not the only reason that Europeans began to sail abroad. During the fifteenth century, Europeans had access to non-European goods and cultures only through trade. Non-Europeans controlled this trade, and prices were very high. Many Europeans desired to bypass these traders and trade directly with the east, and individual explorers and adventurers often wanted fame, fortune, and the titles of nobility that might be lavished upon the leaders of successful expeditions.

The technology of exploration had been improving throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The development of navigational devices, such as the compass and the astrolabe, made better navigation possible for Europeans. Improvements in the field of cartography also contributed to the ability of Europeans to venture farther away from home. Finally, new and improved ship-making techniques provided the vessels that the Europeans needed to launch their expeditions.

During the Middle Ages and even during the Renaissance, kings ruled their subjects with the consent of the nobles. As that practice began to disappear, monarchs began to rule with more power and authority. Often, attempts were made to limit the power of the monarchs, but a few monarchs rose above these limitations. The greatest example of such a leader was Louis XIV of France. He epitomized the absolute ruler. Following in his footsteps in the eighteenth century were several eastern rulers who sought to be absolutists as well. While some nations developed strong monarchies, other nations, like England, developed a strong parliamentary government. Around the same time, Spain experienced its short-lived golden age.

EUROPEAN EXPANSION

Portugal led the way for overseas exploration during the fifteenth century by becoming the first European nation to explore the coast of Africa. Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) explored Africa's coast in search of a Christian kingdom with which he could ally to fight against the Muslims who controlled many of the trade routes. He also searched for new trade opportunities for Portugal as well as opportunities to spread the Christian faith. Henry founded a school on the Portuguese coast where men could learn the skills of navigation and

cartography. Within a few short years, Portuguese ships began sailing further and further down the African coast. The ships often returned with Africans who were sold as slaves. The Portuguese built forts along the African coast and established a thriving trade in gold, slaves, and ivory.

In 1487, Portuguese sailor Bartholomew Dias (c. 1450-1500) became the first explorer to round the southern tip of Africa known as the Cape of Good Hope. In his lifetime, he explored many miles of Africa's coastline. Ten years later, Vasco da Gama (c. 1469-1524) set sail from Portugal. He rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed into Calicut on the coast of India. After barely escaping from the Muslims who controlled the area, da Gama returned to Portugal as a hero. He was the first European to reach India by sea.

Gradually, Portugal sent more and more ships to India and established lucrative trade routes. At first, Portugal was intimidated by the Muslims and other traders that controlled the Indian trade. However, Portugal developed better and more heavily armed ships that allowed them to establish dominance. Perhaps the greatest improvement the Portuguese made was the mounting of cannons on their ships. This allowed the ships to battle from a distance instead of alongside enemy ships. Portugal's trade industry brought tremendous wealth, one that eventually rivaled that of the Italians.

Whereas Portugal's primary goal was the establishment of trade routes and trading ports, the Spanish had a much grander scheme. Spain's enormous wealth provided them with more resources to explore the world. One of the first men to tap these resources was a Genoese sailor named Christopher Columbus (1451-1506). Columbus persuaded the Spanish Queen Isabella to finance his expedition westward. Columbus convinced the queen, as he was convinced, that a sea route to the east could be found by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1492, Columbus set sail westward and landed in the Caribbean. He was convinced that he had landed somewhere in the outer islands of Japan, or Chipangu, as he called it. In his three subsequent voyages, Columbus explored all the major islands of the Caribbean.

Vasco Nunez de Balboa (c.1475-1519) became the first European to view the Pacific Ocean in 1513. He landed in Panama and traveled through dense jungles across the isthmus until he reached the great sea, which he named the South Sea. Several years later, Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) rounded the southern tip of

South America, crossed the Pacific Ocean, and sailed to the Philippine Islands. Unfortunately, Magellan died in the Philippines at the hands of the natives. One of his original five ships continued the journey westward and sailed all the way back to Spain. Although Magellan did not make the entire journey, his name is associated with the first circumnavigation of the globe.

Sponsored by private, rather than state, funds, the Spanish conquistadores, or conquerors, set out to find wealth, fame, and power in the unexplored lands of the New World. In 1519, Hernán Cortés (1485-1547), accompanied by his troops, landed in Mexico. There he encountered the great Aztec civilization and the Aztec leader, Montezuma. The Spaniards, dressed in armor and riding atop horses, amazed the Aztecs. The Aztecs believed the Spaniards were sent by the god Quetzalcoatl, so they showered the Spaniards with gifts of gold and precious stones. Things went bad, and Cortés captured Montezuma, who died while in the custody of Cortés. Cortés' men destroyed many of the Aztec temples and buildings. Within three years, the conquistadores had wiped out the once-mighty Aztecs. The European weapons and diseases proved to be too much for the Aztecs. Those who didn't die of disease, brought over from Europe by the explorers, died at the hands of Cortés' men. Because of Cortés' expedition, Spain eventually controlled all of northern Mexico. Under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro (c.1476-1541), Spain established its dominance in western Latin America by destroying the Inca empire in 1532. In the years that followed, the Spaniards established colonies in the New World and searched for gold and silver. The pope granted Spain the ecclesiastical rights to the New World. As a result, Spain sent Catholic missionaries to the New World to Christianize the natives and to add souls to the Spanish empire.

The overseas expansion by Portugal and Spain had both positive and negative consequences. The trade developed by the two countries boosted their economies and introduced their subjects to many new goods and products. However, so much gold and silver flowed into Europe that Europe began to suffer from inflation. This inflation, coupled with the huge increase in population, contributed to what is generally referred to as the Price Revolution. However, the greatest negative consequence of the European expansion was the loss not only of the lives of the Indians but also of the civilizations.

THE RISE OF ABSOLUTISM IN FRANCE

With the death of Louis XIII in 1643, 5-year-old Louis XIV (1638-1715, king 1643-1715) ascended to the French throne. Louis' mother chose Cardinal Mazarin as his regent. Mazarin was not as shrewd as Cardinal Richelieu, who served as the most important

adviser to Louis XIII. During Louis XIV's early years as king, he witnessed the *Fronde*, rebellions that impressed upon Louis the need to tighten royal authority in France. After Mazarin's death, Louis was left to deal with the aristocracy, who were growing resentful of the growing power of the monarchy. To deal with the aristocracy, Louis adopted the concept of the *divine right of kings*. According to Bishop Bossuet, one of Louis' advisers, the king was chosen by God, and no one but God had the right to judge or question the king. This established the absolute sovereignty of Louis and his monarchy. The famous line *L'état, c'est moi* is often attributed to Louis. Translated "I am the state," this line represents the mindset of Louis XIV.

Louis chose Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) to administer the government of France. Colbert played a pivotal role in centralizing the monarchy of France. One of the ways Colbert did so was through the implementation of a mercantilistic economic policy. Colbert reshaped the French economy through government control of industry and trade. He organized factories and systems of production, trading companies and colonies, and intricate systems of canals and roadways. By the 1680s, France had trading colonies as far away as Canada and the Caribbean. All of his new policies helped put gold into the state coffers.

Louis decided to strengthen his grip on France in addition to controlling its economy. Louis believed that a unified France had room for only one religion. Louis also believed that more than one religion could not coexist in France. Therefore, Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had allowed Calvinists to worship freely. Louis closed Huguenot institutions and stripped the Huguenots of their rights. Many Huguenots were exiled from France altogether.

Louis XIV took control of the military actions of the state, too. He had a strong desire to increase the size of his kingdom, and he used military might to do so. Louis used the money in his coffers to establish a vast, professional army, and he had great success early in his military campaigns. Parts of Germany and the surrounding area were added to French holdings. However, by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the powers of Europe joined together to contain Louis' aggression.

By establishing absolute control over every aspect of the government, Louis epitomized the absolute monarch. As king, he controlled the economics, religion, foreign and domestic policies, and military exploits of France. Louis ran the state and acted as if the state were there to serve him. He used the money in his royal coffers to finance not only his military expeditions, but also his extravagant lifestyle. He built a magnificent palace at Versailles that was home to thousands. He

surrounded himself with fantastic art and beautiful landscaping. He used the wealth of the nation to flaunt his power for all to see. Louis also used his extraordinary wealth to intimidate foreigners who visited France.

THE RISE OF ABSOLUTISM IN THE EAST

When Alexis I of Russia died, his daughter Sophia ruled as regent for Alexis' two sons, Peter and Ivan. At the age of 17, Peter took control from his sister and became Peter the Great (1672-1725, czar 1689-1725). Peter admired Western Europe and was determined to westernize Russia. His first priority was the strengthening of the army and the creation of a navy. He reorganized the government of Russia and divided Russia into provinces. He required members of the nobility to serve in the military or in some civil service position. After studying the policies of Western European nations, Peter attempted to install a mercantilistic economy in Russia by increasing exports and introducing new industries. However, when those efforts did not produce enough money, he simply raised taxes.

Peter really began to take on the look of a Western absolutist when he tried to gain control of the Russian Orthodox Church. Peter turned his attention to architecture. Using the grand Versailles as a model, Peter spent vast sums of money on architecture and art that testified to the greatness of Russia, just as Versailles did for France. Also, like a Western absolutist, Peter used his military to attack other territories and make them his own, as was the case in the Baltic region owned by Sweden.

THE RISE OF CONSTITUTIONALISM IN ENGLAND

England's history ran a much different course than that of France. England had experienced relative success with monarchy rather early in its history. The monarchy was solidified with the establishment of the Tudor dynasty in 1485. Henry VI II strengthened the position of the monarchy in England, and his daughter, Elizabeth I, went on to become the most successful of all the Tudor monarchs. However, the Tudor dynasty ended when Elizabeth died in 1603 and her cousin ascended to the throne of England. James VI of Scotland (1566-1625, King of Scotland 1567-1625, King of England 1603-1625), who became known as James I of England, began his reign on the wrong foot with Parliament. In his first meeting with Parliament, James, in an arrogant manner, informed them that he did not want to be challenged. Although James had the power to call and dismiss Parliament, Parliament had control over the revenues of the land. This antagonistic relationship between king and Parliament would later play a major role in the historical development of England.

James' son, Charles I (1600-1649), also ran into problems with Parliament. Parliament refused to grant Charles a lifetime of customs duties and opted, instead, to grant him only one year's worth. Charles found money elsewhere and wasted it on a failed military expedition to Spain. To pay for his mistake, Charles required the wealthy to cover his expenses. Several members of Parliament refused to pay, and they were jailed. In 1628, Parliament forced Charles to sign the Petition of Rights, which said that the king couldn't force a loan without Parliament's approval. The following year, Charles I dissolved Parliament. Charles began an eleven-year period during which he ruled without Parliament. To raise revenue, Charles collected ship money – money collected from coastal towns for their defense. Charles also collected ship money from landlocked towns.

A few years later, Charles found himself in a dangerous situation with Scotland. Charles tried to impose religious changes on the Scots, and riots ensued. The Scots vowed not to change their church. For the first time in more than ten years, Charles called Parliament in an attempt to raise funds to punish the Scots. The Parliament, called the Short Parliament, refused to give Charles the money he wanted. After a failed military campaign, Charles needed more money to pay the Scots to leave northern England. Charles contacted Parliament, called the long Parliament because it was in session for twenty years, in order to get more money. Parliament dismissed two of Charles' ministers and abolished many of the king's rights. They presented the king with a list of 204 grievances, known as the *Grand Remonstrance*. After a failed attempt to arrest some of the leaders of Parliament, Charles fled London to gather his troops. This began the English Civil War (1642-1649).

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and his New Model Army, composed mostly of well-trained, well-disciplined Puritans, supported Parliament and captured Charles in 1646. A dispute arose among the troops, and Charles fled. Once again, Oliver Cromwell and his army captured Charles I. All of the Presbyterians were removed from Parliament, leaving what was known as the *Rump Parliament*. The Rump Parliament condemned the king to death, and Charles lost his head in 1649. The Civil War was over, and the monarchy had been toppled. Cromwell replaced the monarchy with a republic, called the Commonwealth. Designated Lord Protector, Cromwell ruled the Commonwealth as a military dictator until his death.

Charles II (1630-1685, king 1660-1685) returned from exile to take the throne in England. During his reign, Parliament restored the Church of England as the official church. Charles signed a secret treaty in which he had agreed to make England Catholic.

Parliament became suspicious of Charles and passed the Test Act in 1673, which said only Anglicans could hold public office. Later, Parliament tried to pass legislation that would keep Charles' brother, James II, from ascending to the throne because he was Catholic. However, Charles dismissed Parliament. Charles died a few years later, and James II (1633-1701, king 1685-1688) took the throne. When James and his wife had a son in 1688, England faced the possibility of a Catholic dynasty being established. William of Orange (1650-1702, king 1689-1702) and his wife Mary invaded England, and James fled with his family. With virtually no bloodshed, the old monarch was overthrown and a new monarchy was established. This was called the *Glorious Revolution*. Parliament offered the throne to William and Mary under the condition that they would accept the Declaration of Rights, which later became the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights laid the foundation for the constitutional monarchy in England. Also, with the ascension of William and Mary to the throne, the idea of the divine right of kings had been destroyed in England.

THE GOLDEN AGE AND DECLINE IN SPAIN

The grandson of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, Charles, a Habsburg, became the first king of a united Spain. Three years later, in 1519, Charles became Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. During the reign of Charles, Spain flourished because of the wealth that flowed from the New World. In 1556, Charles abdicated the Spanish throne to his son Philip (1527-1598, king 1556-1598). Because France was involved in its own religious turmoil, Spain went unchallenged. This marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Spain's art and culture. A devout Catholic and absolutist, Philip persecuted the Protestants in the Netherlands, an action that drained the Spanish coffers and led to war with England's Elizabeth I. It was Philip who lost the Spanish Armada to the English in 1588. Philip's successor, Philip III (1578-1621, king 1598-1621) ceased action against the Dutch and reduced Spanish spending.

Philip IV (1605-1665, king 1621-1665) ushered Spain into the height of its Golden Age. Because Philip IV did not concern himself much with politics, he gave governmental control of Spain to Gaspar de Guzman, conde de Olivares. Olivares renewed action against the Dutch and involved Spain in the Thirty Years' War, which then led Spain to war with France. After Olivares was removed, Spain began to decline. Ultimately, the grandson of Louis XIV, Philip V (1683-1746, king 1700---1746) ascended to the throne and sparked international controversy. The other European powers dreaded the idea of Louis' influence extending into Spain. Because of the controversy, Europe erupted into

the War of the Spanish Succession. The Grand Alliance challenged Spain and France. At the end of the war, Philip kept his Spanish throne, to which he brought absolutism that he learned from the best, his grandfather, Louis XIV.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) – Known in Spanish as *Cristobal Colon* and in Italian as *Cristoforo Colombo*, Christopher Columbus was born into the family of a weaver in Genoa, Italy. Columbus took his first voyage in the 1470s and continued sailing after that. He married in 1479 and had his first child in 1480.

Columbus calculated that the earth was actually about 25 percent smaller than scholars had previously believed. (Columbus did not try to convince people that the world was round.) Based on these calculations, Columbus tried in vain to persuade the king of Portugal to finance a westward voyage to prove his theory. After failing in Portugal, Columbus went to Spain where he tried to find sponsors for a voyage. By this time, his wife had died, and he had a second child with his mistress, whom he later married. After several attempts, Columbus managed to convince King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to sponsor a westward voyage of discovery. Columbus completed four voyages for Spain and opened the door for the Spanish occupation of the New World.

Most children learn about Columbus at an early age. However, the traditional stories about the heroic Columbus now seem to be inaccurate. Recent scholarship has shown that Columbus' motives were less than pure and that his treatment of the natives was harsh at best. Accounts from Columbus' own journal support the relatively new belief that Columbus had much less integrity than originally believed. Columbus' character aside, the fact remains that Columbus was a great pioneer in the area of overseas exploration.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) – Colbert is often regarded as the greatest statesman in French history. Colbert began his civil service career at the age of 19 when he first went to work for the office of the minister of war in France. In 1651, Cardinal Mazarin hired Colbert to manage his finances. In 1665, Colbert was made the comptroller of finance for France. In his new role, Colbert completely reworked the nation's finances and employed the doctrine of mercantilism. He worked to control the French economy and direct all profits to the French coffers. Colbert controlled French industry, trade, navigation laws, trading companies, and colonization efforts for the economic prosperity of France. In addition, he built factories, roads, and canals, all of which boosted the French economy. He fortified

coastal towns and strengthened the French navy. Colbert patronized the arts and sciences and established several institutes of higher learning. Unfortunately, as hard as Colbert worked, his efforts were no match for the unprecedented spending power of his king. Louis XIV At the time of Colbert's death, he was unjustly blamed for France's financial problems.

James VI of Scotland, James I of England (1566-1625, King of Scotland 1567-1625, King of England 1603-1625) – Born in Edinburgh Castle in Scotland, James was the only son of Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary abdicated the throne in 1567, and James became king, although regents ruled for him until 1576. He was kidnapped in 1582, but he escaped the following year. In 1586, James signed the Treaty of Berwick and formed an alliance with Queen Elizabeth I of England, his cousin. In 1587, Mary, Queen of Scots, was executed, and James reduced the power of the Catholic nobility. Later, James suppressed the Protestants, too. He claimed the divine right of kings and established a strong central monarchy.

In 1603, James became the first Stuart king of England when Elizabeth I died without children. The following year, he ended England's war with Spain but began his long struggle with Parliament. James is famous for authorizing an English translation of the Bible. During his reign, he treated the Catholics very harshly. In 1605, as a result of his harsh treatment of Catholics, a group of Catholics entered into the Gunpowder Plot. These conspirators, along with Guy Fawkes, placed thirty-six barrels of gunpowder beneath Parliament in an attempt to kill Parliament and the king. Guy Fawkes was arrested and tortured until he admitted his guilt and revealed the names of the conspirators. The conspirators who were not killed while being arrested were hanged later with Fawkes. James considered himself a peacemaker, and in an attempt to promote religious peace in Europe, James gave his daughter in marriage to Frederick V, the Protestant German Leader. James also attempted to marry his son Charles to the daughter of the king of Spain, a Catholic. His subjects interpreted this move as pro-Catholic and anti-Anglican. These actions, along with his hesitation to support Protestant troops in the Thirty Years War, led many to question his loyalty to the Anglican Church.

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) – Originally from Wales, Oliver Cromwell was educated by a Puritan who wished to purify the Church of England of its remaining Catholic elements. As a member of Parliament in 1628 and 1629, Cromwell criticized the toleration of Catholic practices in the Church of England. Cromwell returned to Parliament in the crucial year 1640. After the outbreak of civil war, Cromwell used religious zeal to motivate troops to fight on the side

of Parliament. After demonstrating his outstanding abilities in battle, Cromwell earned the nickname Ironsides. He opposed the king at every opportunity. Cromwell approved the removal of Presbyterians from Parliament and approved the execution of Charles I. He dismissed the Rump Parliament and became Lord Protector of the new Commonwealth; he later refused to be king. By acting as a military dictator in England, Cromwell managed to provide peace, stability, and religious toleration in England. Many people throughout history have vilified Cromwell, but his military and administrative skill is generally recognized as the best of his time.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616) – Cervantes overcame great odds to become one of Western Civilization's greatest writers. During a battle against the Turks, while he was in military service in Naples, Cervantes lost the use of his left hand. On his way back to Spain, he was captured by Barbary pirates and held for ransom. He tried unsuccessfully to escape several times. Fortunately, his family ransomed him, and he returned to Spain. He tried in vain to find employment with the nobility.

He tried writing, but he couldn't support himself. With no other options available to him, Cervantes took government jobs. He found himself in prison, though, for a problem he encountered on one of his government jobs. It was during his prison term that he conceived the idea for *Don Quixote*, the story of a knight who traveled about looking for adventures. In addition to *Don Quixote*, Cervantes wrote *Exemplary Novels* and *Persiles y Sigismunda*. Cervantes is considered the greatest of all Spanish authors.