4 The Age of Religious Wars

The only type of Protestantism recognized by the Peace of Augsburg (1555) was Lutheranism

Lutherans and Catholics opposed the Anabaptists and other radical Protestants, and Calvinists were not strong enough to demand legal standing

By the time of the end of the Council of Trent, Jesuits were leading a counteroffensive to recover regions lost to Protestantism

John Calvin had made Geneva a refuge for Protestantism, and he established a university to arm Protestants against the Catholic counter-reform challenge

Calvinism and Catholicism were mutually incompatible

Calvinism mandated a presbyterian organization, or council of elders, that distributed authority among local governments

It attracted people who favored decentralization and distribution of political power and who opposed authoritarian rule

The church was a centralized hierarchical system stressing obedience to the pope

The pope and the bishops ruled without consent of the laity

Catholicism was preferred by advocates of absolute monarchy favoring one king, one church, one law

One of the effects of the religious wars was the eventual acceptance of religious pluralism and toleration

Skepticism, relativism, and individualism came to be seen as virtues

However, church and political leaders were slow to embrace the principles of tolerance

And the leaders that took a more pragmatic approach to religious strife and the possibility of civil war urged moderation and compromise (restraint)

Those leaders that took strong stands on these issues failed to maintain stability in their countries.

Religious Wars in France

The French government became aroused when Lutheran ideas began to spread in and around Paris in the 1520s

The French Protestants became known as Huguenots after Besançon Hughes, the leader of the revolt that won Geneva its freedom

The French began to actively prosecute Protestants in 1525 when the French King Francis I was captured by Holy Roman emperor Charles V

The French tried to win favor of Charles V by cooperating with his anti-Protestant campaign in Germany

The French cracked down of Protestantism in 1534 in attempt to eliminate Protestantism from the country

It was during this time that Calvin and others fled France

When the wars between the French and the Holy Roman Empires ended in 1559, the European balance of power shifted to Spain

France was severely weakened, and the throne was then up for grabs between three noble families

The Bourbons from the south and west of France

The Montmorency-Chantillon who controlled the center of France

The Guises from the east of France

Of the three the Guises were the strongest and they championed a militant Catholicism

In response to this defense of Catholicism, the Protestants of France rallied behind the Bourbons and Montmorency-Chantillons

By 1561, the majority of French Protestants were found in two regions

Dauphiné and Languedoc

Although the Huguenots were a small minority in France, they represent some of the more powerful commercial segments in the country and over 2/5of the French nobility became Huguenots

Supporting Protestantism allowed the French nobility to stress their independence and sovereignty with respect to their lords

It was hoped that a principle of territorial sovereignty like what the Treaty of Augsburg had established in the Holy Roman Empire

When the weak, sickly, and young King Francis II died in 1560, his mother Catherine of Médicis hoped to offset the power of the threatening Guises by seeking allies among the Huguenots

She issued the January Edict granting Protestants freedom to hold public worship services outside of the towns, but only private meetings within the towns

When the duke of Guise massacred a Protestant congregation ay Vassy, war between the Catholics and the Huguenots broke out

This development also struck fear in Queen Catherine and she abandoned the Protestants and began to side with the more powerful Guises

During this first French war of religion, the duke of Guisse was assassinated, and Huguenot leadership was able to rise to the occasion and negotiate a peace in 1570, winning the Huguenots religious freedoms within their territories, and the right to fortify their cities

In 1572, Catherine had been part of a Guises plot to assassinate a key Protestant leader, admiral Gaspard de Coligny

The royal family had become intermarried with Protestant nobility

When the plot failed Catherine feared that the king together with his Protestant allies would seek revenge against her

In desperation she convinced her second born son king Charles IX that a Huguenot coup was afoot and that only swift action could save the crown

On St. Bartholomew’s Day, August 24, 1572, Coligny and 3,000 Huguenots were ambushed in Paris and slaughtered

Within three days around 20,000 Huguenots were executed in attacks throughout France

This development changed the nature of the competition between Protestants and Catholics everywhere

Both sides now were convinced that they were engaged in an international war for survival and a fight to the death that justified all forms of cruelty

When Henry III, the third son of Catherine of Médicis, became king in 1574, he tried to steer a middle path between the Catholics and Protestants favoring the political survival of France over religious unity

In 1576, Henry III promised the Huguenots complete religious and civil freedom

In response to this move, the Guise-led Catholic League forced Henry III to reverse himself and he issued a new edict limiting Protestants to certain areas

By the mid-1580s the Catholic League became dominant in Paris with Spanish help

In 1588, Henry III launched a surprise attack on the League but failed

King Henry III had to flee Paris to save himself

Later news of the failure of the Spanish Armada in England emboldened the king to order the assassination of the duke and cardinal of Guise

These murders enraged the Catholic League and by 1589, Henry III was left with no choice but to ally himself with the Protestant leader, Henry of Navarre the Bourbon heir to the throne through his marriage to Henry III’s sister Marguerite

When a Jacobin friar assassinated Henry III later in 1589, it cleared the way for Henry of Navarre to become King Henry IV, and establish the Bourbon family on the throne of France

Now there was a real possibility that France would become a Protestant nation

King Phillip II of Spain and Pope Sixtus V sent troops to support the Catholic League and the claim the throne through Henry II’s granddaughter Isabella, a Catholic

The threat of Spanish intervention rallied the French to the support of Henry IV and strengthened his hold on the crown

In the face of this support, eventually Henry IV concluded that since most of his subjects were Catholic, he could best rule as a Catholic, committed to protecting Protestants

In 1593 he embraced Catholicism to the dismay of the Huguenots

Nevertheless, this move brought about an end to the fighting

On April 13, 1598 Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes to end the war of religion

The edict confirmed the promise of toleration within the context of an officially Catholic nation

It created a state within a state as it designated where Huguenots could openly worship, hold public offices, enter universities, and maintain forts

Nantes may have established some stability, but it was ultimately more of a truce than an end to the fighting

In May 1610, Henry IV was assassinated by a fanatical supporter of Catholicism

Spain and the Religious Wars

Phillip II of Spain, had inherited the western parts of the Habsburg lands from his father Charles V

Spain was intensely Catholic and militarily supreme in Europe at the time

The wealth of the New World gave Philip II money to fight wars and to plan international plots and intrigues

At the start of his reign, Philip II focused his attention on a struggle with the Turks in the Mediterranean

During the 1560s the Turks had expanded deep into southeast Europe and throughout the Mediterranean

Phillip II, along with his noble kinsmen fought against the Moors in Granada and countered the Turks on the Mediterranean

In 1571 they secured a clear victory at sea against the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto where 30,000 Turks were killed and 1/3 of the Turkish fleet was destroyed or captured

The Mediterranean belonged to Spain at that point

Phillip II also annexed Portugal, bringing the Portuguese American and Asian empire under Spanish authority

However, it was a revolt in the Netherlands, the richest district in Europe, that brought in motion a chain of events that began to unravel Spain’s ambitions for a global empire

The Netherlands was governed by Philip’s half sister Margaret of Parma, and she was assisted by a council headed by Cardinal Granvelle

Granvelle sought to stem the spread of Protestantism in the Netherlands by promoting reform in the church

He also sought to reduce autonomy and centralize authority through the royal offices in Madrid

The merchant towns of the Netherlands had become accustomed to their independence, and many had become strongholds of Calvinism

Two members of the council led by Ganvelle, the Count of Egmont and William of Nassau, the Prince of Orange, opposed their Spanish overlords

Orange placed political autonomy over religious creeds

He was a Catholic married to a Lutheran Princess of Saxony, but he converted to Lutheranism in 1567

After the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572, he converted to Calvinism

When Granvelle began to tighten the Catholic and Spanish hierarchy over the Netherlands, Orange and Egmont with the support of the Dutch nobility succeeded in getting Granvelle removed from office

When Granvelle’s replacements proved inept and weak, popular unrest began to grow

Philip II insisted that the decrees of the Council of Trent be enforced throughout the Netherlands and opposition materialized under the leadership of William of Orange’s younger brother Louis of Nassau whop was a Lutheran

Calvinist nobility and townspeople joined Louis in a solemn pledge against Trent and the Inquisition

When the protestors were characterized as lowly beggars, they called for help from the French Huguenots and the German Lutherans

Full-scale rebellion was about to erupt

Unfortunately, the Protestant nobility became repelled by the behavior of Calvinist extremists and refused to join the rebellion

Philip II sent the duke of Alba of Spain to restore order in the Netherlands

10,000 soldiers were sent to the Netherlands

And a special tribunal, the Council of Troubles, was established as a basis for a new government

A reign of terror ensued

Egmont and other heretics were executed and high taxes were imposed to force the Netherlands to pay the costs for the suppression of the revolt

Tens of thousands of refugees fled the low countries

William of Orange had escaped into exile in Germany, and he emerged as a leader of the resistance, independence, and religious liberty movement

The northern territories of the low countries was his base of support

The uprising in the Netherlands was a true popular revolt in that all kinds of people were involved

In 1572 various seaports were captured by the insurgents

In 1574, the people of Leiden withstood a long Spanish siege and flooded their own country to get rid of their enemies

When the Spanish commander died in 1576, Spanish forces ran amok in Antwerp killing 7,000 people

This event did the most to unify all the Netherlands, Protestant and Catholic, against the Spanish and brought about the Pacification of Ghent in November 1576 resolving the religious differences like the Peace of Augsburg

For 2 more years the Spanish faced a unified and determined Netherlands

In 1577, after a humiliating defeat, the Spanish commander signed an edict promising the removal of all Spanish troops from the Netherlands

However, the Spanish denounced their agreement and reestablished Spanish control of the southern territories

The northern territories organized an independent Union of Utrecht

When Phillip II declared William of Orange an outlaw and placed a bounty on his head, resistance in the north stiffened

William then denounced Phillip II as a tyrant whom the Netherlands no longer obeyed

In July of 1581 the northern provinces followed suit and repudiated Philips authority

By the time William of Orange was assassinated in 1584, the Spanish had become overextended by meddling in the affairs of France and England

Spanish power waned dramatically after the defeat of the Armada in 1588

By 1593, the northern provinces had driven out all Spanish soldiers, and France and England recognized the independence of those provinces in 1596

England and Spain

When young Edward VI died in 1553, Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon became the queen of England

As a Catholic, she sought to restore Catholicism to England

Bloody Mary

She had the Parliament repeal the Protestant statutes and executed Protestant leaders burning them at the stake

Many Protestant leaders escaped death by going into exile in Germany and Switzerland and waited for a time to launch a Protestant counteroffensive

Mary was married to Prince Phillip (II) of Spain because of his staunch defense of Catholicism and his power as the heir to the Spanish crown

Mary died childless and the crown was then passed to her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth

Elizabeth would prove to be the most astute politician of the 16th century as she navigated the dangerous shoals of religious conflict to create a strong centralized nation

Most of Elizbeth’s subjects were Catholics when she came to the throne

Many Catholics wished for Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, to take the throne

She had a claim to the throne through her grandmother, sister of Henry VIII

Elizabeth also had to deal with Calvinist Puritans who wanted to purify or reform the Church of England

Puritans were opposed to the retention of Catholic ceremony and the continuation of the episcopal system of church governance and made the crown in the role of the pope

More extreme Puritans, the Congregationalists, or Separatists, wanted every congregation to be separate and autonomous with a law unto itself and neither episcopal nor presbyterian control

Nevertheless, Elizabeth ceded nothing that lessened the hierarchical unity of the Church of England and her control over it

The Conventicle Act of 1593 gave separatists the option of conformity or face exile or death

Events eventually led to war between England and Spain

When the Spanish sent troops to the Netherlands in 1567 it was feared that the Spanish intended to use the Netherlands as a base from which to attack England

In 1570 Pope Pius V branded Elizabeth a heretic and pressed for a military expedition to restore Catholicism in England

After the Spanish victory at Lepanto in 1571, Elizabeth sought an defensive alliance with France and throughout the 1570 English privateers attacked the Spanish on the high seas

After the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, Elizabeth openly supported the Protestant cause in the Netherlands and France

This of course drew the ire of the Spanish, but it was the execution of Mary Queen of Scots that brought about war between the English and the Spanish

Mary was the daughter of King James V of Scotland and Mary of Guise in France

She had resided in France since the age of 6 in preparation to be the future wife of Francis II

However, when Francis II died at a young age, Mary was sent back to Scotland in 1561

Before her arrival, Protestantism had become established in Scotland

Mary, a Catholic, did not sympathize with Protestantism, and she practiced her religion despite it being a capital offense in Scottish law at the time

In 1568, Mary became involved in a scandal revolving around her marriage to a young noble with connections to the royal houses of England and Scotland

As her husband Lord Darnley became insufferable, Mary took a lover, the earl of Bothwell, and allegedly had Darnley murdered

When Bothwell married Mary, the Protestants were outraged and forced Mary to abdicate in favor of her infant son (James)

She then sought refuge in England

Elizabeth distrusted Mary because English Catholics contended that Mary had a greater claim to the throne than Elizabeth

Elizabeth therefore held Mary under house arrest for 19 years

When English authorities discovered Mary’s involvement in plots and schemes to unseat Elizabeth, Elizabeth decided that she had no choice but to execute Mary

She was beheaded in February (18) 1587

This execution destroyed the hope of English Catholics that there could be a bloodless reconversion of England

And it persuaded Phillip II that the time had come for a military assault on England

On May 30, 1588, an armada of 130 ships with 25,000 sailors and soldiers threatened England

While this fleet was waiting to rendezvous with transports from the Netherlands a storm blew up and helped the English and Dutch ships scatter the Spanish ships

Protestant Wind

Spain never recovered from this defeat and by the time of Phillip II’s death in 1598, the armies of Spain had suffered defeats on all fronts

These defeats allowed the French to ascend to the leading continental power and the Dutch and the English to begin nibbling away at Spain’s global empire

When Elizabeth died in 1603, she left behind a stronger nation on the brink of the beginnings of a global empire

The 30 Years War

Although the 30 Years War had many causes, most stemmed from a fear of the unification of Germany

The Council of Trent raised Protestant suspicions of the use of a unified Holy Roman Empire to restore Catholic dominance throughout Europe

The imperial diet (Reichstag) controlled by German magnates was wary of any attempts to consolidate the empire at the expense of the liberties of the territorial princes

The diet countered every more by the emperor to consolidate his authority in the empire

And the German princes called upon allies outside of Germany to help defend their rights

Allies were eager to help to maintain a divided Germany

Even Catholic states wanted to keep the Holy Roman Empire divided

By 1600 there were slightly more Protestants than Catholics in the empire

Although the Peace of Augsburg was supposed to freeze Lutherans and Catholics in place throughout the empire, Lutherans and Catholics had gained territories at the expense of one another

Lutherans were more successful in gaining the right to worship in Catholic territories than the other way around

These Protestant enclaves became a constant source of tension

Protestants were reluctant to follow provisions in the Peace of Augsburg, such as those requiring the return of property to the church

Not only did Protestants and Catholics square off during this time

Various factions and branches of Protestants were also opposed to one another, and Calvinists were opposed to all the above

Calvinism was not recognized in the Peace of Augsburg

But it gained a foothold in the empire when Frederick III, Elector Palatine made it the official religion of his province

His royal city of Heidelberg became a German Geneva and a staging area for the Calvinist penetration into the empire

The bold missionary forays of Calvinists in the empire threatened to undo the Peace of Augsburg

Jesuits also undermined the Peace of Augsburg

Jesuit missionaries operating from Bavaria returned some major Protestant (Strasbourg) cities back into the Catholic fold

In 1609 a Catholic League was organized to counter a Protestant alliance.

The army formed by the league tipped Germany into war

There are four periods of the 30 Years War

The Bohemian Period (1618-1625)

War broke out in Bohemia in 1618 when a Jesuit educated Habsburg archduke (Ferdinand II) ascended to the throne and was determined to restore Catholicism to the region

As king of Bohemia, he revoked the religious freedoms of Protestants and protests broke out

When Ferdinand (II) became the Holy Roman Emperor in 1619, the Bohemians refused to accept his authority and declared their allegiance to the Calvinist Elector Palatine, Frederick V

The Bohemian revolt escalated into an international war

Spain, Maximilian of Bavaria, and the Lutheran Elector John George I of Saxony jumped at the chance to side with Ferdinand II and to expand at the expense of Calvinist defender Frederick V

Frederick V’s troops were defeated in 1620 and by 1622 Ferdinand II had subdued Bohemia and conquered the Palatinate

As Frederick V’s army retreated north, Maximilian of Bavaria flowed claiming lands as he went

The Danish Period (1625-1629)

Maximilian’s expansion into northwestern Germany raised fears of a Catholic consolidation of the empire

Urged by the English, French, and Dutch, the Lutheran king of Denmark and the duke of Holstein undertook the defense of Protestantism

Fearing Maximilian’s growing power, Emperor Ferdinand II commissioned Albrecht of Wallenstein to take over the war against the Protestants

Wallenstein broke the back of Protestant resistance and Ferdinand was able to issue an edict outlawing Calvinism and ordered all former church lands returned to the church

This edict struck fear and panic in the hearts of the Habsburgs opponents and encouraged more resistance

The Swedish Period (1630-1635)

Lutheran Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden then took up the defense of Protestantism

He was supported by the Catholic Cardinal Richelieu and the French crown, and the Dutch

With this support the Swedish king won a stunning victory in 1630 and reversed the course of the war

However, the war was not ended

The Protestant cause stalled when king Gustavus Adolphus was killed in 1632 and the German Protestant states reached a compromise agreement with Ferdinand

However, when the Swedes refused to join in the compromise, hostilities resumed

The Swedish-French Period (1635-1648)

The French openly entered the war in 1635 and prolonged it for thirteen more years

French, Swedish and Spanish forces looted the breadth of Germany, and the Germans were to disunited to do anything about it

By the time peace talks began in 1644, 1/3 of the German population had died

The Treaty of Westphalia, 1648

The treaty ended hostilities by ensuring the continued fragmentation of Germany

The territorial principle of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 was reasserted to confirm rulers in their right to determine their subjects religion

Calvinism was added to the list of religious options

And the German princes were acknowledged supreme over their principalities

Bavaria was elevated to the rank of an elector state

Brandenburg-Prussia emerged as the most powerful north German principality

The independence of Switzerland and Holland were proclaimed in law

And France acquired considerable territory

War between France and Spain continued until 1659 when France defeated Spain

Germany’s fragmentation and Spain’s defeat left France as the dominant power in Europe

The competitive nationalisms of the modern world are rooted in these religious conflicts of the 16th and 17th centuries

The treaty laid the groundwork for the international system organized based on sovereignty, by virtue of which each political entity is recognized as being sovereign within its borders. This model gave rise to the concept of the modern state, which holds the monopoly of legitimate violence over its territory and relies on a national army to ensure its border security