



## Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517-1648 (The Penguin History of Europe)

By Mark Greengrass

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**A remarkable new volume in the critically acclaimed Penguin History of Europe series**

From peasants to princes, no one was untouched by the spiritual and intellectual upheaval of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther's challenge to church authority forced Christians to examine their beliefs in ways that shook the foundations of their religion. The subsequent divisions, fed by dynastic rivalries and military changes, fundamentally altered the relations between ruler and ruled. Geographical and scientific discoveries challenged the unity of Christendom as a belief community. Europe, with all its divisions, emerged instead as a geographical projection. Chronicling these dramatic changes, Thomas More, Shakespeare, Montaigne, and Cervantes created works that continue to resonate with us.

Spanning the years 1517 to 1648, *Christendom Destroyed* is Mark Greengrass's magnum opus: a rich tapestry that fosters a deeper understanding of Europe's identity today.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

#### **An Economist and Financial Times Book of the Year**

“A magisterial account of the birth of modern Europe, from the Reformation, which broke the dominance of the Roman Catholic church, to the Peace of Westphalia, which entrenched the idea of the nation-state.”—*The Economist*

“A masterly synthesis of depth and breadth.... Mr. Greengrass is adept at material and environmental history.... ‘Christendom Destroyed’ captures a great deal of truth about the wrenching transitions of the early modern age.... with admirable clarity and a notable lack of condescension.”—*Wall Street Journal*

“An immensely well-informed, informative and engaging account of the disintegration of “Christendom’s universalism.”—**Glen C. Altschuler, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

“Any student of European history will find this a solid, close survey and a 'must' for understanding social and religious change.”—*Midwest Book Review*

“An absorbing and enlightening book that explains much about the emergence of modern Europe.”—*Booklist*

“It is Mark Greengrass’ achievement to have imposed upon his subject a sense of order which draws the reader along.... He may be commended, too, for having written a book which, by illustrating human situations and predicaments, places men and women centre stage, while recognising the importance of ideas and their influence upon the world of the time. It is characteristics such as these which earn the book the five stars which it surely deserves.”—**Christopher Allmand, The Tablet**

“Like its fellow volumes in the Penguin History of Europe, Greengrass’s book is a model of scholarly dedication.... Nothing escapes Greengrass’s fascinated gaze, from the new foods that came to Europe from the Americas, such as pumpkins, pineapples and potatoes, to the extraordinary politics of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, arguably Europe’s first constitutional monarchy. Almost every page has a memorable nugget.”—**Dominic Sandbrook, The Sunday Times (UK)**

“[Mark Greengrass] writes with clarity and vigour, in a highly engaging style, and his book is as full of fascinating nuggets as it is of wise judgements.... Mark Greengrass succeeds brilliantly in bringing to life a vanished world that is consistently strange and surprising—and sometimes disturbing and repellent—even as he encourages us to recognise the ways in which it prefigures our own.”—**Peter Marshall, Literary Review (UK)**

“[*Christendom Destroyed*] offers insight into the extraordinary turmoil that the average European endured in an era typically described through reverent admiration for art, architecture, and intellectual development. Using the histories of well-chosen cities and countries as examples for each discussion, Greengrass reveals that it was ‘curiosity [that] destroyed Christendom.’”—*Publisher’s Weekly*

“Greengrass reaches deeply behind the early myth of a united Europe.... A tour de force of scholarship that

begins with a gradual and accessible buildup and then descends, like the century, into a convulsion of dynastic entanglements.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

“Christendom Destroyed is a magnificent achievement. Engagingly written, remarkably comprehensive in scope, impeccable in its scholarship, it should find a wide readership which will be rewarded with a new understanding of one of the most decisive eras in European history. There are insights on every page. Mark Greengrass brings his deep learning and light touch to a period that now bears the mark of his strong and convincing interpretation.”—**Robert A. Schneider, Professor of History, Indiana University**

“Mark Greengrass is a leading authority on early modern Europe, and he’s written an extraordinary book, one that combines learning, imagination, and insight. It explores the full range of the European experience in these years, with attention to all social classes and regions, and to Europe’s interactions with other continents. This is history that takes seriously our twenty-first century questions about what Europe is and where it fits in the larger world.”—**Jonathan Dewald, University at Buffalo, State University of New York**

“Composed in four countries (three of them in the European Union), Mark Greengrass’s contribution to this series offers an unusually wide-angled panorama of European history from Luther to the Peace of Westphalia, seasoned with a plethora of richly-illustrative and often unfamiliar illustrations. While some centripetal concepts vanished in this era, an emergent Europe composed of composite states acquired decisive global advantages through scientific breakthroughs and overseas empires.”—**William Monter, Professor of History, Northwestern University**

#### About the Author

**Mark Greengrass** is a professor emeritus of early modern history at the University of Sheffield. He is an awardwinning historian, noted for his work on France and the Reformation. He lives and works in Paris, with affiliations to the University of Paris-IV (Centre Roland Mousnier).

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### *Introduction*

David de Vries was proud of having seen the world. The travel account which he published in his native Dutch in 1655 recounted the six voyages which had taken him to the Mediterranean, the Far East, Newfoundland, the Caribbean, and South and North America. Born in La Rochelle to Dutch parents in 1593, he became a trained artillery master, fluent in several European languages, a skilled navigator, a shrewd man of business, an autodidact with an observant eye. It was not his fault that his colonial enterprises – on the ‘South’ (Delaware) river (1633), Oyapock river in Guyana (1634) and Staten Island (1638–43) – all failed. Sponsors let him down, the local populations were difficult to manage, and competing ventures were hostile. De Vries knew where his loyalties lay. His homeland was in the Low Countries, the town of Hoorn his *patria*. If he had succeeded in establishing a colonial ‘patroonship’, he would have modelled it on the estates of the landed gentry of Holland as a part of the ‘New Netherland’ to which he often referred. He was a Calvinist Protestant who had a hand in building the first Christian church on Staten Island. De Vries understood Europe in a wider world. Landing at St John’s, Newfoundland in 1620, after marvelling at the

monumental icebergs he saw en route, he recounted the Dutch, Basque, Portuguese and English vessels that he had met, fishing and trading in those waters. With an eye already acclimatized by his reading of other travelogues, he accommodated himself to local Indian customs. Visiting the governor of the new English colonies along the James river in 1640, he was welcomed with a glass of Venetian wine and sat down with another English colonist who had also been in the East Indies in the late 1620s. ‘I looked at him well, and he at me,’ says de Vries. And he heard the colonist say ‘that mountains could not meet one another, but men who go and see the world can’.

By their clothes, their food and their demeanour, these were Europeans, aware that they were on another continent, having (as de Vries said) ‘steered the earth’s four corners’. De Vries’s career reflected the wider geographical horizons of his generation, the possibilities and challenges which they opened up, an extraordinary pluralism of contact and communication that challenged old loyalties and senses of belonging. This new sense of Europe as a geographical entity, fashioned in a reflection of the wider world, would not have existed a century before. This eclipse of the older notion of ‘Christendom’ by ‘Europe’ in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the extraordinary changes that went with it, is the subject of this book.

Christendom conjures up – like Camelot – an imagined past. In the Middle Ages, the Latin terms for Christendom (*Christianitas* or *Corpus Christianorum*) delineated something else: an imagined present and future for a world united by its beliefs and aspirations. That belief-community emerged along with the fall of the Roman empire in the west. The Christianity that took root amid what remained of that empire was initially only the western fringe of a much wider Christian world whose heartland lay further east, towards the Middle East and in the still-active eastern (Byzantine) Roman empire. Gradually, however, and by a process of mutual estrangement, eastern and western Christianity drew apart until, in 1054, the pope in Rome and the patriarch in Constantinople mutually excommunicated one other. Following that big divide, Latin Christians were henceforth separated from Orthodox Christians in the Greek archipelago, the Balkans and Russia to form western Christendom.

In the first millennium of western Christianity, Christendom developed without any elaborate notion of where its centre lay, and therefore where its peripheries were to be found. It existed (to borrow the phrases of a distinguished medievalist) as a series of ‘micro-Christendoms’ held together like a ‘geodesic dome’, composed of self-contained segments. The traffic of ‘symbolic goods’ (holy relics, but also holy people, such as missionaries and saints) carried the charisma of holy power from one place to another and, with it, the values and aspirations of the belief-community from one segment to another. Then, in the Central Middle Ages, and following the rupture with the East, western Christendom developed a more elaborate sense of centre and periphery with the full emergence of two geographical and ideological units: the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Their claims to authority were forged competitively by theologians, lawyers, political theorists and intellectuals in an atmosphere of confident universalism. That ideal was supported by the economic transformations of the period, the impressive growth of markets and inter-regional and international trade, and by the marriages and diplomatic alliances of the aristocracy. ‘Christendom’ was how learned contemporaries in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries understood the world of Latin Christians in western Europe.

The Roman Catholic Church was the central pillar of the belief-community in Latin Christianity. The intellectual élites of the latter were formed around an international language (Latin, as opposed to Greek) as well as a common curriculum (centred in matters of philosophy and logic on the works of Aristotle) and ways of study (scholasticism). Papal envoys shared with princely advisers common theocratic and bureaucratic conceptions of how power was derived, exercised and legitimated. The Crusades became western Christendom’s most ambitious project. Above all, Latin Christianity was expressed in inherited and practised beliefs, mapped onto that pre-existent multi-dimensional sacred landscape of shrines, pilgrimage sites, saint cults and festivals. Baptism was a universal rite of initiation. Those who were not baptized

Christians (Jews, Muslims) were a significant presence in western Christendom's margins in the Central Middle Ages, tolerated precisely because they were *not* part of the belief-community. But, as Christian kingdoms pushed the frontiers of Latin Christianity southwards in Spain and southern Italy, their significance as exemplifying alien forces from those who did not belong to Christendom seemed to increase.

Christendom was a reflexive construction that felt easily threatened. In reality, its most dangerous enemy was not non-Christians. Its power-brokers were most vulnerable from a different and disparate constituency – from those with particular, local loyalties to whom the overarching aspirations of Christendom meant little or nothing. Across the landmass of western Europe, over and against the mechanisms of the universal order of the Holy Roman Empire (the dominion located in central Europe whose title indicated its claims to continuity with the Roman empire and a temporal form of universal dominion) and Church lay thousands of villages and parishes, their inhabitants often carrying burdens of obligation to their manorial lords which made them serfs. These communities were joined by towns, benefiting from the economic transformations of the Central Middle Ages. Suspicions were fostered towards the cosmopolitan ambitions and bureaucracy of the international order. The more the sense of centre and periphery within Christendom was enhanced, the more people locally begrudged the time spent in getting permissions from above. Many resented the levies to sustain the universal Church and mistrusted the overblown supranational project of the Crusades. These sentiments spilled over into contentiousness, or heresy – the latter being a serious epidemic problem – and still more threatening in the minds of those to whom the ideals projected by Christendom mattered most – from the twelfth century onwards.

The confidence in these ideals waned as the European economy contracted in the wake of the Black Death. Serfdom and manorial obligations became matters of contention as local people asserted what they claimed were their customary rights. Although the beliefs and practices which Christendom had represented continued, and its sacred landscape flourished as never before, its local credibility diminished as it became the object of competing claims to represent a traditional social order. The Great Schism (1378–1417), too, undermined the claims to universal obedience. The existence of two lines of popes divided Christians between those loyal to Rome, and those supporting the Avignonese papacy, stigmatized by its enemies as a puppet in the hands of a disruptive French monarchy. The dispute ended in a compromise, but its legacy was lasting damage to the moral authority of the papacy. It also pointed up the dangers of an alliance between discontented localism and the new forces of secular, but non-imperial, authority. For the compromise was achieved through the authority of an ecumenical council. A council sustained the assertion (troubling for theocrats and bureaucrats), already debated two centuries previously but now presented with greater force, that a council was superior to the pope. That proposition was a radical way of putting it, and most 'Conciliarists' were moderates. They saw a council as a neat way out of a mess, not an engine to destroy universal papal monarchy, and still less a way of deriving doctrinal authority via unorthodox ways. Yet that was what the implicit successor to the Conciliar Movement, the Protestant Reformation, achieved.

So the central issue in the history of Europe in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries was: what was to happen to Christendom – the institutions which defined its centres of gravity and, still more, the belief-community which underlay it? If Christendom was destroyed, what, if anything, was to take its place? The process was one of a progressive eclipse of Christendom by Europe (defined as a geographical notion in a relationship of distance with other parts of the world). The two entities differed fundamentally. Christendom claimed the loyalties of those who were baptized into the belief-community and who related to the outside world accordingly. Europe, on the other hand, claimed no unity beyond the geographical landmass that it represented and an emerging sense of the moral and civilizing superiority of the different states and peoples which occupied it. Western Christendom was a great project about European unity, over a millennium in the making. Its destruction, by contrast, was rapid and total. In little over a century, there was nothing left but the dream of it. Huge forces accomplished its destruction and transformed Europe. Their interaction with one another is the focus of the first chapter.

## 1. The Fall of Western Christendom

When Thomas Cockson published his engraving entitled *The Revells of Christendome* in the wake of the controversial truce between Catholic Spain and the newly emergent Dutch Republic in 1609, he drew on well-known satirical modes to make fun of Christendom. At the head of the table stands Pope Paul V with, to his left, other crowned heads of Europe (Henry IV of France, James I of England and King Christian IV of Denmark) facing us. Opposite, three Catholic monks play backgammon, dice and cards with them for the future of Europe. A dog urinates on the foot of one of them. The implication of the print was clear. The fate of Christendom was out of anyone's hands. It had become a joke. Many of the elements which contributed to the fall of western Christendom were already at work in Europe before 1500. But it was only when they were all in place, interacting with one another, that Christendom's eclipse became total.

### THE IMPACT OF THE RENAISSANCE

The revival of classical texts and ideas had begun well before 1517 in the urban cultures of northern Italy, Flanders and the Rhineland. It challenged scholasticism as the accepted way of defining the philosophical concerns of Europe's élites, and with it the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy. Humanist scholars saw it as their task to recover the texts of classical Antiquity in their purity, and to enter into a dialogue with the thought of those who wrote them, subjecting it to cross-examination and scrutiny. Humanist teachers emphasized 'persuasion', learning how to marshal and deploy arguments that would win other people over to one's point of view. Their pupils, brought up on a diet of Latin (especially Ciceronian) texts, absorbed a new language and set of preoccupations about the proper conduct of citizens. That led to different conceptions of the relationship between ruler and ruled, the political and the social, and a different universalism (the 'public') from that afforded by 'Christendom'.

The 'public' was the largest conceivable *universitas*, a fictive person in the eyes of Roman law, distinct from those who created it, an entity which could mimic a living person, take on rights and responsibilities, and delegate others to carry them out in its name. The *universitas* of a republic embodied the will of its members. There could be a pluralism of republics, some more virtual than others. The 'republic of letters', for example, took advantage of changing modes of communication and was energetically promoted by humanist scholars of the age. It also, however, reflected the history of Europe's 'intellectual capital', which was increasingly out of the hands of a small clerical and bureaucratic élite and vested in a more complex and cosmopolitan market of producers and consumers, in which patrons, printers, engravers, librarians and readers of varying sorts all had a stake. How that market functioned depended upon the local environment, which explains why the Renaissance had a variable intellectual and social geometry, its impact differing across Europe, the distinctive contours sharpened by religious divisions. One of its important components would be the princely courts, and the Renaissance readily migrated and transmuted into a court culture, adapting itself to their needs and aspirations. Like the great scientific discoveries of the twentieth century, the Renaissance had the power to transform, and to destroy. It could cement ecclesiastical and political authority but also undermine it. It could challenge fundamental ideas about God's providence in the world, and also reinforce them. Its new pedagogies introduced fresh ways of understanding how one learned about oneself, the world and its creator.

Humanist scholars discovered, among other things, that ancient philosophy had a history to it. To understand Aristotle you had to place him in the context of those whose thought he was engaging with. He ceased to be a unique authority upon which to construct truth and legitimacy. The process had begun with the editing, translating and popularization of the Greek text of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*. This provided a genealogy for the competing 'sects' of Greek philosophers, giving lustre to views which had been marginal in the Middle Ages. Contemporaries presented Aristotle to their students within this more complex lineage, and took the arguments and debates of the Greek world seriously. Some philosophers in the

sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were disciples of the Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists and Pyrrhonists. The result was that ancient philosophy ceased to be the handmaiden of Christian truth and the instrument by which a universal order could be constructed. That did not stop philosophers of the period seeking to discern an underlying set of truths. Some thought that, as in any genealogy, you could trace the line back to an ancestral primacy, of which all the descendants would contain perennial, genetic traces. Francesco Patrizi, for example, in his *New Philosophy of Universals* traced what Aristotle wrote, back through what Plato had told him, through Solon and Orpheus, to the Mosaic account of the creation of the world and the mysticism of the Egyptians, as hinted at in the works of Hermes Trismegistus (these latter, he said, contained more wisdom than ‘Aristotle’s philosophy entire’), written originally over 1,100 years before Plato. Others preferred to highlight the points of agreement between Plato and Aristotle as the signs of an underlying ‘symphony’ in ancient thought, despite the apparent disagreements.

Just as this syncretic agenda might have been consolidated, however, there emerged the radically sceptical voices of those who read the works of the Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus. He had used the disagreements among his fellow philosophers in Greece to disparage Aristotle’s and others’ efforts to attain the truth at all. If you took his works seriously (and some heavyweight thinkers of the period, notably the French magistrate Michel de Montaigne, did), then classical philosophy was full of error. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, the Martin Luther of sixteenth-century philosophy, wrote in his *Examination of the vain doctrines of the Gentiles* (1520): ‘the entire learning of the Gentiles [i.e. pagan Antiquity] totters with superstition, uncertainty and falsehood’. It would take the genius of the French philosopher René Descartes to build a universal philosophy, capable of supporting a new experientially based physics, on the foundations of such Pyrrhonism. But, by then, no one could seriously imagine Christendom being patched together on the basis of radical doubt.

Humanist geographers, physicians and natural philosophers shared an emerging sense of the importance of direct practical experience and the value of experiment. That changed the picture of the natural world. Europe’s geographical discoveries in the wider world contributed to the gathering perception that the natural world was a cornucopia of rich and rare phenomena, a treasure-store of secrets, waiting to be interpreted by those who held the key to decoding nature. Astrologers, alchemists, cosmographers, natural magicians and unorthodox practitioners of medicine rivalled one another to offer explanations as to how that immense variety in nature might be reducible to ordered, physical principles, or at least to demonstrate that it was conducive to empirical enquiry. Some of them sought these principles in forces higher than nature itself – magical power immanent in nature like a spirit hidden in earthly processes, or conveyed by celestial warmth and movement. They, too, like many philosophers, were vocal in their criticism of Aristotle, mainly on the grounds that his ideas about matter were too abstract. They enveloped their learning and insight in an aura of arcane mystery to protect them from their numerous critics and enhance their reputation for exceptional wisdom and power. But there was a contrary recognition that human knowledge had its limits, which implied that penetrating the secrets of nature could never be the work of a single individual. It had to be achieved through a collaborative effort of many enquirers, attentive to the practical aspects of knowledge and to the varying possibilities for its interpretation.

The impact of such changes upon the notion of Christendom was nowhere more profound than in cosmology. The Copernican heliocentric universe owed a great deal to the revival of alternative cosmologies from classical Antiquity which challenged the Aristotelian consensus. But, if the earth was simply another planet, revolving around the sun, then the universe became dramatically large in comparison to the earth – ‘immense’, as Copernicus conceded. That was because it was necessary to envisage an enormous distance between the orbit of Saturn and the sphere of the stars. Once the earth became one of the planets, all the processes of generation and corruption which had been explained by Aristotle as based on what happened in the natural world and on earth, could more plausibly be explained in terms of the influence of the sun, or the earth’s motion and position with respect to the sun and the other planets. Christendom was most

comfortable when it was cocooned within the concentric circles of a geocentric and anthropomorphic universe. Placed in a heliocentric universe, it ceased to be at the heart of the created order of things.

The brilliantly self-publicizing chemical physician Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim), the magician and astrologer John Dee, the theologian and cosmographer Giordano Bruno, the natural philosophers Francesco Patrizi and Galileo Galilei were among those who found themselves, in varying degrees, held in suspicion for heliocentric views by the remaining ‘gate-keepers’ of Christendom, the Inquisition and the papacy. In February 1600, Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome. A year later, the Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella was brutally tortured for forty hours in the Castel Nuovo in Naples for his involvement in a popular rebellion. He spent the next quarter of a century a prisoner there, raging against the ‘infected roots’ of pagan Aristotelian philosophy. He dreamed of a radical transformation of a world in which he now no longer truly belonged. The problem for radical thinkers in this period was that the circumstances of the moment, as well as the accident of where they happened to live, determined in what ways and how their ideas came to be seen as challenging – which is why there was no ‘end’ to the Renaissance, but rather a continuing renegotiation of its potential for demolishing old certainties in new contexts.

## THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

At the heart of the movement for religious change was the Protestant Reformation, a rift in Roman Christianity as spectacular and as permanent as that which had occurred between the eastern and western Churches in the eleventh century. What made it the more painfully complicated was that western Christianity splintered violently. Martin Luther became convinced that Christendom was going to wrack and ruin because of the ‘louts and whores’ in Rome. In May 1520, a Leipzig Franciscan, Augustin Alved, published a pamphlet in German defending the proposition that the pope in Rome had authority over Christendom by divine right. Luther replied to ‘the ass of Leipzig’ and his ‘rotten arguments’ saying that the pope and his ‘Romanists’ had turned the papacy into the ‘scarlet whore of Babylon’, and that this papal Antichrist was at the heart of Christendom’s woes. By then, his study of Scripture and Church history had led him to a contentious sense of what God’s truth was, and how it was proved. ‘By faith alone’ (*sola fide*) was Luther’s redefinition, and ‘Scripture alone’ (*sola scriptura*) was his way of validating it. Papal authority was human, and not divine, in origin, and ultimate authority rested not with popes or councils or church fathers, but with the Bible. That was the way by which Luther claimed that Christianity could return to its roots – the gospel of Christ. The Bible was the record of God’s promise to mankind from the beginning of the world, renewed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ. Nothing was more ‘literally’ true than this promise since God himself is to be trusted in faith.

From this reductionist and stark truth-claim, so much else descended, including an irrecoverable breach with the Roman Church and a monumental Protestant division of theological opinion as to how literally it was to be taken. Luther used the term ‘Christendom’ interchangeably with ‘Church’ and ‘Christian community’. They all meant a virtual commonwealth, the communion of saints to which Christ referred when he said: ‘my kingdom is not of this world’. It was a ‘stinking lie’ to say that Christendom was in Rome, or anywhere else for that matter. The true Church had no external forms, no vestments, special prayers, bishops or buildings. The sacred landscape dramatically shrank. According to Luther, it was faith alone which makes true priests of all believers, and turns the world in which they happen to dwell into a Christian order.

Luther succeeded brilliantly in mobilizing pre-existing and disparate local resentments, especially in Germany, against the Roman Church. If the latter was the root of Christendom’s canker, then it was up to others to step in and remove the rot. Christian people should act like children whose parents had gone mad, or like an individual who, seeing a building on fire, has a public duty to raise the alarm and put the flames out. That, in particular, was the responsibility of kings, princes and nobles. Their job was to ‘prevent

blasphemy and the disgrace of the divine name'. Luther's purpose was to reinforce Christendom, not to destroy or replace it. But, by radically transposing the sources for authority and legitimization within Christendom, he opened the door to the decay of the united belief-community at its heart. In 1520, Luther was unequivocal. No universal authority was vested in anyone. The truth was that all Christians were members in equal standing in a Christian order, with one baptism, one gospel and one faith. These things alone created 'a spiritual and a Christian people'. There was no difference between laymen and priests, or between princes and people, in their status as Christians. Spectacularly reductive as that was, it begged more questions in practice than it resolved. How, in reality, should Christian people organize themselves? What should they do to provide themselves with suitable pastors, and what were the duties and responsibilities of the latter? How should people act if their pastors or rulers failed in their Christian duties? What was the role of the ruler in those circumstances? What should Christians do if the prince or magistrate failed to carry out his Christian responsibilities? To whom did it fall to declare and enforce a unity of true belief? Whose job was it to defend Christendom?

Beneath the theological divisions which opened up within the Protestant Reformation lay a transformation in the nature and manifestation of holy power. One of the most fundamental changes was in the relationship between ecclesiastical and state institutions. Luther and the other Protestant reformers ostensibly retained the bicephalous and notionally separate civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Christendom. In reality, however, the pressures of religious change altered the relationship, accentuating an uneasy friction between the two. While affecting to maintain the 'two regimes' of Church and state, Luther enlarged the scope of the latter and emasculated the former. That renegotiation of power contributed to a different sense of what religious truth was in Protestant Europe. It became a truth declared by God, as guaranteed by the Scriptures, embodied in creeds, statements to which people subscribed, and lived out in confessionally configured communities where the instruments of public authority structured and monitored people's lives and behaviours. Attenuated was the sense of humankind as a participant in God's work of redeeming his creation. God had established a world of nature in which the sins of humankind were a fact of life, to be regulated, controlled and limited. Those limits were policed by state power, itself constructed around a theo-political imagination in which God's power was the model of that of the state itself – both almighty and irresistible.

## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Where did that leave the Roman Church? It did not surrender its claims to be the spiritual leader of what was left of Christendom. But what that meant when Protestant Europe had rejected those claims remained to be decided. Initially, its efforts were concentrated in the heartland of Latin Europe. Although those efforts eventually produced a systematic rebuttal of Protestantism at the Council of Trent (1545–63), and became closely identified with the might of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy and its conflicts (especially those with the Ottomans), they never lost their ancestry in a spiritual and religious revival that re-engaged the Roman Church with the local roots from which Protestant rhetoric had sought to detach it. Catholic unity became expressed, like Protestantism, in confessional terms. Its organization remained theocratic and bureaucratic, although that reality was occluded by the renaissance of religious orders, both new foundations (Jesuits, Capuchins . . .) and the revival of older orders (Franciscans, Dominicans . . .), newly energized by the challenges confronting Christianity. That organizational unity became the basis for its polemic against Protestant theological divisions and what its defenders perceived as Protestant incoherence over the issue of authority.

Ultimately, the revival of the Roman Church was dependent on a renegotiation of the relationship between the Church hierarchy and local worshipping communities. At the heart of that renegotiation lay the objective of helping human beings to access holy power and redemption, while seeking to remove what the hierarchy regarded as the 'superstitious' excrescences introduced into the sacral landscape in earlier centuries or the residue of 'pagan' cults and beliefs among those recently converted to Christianity in the wider world. The

latter became the focus for the remarkable missionary and ecclesiastical endeavour in an emerging colonial ‘spiritual acreage’ overseas, through which the old-fashioned universal values of Christendom were refashioned into a global Christianity.

## THE SURVIVAL OF CHRISTENDOM

Both the champions of Reformation and the defenders of the old order believed, in fundamental ways, that they were protecting Christendom from destruction, proclaiming their truths as self-evident in a way that implied that it was only when they completely prevailed over the other that its defence would be complete. Christendom equally continued to mean something to ordinary folk. A devout citizen of Milan in 1565, brought up on the sermons of preachers who had emphasized the Ottoman threat towards Christianity, could pray that God keep his family ‘in perfect union and love, us and all of Christendom’. Contemporary travellers still wrote of ‘embarking for’, ‘arriving in’ or ‘departing out of’ Christendom. Very few of them, however, were bound for Jerusalem. Protestant reformers undermined pilgrimage to the Holy Places. To the English cleric Samuel Purchas, Jerusalem had migrated westwards: ‘Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life, has long since given the Bill of Divorce to ungrateful Asia where he was born, and of Africa, the place of his flight and refuge, and has come almost wholly over to Europe,’ he wrote in *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (1613), a collection of travel accounts, published to show the geographical diversity of God’s creation. Even for Catholics, a pilgrimage could be undertaken in the comfort of one’s own sitting room by reading one of the many published narratives which satisfied the desires of the curious as well as the pious.

When it suited, however, even the most ardent Protestant could also appeal to a sense that the peoples of Christendom were essentially one. Francis Bacon would not have followed Thomas More, his one-time predecessor as England’s chancellor, to the block for the belief that Christendom was a ‘common corps’, but he could still appeal to that same sense, advocating in 1617 the establishment of an international tribunal to adjudicate disputes between countries to prevent the ‘effusion of Christian blood’. The desire to ‘see Christendom reconciled’ was earnestly expressed by his contemporary Edwin Sandys in his *Europae Speculum* (1605). The sentiment was, as he wrote, in the process of being elevated to a political aspiration by his master, King James I. None of the successors of Erasmus invested quite so much history and meaning in the term *Christianitas* as he had, but they continued to see wars between its states as, in some sense, ‘civil wars’, and to find ways of living with religious diversity.

## THE WANING OF CRUSADE

Christendom seemed most afflicted in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the rising power of Islam on its southeastern and southern flanks. Ottoman military and naval power had been resurgent from the fall of Constantinople (1453). By 1520, the Ottoman empire had absorbed Greece, the Aegean archipelago, the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic in Bosnia, and established its overlordship in the Balkans. The Ottoman triumph over the Hungarian army at the battle of Mohács (1526) consolidated their influence in the central Hungarian plain and around the Carpathians, with Ottoman client-states in Transylvania and Moldavia. They thus created a long, exposed and vulnerable frontier with western Christianity, uncomfortably close to Vienna. By the death of Suleiman I in 1566, probably over 15 million people were under Ottoman rule, a great Eurasian land empire centred on Istanbul (Constantinople). Intelligent European observers admired the structure and magnificence of the Ottoman state and feared the discipline and scale of the Ottoman army. Istanbul itself became the showcase of empire, a great city of over a quarter of a million inhabitants by 1566, resplendent with the Great Bazaar, Imperial Palace (the *Topkapı Sarayı*), and mosques with their adjoining schools, hospitals and public baths.

The Ottomans also turned themselves into a naval power, establishing supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean lasting throughout the sixteenth century. The Ottoman conquest of Egypt and Syria (1517)

and the capture of Rhodes (1522) were the prelude to Ottoman attempts to establish their predominance over the African coast dominating the narrows in the middle of the Mediterranean. The Ottomans worked through intermediaries – Muslim pirates, licensed by the Ottoman state, and local governors, who were given military ranks. The seas off the southern Mediterranean coast remained hostile to European ships well into the seventeenth century.

Did this Ottoman expansion revive the myth of Crusade? Did the Mediterranean in the second half of the sixteenth century witness a seaborne ‘clash of civilizations’? The papacy often seemed more preoccupied by the Turkish Infidel than the Protestant heretic in the first half of the sixteenth century. The focus of its diplomatic initiatives was towards constructing a ‘Holy League’ against the Infidel, ultimately brought to fruition by Pope Pius V. Before the last two decades of the sixteenth century, the papacy put more of its resources into fighting the Ottomans than it did into combating Protestantism, drawing not only from its own coffers but also from the grant of indulgences from the faithful to others willing to take up the cause. Its rhetoric, too, echoed the mobilization for Crusade which had preoccupied its predecessors in the Middle Ages. For Emperor Charles V, as for his son Philip II, the Ottoman threat served as a *de facto* justification of their claims to princely pre-eminence. Anti-Ottoman mobilization remained the means by which Christendom was sustained through this period, despite the divisions at its heart.

The image of the Turkish Infidel certainly remained central to western Christian antagonism towards Islam, a latent anxiety that retained its capacity to crystallize fears and inspire loyalties, especially in those areas most directly exposed to Ottoman expansion. That antagonism was no longer expressed, however, in terms of a concrete project (the conquest of the Holy Land). ‘Crusade’ had mutated into ‘Holy War’, where the objective was a less defined and more defensive ‘protection’ of the Christian world from an aggressive enemy, ‘common’ to all. The most pervasive fear was that Christendom would be overwhelmed. In the wake of the attempted Ottoman conquest of Vienna (1529), the ambassador of Charles V there (Roberto Niño), who served as a Habsburg listening-post to the goings-on in the Ottoman world, reported on Suleiman the Magnificent’s naval preparations to invade Italy and march on Rome: ‘Soleiman dreams of that city and repeats endlessly: “To Rome, to Rome!”’, he said. In 1566, the Venetian cosmographer Jeronimo Ruscelli published a collection of emblems for contemporary rulers, each designed to reveal their secret ambitions. Suleiman was represented by four candlesticks, in which only one had a lit candle. Ruscelli’s interpretation of the device was straightforward: the four candles represented the continents of the world. The Ottomans already had a stake in three of them, and their appearance in the fourth (the newly discovered Americas) could not be long delayed. Suleiman’s design was to light the lamp of Islam in all four through the exercise of world empire.

The existence of Christian ‘renegades’, those who ‘turned Turk’ – much discussed in pamphlets of the time – was, for contemporaries, a further anxiety. They had not all done so as a result of force of circumstances. Had not those on the Aegean islands of Naxos and Scarpanto, for example, welcomed the Ottomans in the early years of the sixteenth century, as ‘liberators’ from Christian oppression? Had not the consolidation of Ottoman power on the Hungarian plain been assisted by tacit acceptance of their rule in a rural world that longed for an alleviation of the seigneurial burdens of Christian rule and the imposition of order, represented by Ottoman justice?

Yet the anxiety about being overrun by the Turks was interpreted in different ways by contemporaries. Desiderius Erasmus, for example, took the dangers of Ottoman expansion seriously, but initially argued that the only possible response was to strengthen Christendom by a reform from within. Later, however, in the wake of the Ottoman siege of Vienna (1529), he changed tack. Pointing the finger implicitly at Lutherans, he now said Christians had an individual and collective duty to come to arms in defence of those suffering on the front line. Luther, however, like the Protestant reformer in Geneva Jean Calvin in the next generation, interpreted the Ottoman threat as a warning sign from God about the urgent need for reform within, and

continued to resist the call to arms to the challenge from without.

For others, the traditional figure of the Turkish Infidel modulated in the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to a more complex, less religiously exclusive representation of the alien ‘other’, whose ‘barbary’ and ‘despotism’ were to be compared with those of the wider world in which Europeans increasingly understood themselves. In due course, the underlying conception of an enduring and permanent hostility between Christianity and the Ottoman empire gave way to a reluctant coexistence which gave the lie to anti-Turkish intransigence. Christendom decayed along with Crusade. Europe emerged, as in a mirror, reflected geographically and culturally in comparison not just with America, but also the Levant.

### THE HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR

In October 1520, Charles of Habsburg, duke of Burgundy and newly acceded to the thrones of Castile and Aragon, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor at Aachen. He processed through the huge bronze doors of the cathedral to an exquisitely choreographed ceremony. He was given the sword and ring of his predecessor and namesake Charlemagne, crowned with the imperial crown of Otto the Great, and entrusted with the imperial sceptre, orb and star-strewn mantle, as well as religious relics which included the holy lance which had pierced Christ’s side. These were the emblems of the sacral heritage of universal monarchy. The octagonal crown, like Aachen’s cathedral, recalled the heavenly Jerusalem. The orb represented the globe, and the star-covered mantle implied that he ruled over the cosmos as Christ’s secular vicar on earth, the protector of Christendom. Technically, however, he was ‘emperor-elect’, his title *Romanorum rex semper Augustus* until he was invested in a further coronation by the pope – empire and papacy being the twin pillars of Christendom. That event took place a decade later at Bologna on his thirtieth birthday in February 1530. Charles V was the last emperor in Europe on whose behalf these claims to universal monarchy were made, and about whom they would have any meaning. He was also the last emperor to be invested by the papacy and to be crowned at Aachen. By the time of his abdication in 1556, the Holy Roman Empire had ceased to be one of the twin pillars of Christendom. It had shrunk to become a Habsburg dynastic instrument, for use in German lands.

Charles V had won the dynastic jackpot. By the time he was twenty-five years of age, he had inherited claims to seventy-two separate dynastic titles, twenty-seven kingdoms, thirteen duchies, twenty-two counties and other seigneurial overlordships that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and over the New World. That meant that something approaching 28 million people owed him some kind of allegiance, or not far short of 40 per cent of western Europe. His chancellor, Mercurino Gattinara, reminded him: ‘God has been very merciful to you. He has raised you above all Kings and princes in Christendom to a power such as no sovereign has enjoyed since your ancestor Charlemagne. He has set you on the way towards a world monarchy, towards the uniting of all Christendom under a single shepherd.’ Gattinara set about constructing a credible image of the emperor as its secular leader.

Charles himself never seriously contemplated creating a unified, autonomous political realm, and rarely evoked the legacy of Charlemagne. Concerned to respect the rights and privileges of those who were the guardians of local identity, he almost invariably thought about universal rule only in terms of the guardianship of the faith. Yet his image-makers projected an amalgam of Christian and classical *imperium*, a reminder of the political implications of humanist powers of persuasion, especially when conjoined to new mechanical forms of reproduction and dissemination (typography, engravings, coins and medallions, tapestries). No political leader in medieval Christendom had been so deliberately fabricated, in so many different media, and to so many disparate audiences and objectives as Charles V. The Aachen coronation was the shape of things to come, detailed representations of the ceremony circulating in different languages with woodcuts, medallions and engravings of the emperor, his beard square and his hair long after the German fashion. A decade later, the engravings and woodcuts depicted a Roman emperor, his hair and beard

cut short, an impresario of military victory and imposer of peace upon Europe. The accounts of the procession reported his throwing the specially minted coins with the twin columns of the demigod emperor Hercules and Charles V's personal tag *Plus Ultra* ('Yet Further') upon them, crying '*Largesse! Largesse!*', the streets ringing out to the chant of '*Imperio! Imperio!*'

Even those sympathetic to Charles V's cause recognized that this vision had an increasingly slim chance of realization. The claim to be the guardian of Christendom was compromised when imperial troops ran rampage through Rome in 1527. The Protestant Reformation gave the lie to any vision of a united Christian *res publica* in Germany, still less in Europe. Charles V's military victories, like his diplomatic initiatives, increasingly reflected Habsburg dynastic imperatives. They had become a kind of indirect imperialism, universal monarchy being a back door to hegemony by a fortunate princely family. German princes, Protestant and Catholic alike, regarded Charles V's claims to sacral *imperium* as a threat to the liberties of the German nation. In Italy, where Charles V's dynastic inheritance included the kingdom of Naples and Sicily as well as a string of territories north of the Papal States, the claims to universal monarchy were the most vigorously projected, and the most seriously contested. Charles V's French opponent, Francis I, sought to undermine the imperial pretensions at every turn. French humanists responded with counter-projections of a providential, even messianic monarchy, whose destiny was to protect the liberties and privileges of Europe's political order against Habsburg dynastic hegemony.

## DYNASTIC PRINCES

If the emperor no longer protected Christendom, who did? Magistracy – the power of the sword – lay mainly in the hands of dynastic princes. Dynasticism (rulership based upon inheritance) was destined to be the dominant political order. Its attractiveness lay in legitimacy determined by descent. Especially when reinforced with claims to absolute authority, dynastic rule mobilized resources around the aristocratic and patrimonial world of princely courts. The introverted culture of favour and the competitive instincts inherent in their honour codes were the levers at the princes' disposition in the informal power structures that prevailed at princely courts. Dynasts readily understood and shared the selfish desires of those in their midst to have and to hold offices for themselves, their friends and their relatives. As a way of imposing political order, dynasticism was never more convincing than when it seemed to offer an alternative to the religious divisions and social disorder of the Post-Reformation. That said, the politico-religious violence that particularly marked the second half of the sixteenth century was concentrated in western Europe, which is also where state power was most precocious. The greatest acts of violence in the sixteenth century were either instigated by vulnerable dynasts, or they were strongly implicated in them. Dynastic monarchy was involved in the post-Reformation religious-based contentions which it then played a part in attenuating.

The dynastic state was reinforced, above all, because the ability to raise and deploy military power at increased distances grew significantly in this period. The power to levy taxes, and the confidence to survey, control and raise revenues from economic activities of all sorts, also changed, often dramatically. Above all, the authority to borrow money on the basis of this accretion of power altered the nature of state power in relation to other sorts of power in society. Europe's first generation of colonial endeavour would have been impossible without state backing. That sounds like a ringing endorsement for the older picture of this period as the rise of the 'modern state'. In reality, it was something rather different. Beyond the officials, the tax-farms, the military muster-rolls and colonial courts, the collective imagination was of a Christian commonwealth, with a moral relationship between ruler and ruled. For practical purposes, state administrative mechanisms were local, distributive and weak. At the centre, state power was too readily the focus for court rivalry, faction and division. At the locality it still often lay in the hands of power-brokers, aristocratic grandes and their clients. Behind the forward-looking statesmen and women of this period it is difficult to detect a coherent vision of an ordering state, demanding the obedience and loyalty of all its citizens. Far easier is to discover their games of disgracing their opponents and monopolizing authority in

their own hands. When it came to summoning the loyalty and obedience of their subjects, early-modern non-military power was principally ‘performative’, the projection of power being a contrived ventriloquism for the benefit of a public gallery. Europe’s enduring localism, which had been the weak link in Christendom, became in turn the Achilles heel of the dynastic state.

That was because dynasticism obeyed the logic of genealogy and the accidents of birth and death. It disregarded local cultural identities and cut across privileges and jurisdictions. Its composite states created implausible units with different legal and religious traditions, especially vulnerable to the confessional divisions of the post-Reformation world. The competitive instincts at the heart of dynasticism destroyed the possibilities for cooperation around an ideal. Internationally, it was a perpetual force for instability and warfare. The capacity of Europe’s dynasts to mobilize power came at an escalating price of destructive internal conflict. Eurasian power structures, with which Europe’s dynasts were now in competition, did not have to pay anything like the same price. A succession of regional tornadoes of conflict sapped Christendom’s capacity to devote resources and energy to its colonial expansion. Indeed, the reverse occurred. The wealth of the New World financed the dynastic ambitions of the Old which, in due course, generated the maelstrom which afflicted Europe in the Thirty Years War (1618–48). By contrast, aristocrats, sometimes in league with representative institutions, were often better placed to understand and reflect local wishes, and to exploit the attachment to provincial institutions and customs against the centralizing aspirations of dynastic princes.

The fundamental problem was that the loyalties created by dynasticism were inherently weak. If dynastic states succeeded in aligning themselves with the stronger identities of religious truth or *patria* it was largely fortuitous. More generally, they had to accept the limits to the extent of political integration which was possible under their rule – and, with it, the perpetual swirl of factions, lobbies and networks of their court, and the reality of local autonomy, most evidently in the governing of Europe’s peripheries and colonies. The attempt to build wider loyalties around the strengthening of dynastic absolute monarchy tended to expose how barren such claims were underneath. The dynastic state lacked a convincing ideology. Its political model had nothing to say about that essential part of the Christian commonwealth, the reinforcement of the public good and the right relation between political authority and the people. In the context of the Protestant Reformation those ideals broadened into an understanding that people were answerable first and foremost to God for what they did. The resulting invitations – to contribute to the public good and do God’s will on earth – altered the ground rules governing the conduct of politics in the later sixteenth century, not least because they were readily adapted to the new forces of pluralized information diffusion in the transformation of public media in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The result brought different models of political association and engagement, and at all sorts of levels. It was not just in small, distinctive and somewhat vulnerable independent cities and republics that godly and well-meaning notables became convinced that they had a stake and a role in making decisions that were too important to be left entirely in the hands of rulers. Dynastic states had little by way of a reply to the demands of those who expected to be involved in the destiny of the state. The tension between ruler and ruled was fundamental in post-Reformation politics.

## CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTHS AND POST-REFORMATION RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Humanists had popularized the notion of a ‘commonwealth’ (*res publica*). Any form of legitimate rulership could be a commonwealth. That was important, since the public face of the governing entities of the European landmass was varied. Besides the Holy Roman Empire and dynastic rulers, there were also elective monarchies, city-states and republics. Christian commonwealths were legitimated by the relationship between rulers and ruled, a mutual obligation in which the obedience of the people was natural and divinely ordained, but made right by the commitment of the Christian prince or ‘magistrate’ to obey God’s laws and to rule justly in the interests of the people. A ruler who did none of those things was a tyrant. The role of the

Christian magistrate was to defend right religion, dispense justice and promote peace. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the fundamental problem was how to square the conflicting objectives created for political rulers by religious pluralism. If they did not defend right religion, that seemed to threaten the *raison d'être* and unity of the Christian commonwealth. To do so, however, ran the risk of the commonwealth being pulled apart by religious divisions, destroying the values of concord, peace and harmony which were equally fundamental to its existence. An unanswerable conundrum confronted rulers, especially in the middle latitudes of the European landmass, where religious loyalties were mostly in doubt through to 1648. That region was where the risks of sectarian violence were greatest, and where religious-related tensions spilled over into every aspect of public and private life. Unpredictable and polymorphous, those tensions infected other, existing divisions. They manifested themselves at all social levels and proved exceptionally difficult for magistrates in a Christian commonwealth to manage. Religious divisions compromised rulers by making them a party to the conflict on one side or another. They strained the mutual obligation (and trust) between rulers and the people.

The justification for Christendom had been that it provided a set of ideals and institutions by which to encourage and realize peace within the belief-community. In the post-Reformation world, conflict over religious beliefs lay where once had been the focus for Christendom's unity. What had been a means of reconciliation now became an instrument for discord. The world grew more dangerous and divided as a new jagged-edged set of frontiers of faith emerged. Unlike the previous frontiers of Christendom, these were not at the periphery of the belief-community, facing the outside world, but in the midst of it. The new frontiers of faith divided varieties of Protestantism to the north and Catholicism to the south, setting Christian commonwealths at each other's throats, and sharpening divisions in people's minds as conflicting religious identities emerged from the oppositional processes of the Reformation itself.

For Christian commonwealths, there were other changes, too, which made the religious conflicts of the post-Reformation world difficult to contain. Firstly, the nature of religion itself was changing. The Protestant Reformation created a plurality of beliefs, argued for with conviction on all sides, each claiming its legitimization on the basis of a supposed continuity with the past. Christendom became, in the process, a contested legacy, part of what humanists had already begun to dismiss as a 'Middle Age' of decay and corruption. In the new landscape of plurality, 'religion' (qualified as 'right', 'reformed', 'Catholic') became a way of determining true beliefs from false ones. Moreover, religion became further consolidated around what people 'believed', detached from the religious observances that they performed. That detachment was most evidently manifest in the increasingly 'confessionalized' nature of religion in the Post-Reformation. Religious confessions (Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, Anglican) attempted to define what people should believe – and became the basis for a mammoth investment in education and persuasion by churches and states. For both these, however, it was harder to enforce conformity around a confessional notion of belief than it had been around a belief-community in which observances (whose performance could easily be measured, and by those who were not theologians) reflected the beliefs of the individuals and communities concerned.

There were plenty of places where, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, religious conformity proved unrealizable. Christian princes found reasons to argue the case to make domestic peace a more immediate priority than religious uniformity, and to deploy the resources of law to resolve religious disputes. But, in the eyes of their confessional critics, such attempts to live with confessional diversity were the clearest sign that Christendom was in terminal decay. Such religious pluralism was destined, they argued, to end in tears. By fudging the issue and failing to fulfil their responsibilities, rulers who permitted religious pluralism were not only risking God's wrath, but making the inevitable and ultimate confrontation that much more violent and destructive. Such views tended to be self-fulfilling prophecies. There were no lessons in religious toleration in this period which could not be unlearned. Each generation had to discover afresh the dangerous simplicities of believing that the imposition of religious conformity would be a straightforward solution to

the problems of religious dissent.

The religious-based conflicts of the post-Reformation period made conformity to a confessionalized sense of belief seem important as never before. Christian commonwealths were expected to uphold and enforce confessional conformity as an essential precondition to political unity. The ecclesiastical changes associated with the Protestant Reformation (and the Catholic response to it) changed the relationship between churches and rulers. The geometry of the relationship differed widely. In parts of Protestant Europe, there were state-based churches; in others, there were official churches, with which the state had a looser, even independent, relationship. In Catholic Europe, Church and state were a partnership in which there was plenty of room for mutual misunderstanding and frustration. In general, however, states acquired more authority over ecclesiastical affairs. With that authority came greater responsibility for the maintenance of right religion. Rulers faced more vocal appeals from their clergy. Clerical voices demanded that Christian rulers carry out their duties of promoting the true faith. They sought the arbitration of their rulers over contested issues of ecclesiastical structure, discipline and even beliefs while, at the same time, upbraiding them for interfering with rights and property that belonged to the Church. In Post-Reformed conflicts, it was not merely the mutual obligation between rulers and ruled which became strained. So too did that between magistrates and clerics.

Such increased tensions occurred in the context of broader changes in the authority of states. Christian commonwealths were becoming more extensive and intrusive locally in the justice undertaken in their name. Rulers expected more by way of taxation from their lands and subjects. Military changes meant that the magistrate's 'power of the sword' was more in evidence to the civilian population. Public authority required greater access to specialist skills and advice to undertake the more complex legal and administrative tasks of policing economic, social and public life. From different quarters came the demands to broaden fiscality over a wider range of products and services, for greater economic competition between states, and for an intensification of social discipline and moral conformity by both state and Church. At the same time, weakening social cohesion in communities compromised the loyalties of local magistrates, among whom the notion of a mutual obligation between ruler and ruled had been the most strongly rooted.

By 1600, Europe's Christian commonwealths were the political remnant of Christendom's ideal of a belief-community, but they were battered from without and undermined from within by the divisions created by the Reformation. They proved vulnerable to the explosive cocktail of religion and politics. Even in those polities which achieved a degree of religious pluralism, the results were unstable, dependent on balances of forces between different religions that were liable to change, and vulnerable to the arguments and strategies of those who had never accepted that religious diversity could be a good thing. Where the cocktail of religious and political dissent resulted in war and conflict, it exposed the weakening bonds of trust between Europe's peoples and their rulers. The first signs of demographic and economic weakness as the 'silver age' began to recede only heightened the fragility of that trust.

The recovery of a degree of stability in the early years of the seventeenth century served as a moment of respite, encouraging people to imagine that, even though the underlying problems of post-Reformation politics could not be resolved, they might be contained. Some rulers sought consciously to distance themselves from the central proposition of a Christian commonwealth – of a mutual relationship of obligation in the name of the common good between rulers and the people they ruled. Building on the traditional formulations of theocratic monarchy – that monarchs' responsibilities were solely towards God and not open to scrutiny by others – 'absolute' rulers posed as the embodiment of the destiny of the 'state', the latter being a confessionally neutral language to describe political entities. Absolute monarchs (and the French Bourbon dynasty, which ruled a French kingdom gradually reunited after its 'wars of religion', served as the exemplar to others) proclaimed themselves separate from, and above, the fundamental tensions of post-Reformation politics. They could legislate for religious uniformity or decree religious pluralism, form

diplomatic alliances between or across religious divides – all as seemed fit to them, justifying their actions as for the good of the state. Absolute princely rule sat strangely at odds with those polities – generally in those parts which had not experienced the most destructive forces of post-Reformation tension – where the notion of a Christian commonwealth still survived, and where rulers and ruled were still regarded as in a relationship of mutual obligation.

## EUROPE'S PAROXYSM

In the 1550s, 1590s and then again from the 1620s, military activity in Europe rose to unprecedented levels. The signs of respite in the early years of the new century were nothing more than a false dawn. Europe was plunged into a widening vortex of interconnected and destructive struggles, culminating in the later 1640s. These conflicts exacerbated Europe's economic divergences and weakening social cohesion. The 1590s became the avatar of later and longer strife. The Thirty Years War comprises three concomitant and related conflicts, of which only the first lasted thirty years. The first was a war in Germany (1618–1648) that sucked in those around it. The second was a renewed struggle between the Spanish Habsburgs and the Dutch Republic (1621–48). The third was a bitter struggle between France and Spain (1635–59). The first two had their origins deep in post-Reformation disputes whereas the latter was something different and fundamentally new in the degree to which it was openly a fight for hegemony in Europe. Each of these conflicts overlapped with the others, drawing most of western Europe into their orbit.

The burden of raising the unparalleled resources for these conflicts brought Europe's states to the brink of their call on the loyalties of their subjects. The constellation of European kingdoms of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy imploded in a series of revolts in which local stakeholders sought an alternative future for themselves and their people, aided and abetted by Spain's enemies. They began in Catalonia (1640–59) and Portugal (1640–59), but spread to the Italian peninsula in Naples (1647–8) and Palermo (1647). The more united French kingdom suffered profound strains too. They appeared first in a widespread and potentially damaging sequence of local and regional popular revolts and aristocrat-led rebellions which were contained with a mixture of repression and concessions. After 1643, its absolute monarchy was weakened by the minority of Louis XIV, who had come to the throne as a boy-king, not yet five years of age. The unparalleled effort of fighting a major international war on several fronts during a period of royal minority not only stretched the military and financial resources of the state to its breaking-point, but also tested the loyalties of those who had hitherto been the pillars of the French state, its senior magistrates and office-holders. They led the revolt known as the 'Fronde' (1648–53), a period of profound monarchical instability which included two brief episodes of open civil war.

Framing the conflicts and instabilities associated with the Thirty Years War lay two other parallel political implosions, each with its attendant devastations. In both cases, their origins lay back in post-Reformation religious settlements which came unstuck. In both cases too, the central issue was the survival, or not, of the Christian commonwealth as against the newer conceptions of absolute rule. In the British Isles, what was referred to by a contemporary as the 'falling out in the three Kingdoms' began with a rebellion against the Stuart monarchy in Scotland in 1639, enlarged with the Irish Rebellion that broke out in 1641, and culminated in the Great Rebellion of England in 1642. Charles I's military defeat in the first English Civil War in 1646, coupled with his subsequent attempts to recover the situation from a position of dangerous weakness, led to his execution in January 1649. The victorious Parliamentary forces, now commanded by Oliver Cromwell, invaded Ireland and brutally crushed a Royalist–Confederate alliance there in 1649. And, when the Scots crowned Charles I's son and heir as their king (Charles II), renewed hostilities with England resulted in Cromwell's conquest of Scotland in 1650–51. By the end of 1651, the Three Kingdoms were set to emerge as a new state, proclaiming itself a 'Commonwealth' and ostensibly a republic.

Meanwhile, to the east, a major Cossack insurrection in the Ukraine in 1648 undermined another Christian

commonwealth, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*). The Polish state had seen off many threats from Muscovites, Tatars and Turks on its eastern and southeastern borders, and faced down numerous previous revolts by Ruthenian Cossacks, increasingly alienated by the political and social contempt shown towards them by Polish aristocrats, who had established huge landed estates in Ruthenia (Ukraine). But nothing prepared the Polish state for the Cossack Rebellion (1648–57) led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky. With Tartar assistance, and then with the support of the Muscovites, the rebels eradicated the Polish nobility (*szlachta*) and their estates from Ruthenia, and dismantled the ecclesiastical authority of the Latin Rite Catholics there. Already weakened by a Swedish incursion in the 1620s, the military and political collapse of the once powerful Polish state after 1648 was dramatic, destabilizing eastern Europe.

Despite their different specificities, what all these rebellions, movements of protest and insurrections had in common was a breakdown of trust between Europe's rulers and the people whom they ruled. Many contemporaries interpreted these near simultaneous troubles, about which they were informed as never before by regular printed newsletters, as the fruits of divine wrath, justly earned by human sinfulness. That was a way of registering something else about the mid-century paroxysm: that Europe had lost everything that Christendom had stood for. In its place was a nakedly divided Europe. Across its landmass lay a religious frontier, reflecting a fracture of belief. Its political systems depended on states which did not seem to obey the rules of conventional morality, and whose relations with their people were openly in contention. Its leading states were engaged in a battle for hegemony and the Peace of Westphalia failed to construct a new international order to contain it. Europe was disunited in itself, and exported its divisions to the rest of the world. The social cohesion of its communities had weakened. Economic change created greater disparities of wealth and widened the gap between regions that did well and those which did badly. Meteorological change had also disrupted settled agriculture across the planet. Even Europe's understanding of the natural world and the universe had become conjectural, contingent and disputed. The Protestant Reformation was the last crisis of Christendom. The paroxysm of the mid-seventeenth century was the first crisis of what was now Europe.

## THE WORLD AND THE DISCOVERY OF EUROPE

Cross-cultural interactions among the Eurasian civilizations had existed for centuries. Yet the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries brought the peoples, not just of Eurasia but of the eastern and western hemispheres more generally, into much more intensive and sustained interaction with one another. Although that occurred as a result of a largely European-led effort to put in place long-distance trading relationships, the processes that brought it to pass were on a global scale and interactive in a double sense. They interacted with one another in a complex fashion, and they were the result of the interchange with other civilizations, especially those of Eurasia. Only an extreme Eurocentric myopia could persuade anyone that its expansion is explicable solely in terms of Europe's internal dynamics. The processes depended on the creation of global sea-lanes, potentially giving access to the world's shorelines. Measuring the latter is a hazardous enterprise. Europe's seafarers 'knew' (but to very varying degrees) about 15 per cent of that shoreline in the middle of the fifteenth century. By the same token, perhaps getting on for 50 per cent of that shoreline was 'known' by their successors in 1650. Dramatic though that expansion certainly is, it was mainly in the world's middle latitudes, and dependent on a small number of well-known sea-passages, much of the knowledge being still indirect, unverified and vague. By 1650 it is evident that Europe's overseas expansion had reinforced its maritime technologies, its navigational and cartographic expertise, shipbuilding skills and naval armaments in comparison with other Eurasian civilizations.

A second, consequential global process was the biological transfer which resulted from those interactions, now widely known as the 'Columbian Exchange'. Unforeseen and unplanned, it involved a hemispheric displacement of agricultural crops and wild plants, especially to and from the American continent to Eurasia. From the New World came major staple crops that had begun to influence European diets and agricultural

practices by 1650 (maize; manioc; kidney, lima and pinto beans; potatoes). There were new salad crops and fruits (courgettes, cranberries, pineapples, pumpkins). But the process went both ways. From the Old World to the American continent came hitherto unknown staples (wheat, oats, barley, millet), and fruits and salads (figs, lettuces, peaches, pears, peas, carrots). The same was also true for domestic animals and feral species. Turkeys, llamas, guinea pigs, alpacas and Muscovy ducks moved from the New World to the Old; domestic cats, cows, sheep, chickens, donkeys, ferrets, honey bees and silkworms went in the reverse direction. The introduction of new food crops and livestock fuelled population growth, not just in Europe but in East Asia and probably in North Africa too. The most tragic evidence for the importance of these biological transfers was in epidemic disease. The Old World exported bubonic plague, chicken pox, cholera, smallpox and typhus to the New World – diseases to which Eurasians and, to a degree, Africans had developed resistance, but which decimated the indigenous American populations. This time, however, the return traffic was asymmetric. Nothing from America significantly damaged the European host population.

The Columbian Exchange became an essential part of a precocious capitalist global economy. Biological transfer lay at the heart of some of the emerging patterns of production, distribution and consumption, not to mention changes in social organization. By 1620, for example, up to 20,000 tons of sugar (a newly imported plant into America) was probably being produced for European consumption by a slave workforce, transported across the Atlantic from Africa. Raw and processed materials circulated globally in substantial quantities, satisfying new markets. The canvases which Johannes Vermeer painted in Delft represent, at first sight, an ordered and inward-looking, provincial world. Study them more carefully, however, and the objects in them – that lavish black felt hat from Canadian beaver; this Chinese porcelain dish; those silver coins, the raw material from Peru; those vermillion and scarlet red cloths (from cochineal, produced by the Indians of Central and South America) – tell a different story. Like the silk from China, the spices from Southeast Asia, the pepper and cotton from the Indian subcontinent and the tobacco from the Americas, they were all products which were traded and consumed globally in unprecedented quantities in this period. In some cases, the demands of the new market could be met by simply scaling up existing practices. That was the case for Indian cotton weavers, or Chinese porcelain factories. In others, however, it involved major social change, and the brutalizing coercion of labour forces – like the mining operations in Mexico and Peru or the slave-labour on the Brazilian sugar plantations.

In the global perspective the significance of the immense, sophisticated and monetarized economies of China and India is evident – which is why the East remained an enduring objective for Europe's overseas expansion throughout this period. The dynamism of the Chinese economy is at the heart of the explanation for Europe's overseas expansion. The market value of silver in Ming territories was roughly double its contemporary value elsewhere in the world. In that perspective, the discovery and exploitation of South American silver takes on a different dimension. Europe produced few goods that eastern hemisphere markets wanted. Silver was the one commodity with which Europe's merchants could trade in Asia. Still more importantly, on that basis Europeans became the dominant intermediaries in the global silver trade, the majority of which never reached Europe's shores. Perhaps over fifty tons of silver annually was transported by Europeans from Acapulco on the Pacific coast in the first half of the seventeenth century across to Manila in the Philippines. That is roughly the equivalent to the overall value of Europe's overseas trade per annum during the same period with the East Indies. From the Philippines, the silver was traded on to the Chinese mainland in return for silks and other goods. Spanish galleons were the middlemen in the trade, just as Portuguese ships were the carriers of Japanese silver to the Chinese mainland until they were expelled from the country in 1637.

There were immense profits to be made by those who controlled the centres of silver production – especially Habsburg Spain and Tokugawa Japan. But there were rich pickings for all the individuals and institutions involved in the trade along the way – from the mines in the Andes to the marketplaces of China. Those returns made possible the investment in Europe's first colonial projects in America. They oiled the wheels of its trade with the Far East, the beneficiaries being its merchants, especially after the organization of chartered

trading companies such as the English and Dutch East India Companies (founded in 1600 and 1602 respectively). A shallow globalization was in the process of formation.

Europe's population growth in this period – partly on the basis of the Columbian Exchange of food crops – was only one facet of a more general rise in world populations, especially marked in Eurasia. Increasing state power in Europe was mirrored by the consolidation of states in Asia too. Ming China, Mughal India and the Ottoman empire were, like the Spaniards or the Portuguese and Dutch in the Far East, 'gunpowder empires'. These global phenomena were subject, however, to equally global constraints. The dramatic increase in human population in the course of the sixteenth century resulted in unprecedented pressures on natural resources. These were especially evident on the environmental frontiers – with a retreat of the steppe before the sown, an expansion into marginal cultivable land, and an explosion of commercial hunting. It was not just in Europe that those pressures were in evidence from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. They were the more marked because of global climate change – the cooling of the planet that began to be recorded from around 1580 onwards, and whose effects became more pronounced towards 1650. Europe's mid-seventeenth-century crisis belongs in a global context, even though most of its constituent elements were home-grown.

## IMAGINING EUROPE

The paradox was that Europe's overseas expansion was the result of Europeans who barely knew, or spoke of 'Europe'. It was America which enabled them to reconfigure Christendom as a geographical entity, a space they increasingly knew as 'Europe'. If it had not been for the discovery of America, 'Europe' would not have existed. Mythology provided Europe's poets and artists with ways of representing the ambiguities of the world around them. The humanist revival of the ancient world opened up the veins of classical mythology, the antics of Greek and Roman gods becoming ways of holding a mirror up to power, pandering to the sexual licence of its courts but taking the viewer and the reader into a parallel universe in which fortune, virtue, human passions, danger and the all-important divine protection could all be represented, without necessarily compromising Christian morality or the conventional Christian understanding of the world and humanity's place within it. 'Europe' was part of a myth which Renaissance humanists cultivated from the ancients about the disposition of the inhabited landmass into three zones: Asia (the most important), Africa (the next) and Europe (the least), each mapped onto the story of Noah's successors. With a wider diffusion of world maps and globes, that myth began its metamorphosis into more geographically defined continents. The discovery of a fourth continent in America was an essential part of that change.

It did not happen quickly. The ideas of 'America' and 'Europe' were slow to penetrate the European imagination. Spanish administrators, for example, persisted in regarding its American colonies as 'the Indies', and the word 'America' was scarcely used in official papers at all. Shakespeare and Montaigne almost never used the word 'Europe' in their writings, although when the latter referred to 'us' he evidently had in mind a shared space that went without a name. 'Europe', however, became increasingly envisaged as a set of values, an identity given geographical extension by its humanist-educated élites. The French philosopher Louis Le Roy wrote of 'our mother Europe', using the term to describe a whole civilization with a complex history, a dynamic present and a positive future. Francis Bacon, too, grandly referred to 'we Europeans' in 1605. America was essential in defining what those values, and that identity, were. For those who were not from the Spanish peninsula, or who did not acknowledge allegiance to the papacy, the rights of trade, conquest and settlement in the New World, initially accorded in the early sixteenth century by the papacy and ratified by the emperor, were fiercely contested on the grounds of something larger, a law of nature, shared with other human beings in a world which had expanded in time and space. That law of nature could be used, in turn, to define ways of behaving that were 'human' as opposed to 'savage' and 'barbarian' – terms which became another way of understanding 'Europe' – as values that marked it out from the savage world beyond.

The word ‘Europe’ became utilized instead of ‘Christendom’ by Protestants, especially when they wanted to demonstrate that the cruelties which occurred in Europe’s confessional conflicts were as great, if not greater, than those of supposed ‘savages’. Europe’s settlers in the New World defined themselves in terms of the values of the places from which they had come, in the process idealizing the mother country (‘New Spain’, ‘New France’, ‘New England’), and gradually discovering their own identity. Some of them could not wait to get back. Manuel de Nóbrega, the first Jesuit provincial and author of an influential early history of Brazil, wrote of his compatriots: ‘They do not love the land and all their affection is for Portugal. The first thing which they teach their parrot is: “Parrot royal, back to Portugal”.’ For others, colonialism was about making something new, in the image of the old. Indigenous Indian peoples became an example of all that colonists were not, or should not be – barbarians, pagans, profligate, undependable, lacking industry and purpose, and irrational. Protestant and Catholic missionaries alike identified an attitude towards ‘freedom’ in the indigenous populations that was very different from that which was accorded to Europeans by their laws of nature – careless towards responsibility and constituted authority, unconcerned about the future. America gradually became, too, a utopia for all the values that Europe should uphold, but failed to. For Domenico Scandella, a self-taught miller from Friuli, the term ‘New World’ evoked a world of happiness through which to see Europe, as though in a reflection. Those who sought exile on religious grounds from Europe’s religious conflicts also imagined a New Jerusalem on another continent and, in so doing, invented an alien Europe which had rejected them, and which they had left behind. Through the existence of America in the European imagination, it was possible to imagine that Old World space in new ways.

Mythology played its part in that metamorphosis. On 19 June 1559, Tiziano Vecelli (Titian) wrote from Venice to the most potent ruler of Christendom, Philip II of Spain, to say that he was at work on the last of six great canvases on the *Loves of the Gods*, a commission that they had discussed when he had met the young prince eight years previously in Augsburg. The subject was the *Rape of Europa*. What he finally despatched to his patron in the spring of 1562 was a dramatic seascape under a threatening sky in which a duped and dishevelled Europa is about to lose her clothing and virginity. Being transported away and out of the picture, she hangs on for dear life to the horns of the bull which she has just realized is no bull at all, but mighty Zeus in disguise. Titian’s knowledge of the myth of Europa came from Book II of the Roman poet Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid was the most studied, and certainly the most translated and commented upon, of the ancient poets in the Renaissance. Titian could not read the Latin himself, but no matter – the illustrated Ovid of his friend, the Paduan-trained man of letters Ludovico Dolce, had just appeared on the bookstalls of Venice.

Titian’s brilliant painting had multiple meanings. He described the series of which it was the climax as a ‘poesie’ – poetry in paint. Since the subject had been chosen by Arachne in her contest with the goddess Athena as to who was to weave the best tapestry, Titian was making a claim to be the Apelles (the renowned painter of ancient Greece) of the modern world. But, as his Venetian friend Pietro Aretino remarked shortly before he died (and Aretino had published, perhaps even defined, hard-core pornography), Titian’s ‘poesie’ was an erotic painting to titillate a princely patron, reminding him of sexual attraction and omnipotence in all its guises. It had a political message too. Rape was associated with the Turks, and with the atrocities of war. The young King Philip II was also being told that his inheritance was vulnerable to attack from without and within, the prey to its own passions and the predations of others. In a roundabout way, this ‘Europe’ was also about values.

Above all, Europe became geographical space. ‘Queen’ Europe was famously anthropomorphized into a woman by Emperor Ferdinand’s cartographer, Johannes Bucius Aenictus. The graphic conceit was popularized when it was incorporated into later editions of Sebastian Münster’s famous *Cosmographia* (1544). Not surprisingly, given its origins in Habsburg lands, Spain forms her crowned head and Italy her right arm, her cloak flowing out vaguely towards the east. The crown was important. Cesare Ripa, Europe’s leading interpreter of the palette of iconic emblems available to its poets, painters and writers, instructed his

readers in his *Iconologia* of 1603 to depict Europe with a crown ‘to show that Europe has always been the leader and queen’ of the four continents. That was a reversal of the inherited hierarchy, in which Europe hung onto the coat-tails of Asia and Africa, and a reflection of the emerging sense of superiority that accompanied a Europe conceived as a set of values, mapped onto a geographical space.

There was a problem, however, about such a conception of Europe. Given the lack of any defining natural frontiers to the Eurasian landmass, where did it end? Christendom had faced no such difficulty, since its boundaries were determined by the faith community which it represented. But where were the boundaries of this geographically based Europe of values? The draughtsmen of Europe as a virgin fudged the issue, running her skirts out over a vast region to the east, and scattering names around the hem of the garment (‘Scythia’, ‘Muscovy’, ‘Tartary’). Was Muscovy part of Europe? The question was the more complicated since, less celebrated than Europe’s maritime empires but equally important, was Russian expansion east and south down the Volga and beyond the Urals into the huge Asian landmass. The answers to the question increasingly depended on the European observer’s construction of an alien ‘other’ in terms of values, which the historians and philosophers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalized as a ‘civilization’, based on a particular interpretation of their political, religious and cultural European inheritance.

Europe could be conceived as a geographical entity in this period because of changing senses of space. ‘Cartography’ was a way of understanding space as geometric quantity, abstracted from other qualities of meaning and experience. What mattered was the ‘relation of distances’, as Ptolemy had said. The discovery of his *Geography* in Constantinople in the early fifteenth century, long known in the Islamic world but new to Latin Christendom, established the theoretical principles of cartography, introducing what amounted to latitude and longitude, providing a method of projection and stressing empirical observation. European mapmakers measured and conceptualized space along those lines, the results being represented in printed maps and globes. Europe’s ‘age of discovery’ was not simply of far-away new worlds. It was also that of its own spatial identity.

## EUROPE’S INFORMATION DYNAMICS

That geographical sense of European space epitomized the changes to the sense of what was ‘local’ in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe. Spices, dyes, skins, furs, silks, sugar were among the traded goods which linked Europe’s markets to one another and to a wider world. In addition, there was a shift in the communication and information dynamics of Europe. In other words, the impact of print technology was part of a wider transformation, embracing handwritten letters, postal services, oral transmission, travel and encounter, scientific enquiry and the structuring of knowledge. The organizational and structural means of functioning at a distance deepened. Persuasion (moral and otherwise) as a constituency for political action, religious beliefs and social behaviour became more important. Spatial limits and temporal constraints, defining who you were and how you could behave, weakened. There was greater awareness, direct and indirect, of a wider world and its pluralism and complexity. Wider, too, became the gap between those whose literacy and numeracy enabled them to access directly that dynamic, and those who were dependent on others to do so. The newsletters and pamphlets of the Thirty Years War and the conflicts which surrounded it turned its generals – those whose icy stares, curls of hair and blackened armour greet the visitor to the art galleries of Europe – into household names. Pamphlet accounts of slaughters, famine and plague became object lessons of God’s wrath, experienced vicariously across Europe. The sense of shared crisis, so evident towards the middle of the seventeenth century, is the most telling evidence for what had changed in Europe’s information dynamics in the previous century and a half.

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of Europe’s transformed habits of communication. Had Europe not, for example, found the lexicon and shared the examples which demonstrated that a polity and social order could live with religious division and pluralism in its midst, its seventeenth-century paroxysm would

have been even more profound and damaging. Had Europe not changed the political and organizational frameworks of the state to accommodate information plurality and manage its power relationships, the risks of systemic state collapse would have been greater, and the damaging death-wish rivalries of its aristocratic and dynastic élites would have been uncontrollable. Had it not used its increasingly plural and dispersed communities of wealth and power, linked by increasingly elaborate networks of economic obligation and variegated skeins of knowledge transfer, its colonialism would not have had the enduring and transformative impact that it did, both inside Europe and beyond. Had its diplomatic channels and protocols of communication and negotiation not evolved, the unprecedently elaborate Peace of Westphalia (1648), which brought the German Thirty Years War to a close, would have been impossible.

### THE 'SILVER AGE' AND ITS AFTERMATH

By 1650, over 180 tons of gold had been exported from the Indies, and 16,000 tons of silver from the New World. This was the 'Silver Age'. Whether you had some of it, or none, became of increasing importance. Even if you had none, you could not escape its influence, because of the unprecedented spell of European inflation that continued through the majority of this period, and extended in some parts of Europe well into the seventeenth century. The 'European price revolution' was in reality a time of sustained economic growth and expansion, whether measured in monetary terms or demographic growth. French historians summarize it as the 'beautiful sixteenth century', though it came to a premature end in France as a result of war, and it was 'beautiful' for some, but emphatically not for others. It deepened the divisions between the 'haves' and 'have nots', between those who benefited from price inflation and those who lost out. Among the latter were those on fixed incomes, expressed in money (rents and many other forms of investment, but also taxation). That included those in Europe's élite – its princes, landed nobility and clergy. Inflation and economic expansion depressed their fixed incomes. But they could mostly adjust by exploiting other, frequently contested ways of raising revenues from their assets – new forms of taxation by princes of their subjects, or new burdens by landowners on their tenants. The result was more aggressive domain landlordism, higher entry-fines for tenants in some places, expropriation of woodland and commons to which the local community hitherto had use-rights in others. There was a marked deepening of seigneurial labour burdens placed upon the peasantry to the east of the Elbe and north of the Saale.

Inflation and economic expansion also increased the variety and density of social groups with assets to their name and accrued social status, and who demanded to be recognized as notables in the established social order. At the same time, the numbers of those who lost out grew – the mass of semi-landless peasant owners of tiny plots of marginal viability, the peasants in chronic debt who sold out to their creditors or became renters rather than owners, their holdings reduced to tiny farms, the swelling ranks of the urban poor. The result was a heavier social burden upon communities. Europe did not experience a profound social transformation in this period, but social cohesion was weakened. The decay of local solidarity was masked by sixteenth-century economic expansion, but it was correspondingly more exposed by the recession which followed it in most parts of Europe and which was intensified by the dislocations of the Thirty Years War.

Weakening social cohesion put pressure on Europe's enduring localism. To a degree, the sense of identity in Europe's villages and towns had always been an artificial construction by which local notables – peasant proprietors in rural environments who so often became the leading figures in village society, local nobles, or the merchants and leading guild-members who ran towns as a corporate élite – projected local solidarity as a defence of peace, justice, good order and their own interests. But increasingly those local notables found it harder to present their perception of the good of the common weal as consonant with the interests of everyone in divided communities. Religious differences made their task still harder, and the engines of the state seemed correspondingly more remote and alien, less willing to listen to their concerns, or respond to their petitions.

Relationships between the local urban and rural worlds were changing as well, with towns exercising a greater dominance over their surrounding countryside, peasants cautiously engaging in their markets (and thereby becoming partially dependent upon them) and urban notables investing in the countryside (and foreclosing on tenants who did not pay their debts). Local protest and revolt were such a sustained and important feature of this period that the question is not the degree to which they existed but the extent to which localized dissatisfaction and dissension, in the circumstances of a transformed ability to communicate more broadly, were able to find common cause within and across communities in order to make their voices of protest heard. The diminishing sense of local cohesion and the corresponding social tensions had their impact on local notables. They reached for explanations to account for the vulnerable and uncontrollable world in which they found themselves. Many drew reassurance from the order and authority of the Counter-Reformed Catholic Church. Others sought explanations in a theology of God's inscrutable providence, or in the millennial expectations of those for whom it was a sign of living in the Last Days; others again in the actively malign presence and sinister potential of the Devil in the world around, or in the science of astrology to provide an explanatory framework and predictive component to it. What is interesting about these explanations is their universality and the degree to which they were appropriated by notables at a local level.

Metamorphosis was a way of understanding change in this period. When Lucas Cranach the Elder, the artist-friend of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, painted '*The End of the Silver Age*', he turned it into an Ovidian allegory for his own day. Each time he painted the scene, he showed vulnerable nude women and children huddling in small groups as aggressive and jealous men engage in fratricidal conflict around them. Hesiod had described this metamorphosis, when 'men refused to worship the gods' and engaged in strife with one another. For Ovid it was the harbinger of the 'Brazen [i.e. 'Bronze'] Age', when men were 'worse natur'd, prompt to horrid warre, and rage', the prelude to the 'Iron Age'. To Cranach, this scene was a warning-piece that had parallels with Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It was a reminder of how easily the cycle of human decline and decay could occur unless one obeyed the gods.

Europe's 'Silver Age' became tarnished towards the end of the century, beginning in the 1580s and 90s, precisely at the moment when the imports of silver from the New World were at their peak. The cycle of economic growth and prosperity that had marked sixteenth-century Europe started to evaporate. While the most damaging phases of the civil wars in France and the Netherlands were played out, an underlying economic crisis left its anxieties everywhere, but most notably in those areas which found their population growth faltering. These regions, especially in southern Europe, were forced to contemplate the reality of economic stagnation, or even contraction. In some places epidemic disease, famine and rural depopulation appeared on a scale that contemporaries had not hitherto experienced, and then continued into the next century. Nor was it evident that there were mechanisms for adjusting the layers of political, social and ecclesiastical obligation which had grown up in the good times, and which now constituted a burden on these societies and an impediment to their adapting to the new reality. Seigneurial obligations, share-cropping, serfdom – these were all ways by which the capstone of élites bore more heavily in this period on the rural world. Meanwhile, in other parts of northern Europe societies managed to reconstitute their economies, to weather the storm and to profit from the misfortunes of others. On the northwest Atlantic seaboard, it led to the building of overseas empires and economic systems, emulating their predecessors but also introducing new elements. The differential patterns of Europe's development were among the most striking features of its metamorphosis.

Europe's communication dynamics informed its notables that the impact of the watershed of the 1580s and 90s had not been generalized across the continent, but that it was variegated. Learning from the more successful, emulating them where possible, stealing a march upon one's competitors, became an important feature of Europe's tensions. So too did wistful glances back to what became idealized as a 'golden age' in the past. The economic rivalries which underlay the succession of conflagrations that afflicted Europe after 1618 provoked social tensions that had been briefly glimpsed, but successfully negotiated away and buried in

the years after the Reformation. Now, however, the margins for negotiated and mediated settlement were smaller, with the prospects of economic growth and expansion less certain. The state – and especially its subcontractors (tax-farmers, military enterprisers, office-holders, and others) – made its presence felt in a more coercive way, and drove harder bargains. If millennial convictions or mercantilist prospects still conjured up a positive picture of the future for some, for others the fortune of the gods dictated a rosy future that was in heaven rather than on earth. ‘Happy the age, happy the time’, says Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* when he met some goatherds, still living the pastoral life ‘to which the ancients gave the name of golden’. Their life was in contrast to ‘this our iron age’, against whose harsh reality the deluded knight errant set out to fight the good fight.

The Tuscan Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici commissioned Pietro da Cortona in the later 1630s to decorate the walls of the small ‘Sala della Stufa’ in the Pitti Palace in Florence with the four ages of history. The subject had been suggested to him by Michelangelo Buonarroti, the poet grand-nephew of the artist Michelangelo. The eventual fresco for that of the ‘Iron Age’, finished in 1640, is a hyper-realistic evocation of human bloodshed. Against the trappings of civil society, soldiers in the foreground massacre a defenceless family while, behind them, their companions fight it out among themselves despite the implorations of an impotent priest. The scene is more violent, intense and frightening than Cranach’s picture of betrayed innocence a century previously. It conjures up the colliding squadrons and murderous sieges, the destroyed landscapes and threatened populations of the Thirty Years War, the divided British Isles and wrecked Poland. ‘Then, blushlesse Crimes, which all degrees surpast, the World Surround. Shame, Truth, & Faith departe, Fraud enters, ignorant in no bad Art; Force, Treason, & the wicked loue of gayne . . .’ – George Sandys’s popular English translation of Ovid’s poem, this part published in 1621, exemplifies how contemporaries understood what afflicted Europe towards the middle of the seventeenth century – a crisis which threatened to, but did not become a metamorphosis. It was a paroxysm from which Europe’s *ancien régime* recovered, and on foundations already laid.

From the ‘Silver Age’ to the ‘Iron Century’

## 2. Human Replenishment

### CHRISTENDOM’S MATERIAL FOUNDATIONS

When officials in sixteenth-century Europe counted and taxed their population, they often did so by the ‘hearth’. The term conjures up a family huddled around an open fire, venting through a hole in the roof, dwelling in a couple of rooms, a foyer (where cooking, eating and domestic work took place) and space for sleeping. Storage was everything; human comfort and privacy slight. Prosperity was determined by the existence of a cellar, storeroom and barn. In Europe’s cold winter nights, animals were close by (inside the ‘long house’) for warmth.

That is a stereotype. In reality, Christendom’s material foundations were regionally diverse. Different styles of housing reflected local variations in building materials as well as social and cultural distinctions. Dwellings dictated the evolution of Europe’s demography. By the early sixteenth century one of the changes in their construction had become quite widespread in towns and more substantial rural dwellings: the fireplace, built into a side wall. Chimneys generated much more heat (thanks to improved draught for the fire), which they also largely wasted, but they guaranteed less smoke inside. Better still were closed stoves, built of clay and tiles. An Italian travelling in Poland in the early sixteenth century recounted how whole families slept, wrapped in furs, on benches around the stove. Descartes alluded to a famous insight which

became the prelude to his search for a new method of organizing and validating human knowledge as taking place at night in a ‘stove’ (*poêle*, or heated inn) outside Ulm in 1619. A contemporary chronicler said that there were seventy-four in the palace at Ceský Krumlov. Their moulded contours and coloured lead-glazed surfaces introduced an additional visual aspect to the home. Tile craftsmen miniaturized figurative scriptural scenes from altars and books of hours and transformed them into fireside religion. Changes to the hearth implied transformations in how people lived – their space, privacy, clothing, beliefs and the proximity of rodents.

Wood, stone, brick – building materials vied with social status to determine housing construction. Construction was a motor of local economies – more important than textiles. It is difficult to evaluate how much it cost to put up a house, still less to maintain it. So much of the effort was human and paid for in kind. Even humble cottages were made of stone where it was plentiful (Cornwall, Brittany, Burgundy, the Paris basin). In Mediterranean regions (Catalonia, Languedoc, Provence) the extended family dwellings were often impressive in scale – up to 500 tons in stone-weight and three floors high. The ground floor was where grapes and olives were pressed and wine and oil were stored, with the family living above. The floor under the pantiles (widespread in the Mediterranean) stored grain. The emphasis was on ventilation, appropriate for a Mediterranean climate, with heating in winter provided by fires in braziers. These dwellings were built to last for 300 years or more with only minimal expenses in maintenance. But they cost up to fifteen times as much to build as a house made of wood. That was the preferred material in the towns and countryside in more heavily forested northern Europe. Even then, only in parts of Alpine Europe were houses built entirely from logs. Most were half-timbered – hewn wood forming the weight-bearing frame with wattle and daub in-fill. Wood was cheap, had good thermic properties and was easily replaced piecemeal. These dwellings ranged from the most common house in Poland – a wood frame on stone foundations, with a clay floor, a roof of thatch or shingle, and earth and straw built up around outside for insulation – to the more substantial half-timbered houses of central and northern Europe, with upper storeys for living and farm quarters. Brick was the preferred building material along the coasts and rivers of northern Europe and in the larger cities of the south. Brick-making, however, required transport, plant, skilled labour and investment. Limestone, essential for a durable mortar, was expensive. So, although brick was widely adopted for urban housing, where it was appropriate for stable tall structures and provided excellent insulation without great weight, one did not need to go far outside the town before encountering mixtures of brick and half-timbered buildings or wood.

Social status and function dictated the variety of habitations. Dwellings for day-labourers – cottagers and shack-dwellers – were little more than a refuge from the worst of the elements. Marginal landless tenants in Germany lived in hovels adjacent to the buildings of the farmer on whose land they squatted. Miners in the Auvergne made do with one-room huts. Agricultural day-labourers in Sicily put up with tofts. In Hungary, and on light, well-drained soil in central and eastern Europe, country folk could be found living half-underground in houses constructed of peat and grass turfs. At Pescara, an Adriatic port, about three quarters of its inhabitants (migrant workers) lived in tannery shacks according to an enquiry of 1564. For farming families, their houses were an essential part of their livelihood. Space for processing and storing grain, olives and grapes took precedence over human habitation. If the houses of day-labourers were no more than a refuge, those of more prosperous country people were, as the surviving inscriptions on wooden buildings from the period in central and Alpine Europe suggest, a status symbol as well as an investment. Surviving buildings reveal the intuitive understanding of materials by craftsmen and the elaborate improvisation that went into distributing the weight of upper storeys evenly. ‘Architects’ began to appear in sixteenth-century Italy and France. The humanist Charles Estienne’s *La Maison rustique* (1564) provided a pattern-book for the farmstead which French master craftsmen followed for almost two centuries. Europe’s demographic vitality sustained remarkable fixed capital investment in its housing stock.

Christendom’s material life is revealed in post-mortem inventories, conducted by auctioneers, notaries and

rural scriveners who knew how to value objects at a glance. An inventory was a first move in inheritance from one generation to another, and it was worth undertaking only when there was something to inherit. But that included country people of modest means. Like wills, these documents were not limited to the wealthy. On the contrary, they were important to all those who wanted to secure the inheritance of infant children. In the fenland parish of Willingham in East Anglia, villagers carefully disposed of their cattle and cheese-making equipment. That of 1593 from William Pardye, a waterman, left his only son John two cows, ‘all my lodge as it standith . . . with the fodder that is upon the same lodge, my boat in the fen, my boots, and a pair of high shoes’. In Burgundy, the most common objects were the fireside trivets, stew-pots, cooking utensils and bread-boards. There was often a lockable coffer, a wooden bed and a mattress. Sleeping on straw done up in a sack and laid on the ground or on planks had begun to decline in the fifteenth century. Beds – wooden frames with leather or rope cross-straps – were a significant gift upon marriage. Four poster beds from this period were enormous pieces of furniture, ostentatious signs of family wealth. In his will (25 March 1616) Shakespeare left his wife Anne his ‘second best bed’. Mattresses (stuffed with feathers or wool – straw was a cheap substitute) could be elaborately covered with velvet, braids and silks. But poverty meant most people had little. In *La Chanson à boire*, the Dutch painter Adriaen Brouwer portrays the inside of a cottage, possibly on the dunes north of Antwerp. Four peasants sit on makeshift furniture (cut out of old barrels) around a table. Apart from the old clothes they are wearing, there is nothing other than a rag, a pitcher and a loaf of bread.

Europe’s settlement patterns were determined by a complex mix of historical and social geography. In the mind’s eye, it is the nucleated village which predominates, the settlement with its church surrounded by open fields and common pasture. That was typical of the plains and river basins, and also the dominant pattern around the shores of the Mediterranean and wherever Europe had recolonized land on its margins – on the Meseta in central Spain or on the Hungarian plain. More disparate settlement was the order of the day in Europe’s animal husbandry regions, on its heathlands and marshes, its forests, woodlands and mountain uplands. Across eastern and central Europe the settlement type was the ‘street village’ – straggling communities built along a road. Around the Atlantic shores of northern Europe the equivalent was the coastal village, clustering around a beach or loading station.

Such settlement patterns can be traced in detail through surviving estate maps. Surveying became widely diffused in this period. One of the earliest vernacular printed surveying manuals, the *Geometria* (Frankfurt, 1531) of Jacob Köbel, explained: ‘Take sixteen men, large and small’ as they come out of the church, and line them up, each with one foot along a rod. Marked at both ends, this created the surveyor’s 16-*Schuh* staff (the cousin of the English ‘rod, pole, or perch’, about 16.5 feet long) to measure fields. By the end of the sixteenth century, surveyors were expected to use geometry and a compass to triangulate surface areas that were irregular polygons. New instruments helped them: Philippe Danfrie’s *graphomètre* (advertised in a Paris publication of 1597) and ‘waywisers’ to measure distance. Even so, it was hard to create accurate maps. Paul Pfinzing’s surveying manual, published in Nuremberg in 1598, recommended cutting up pieces of cardboard to the right shapes and weighing them in order to arrive at a collective land area of an estate. His surviving estate maps reveal settlement and land use in remarkable detail. The one for his native village (Hennenfeld) from 1592, for example, enumerates the fields and plots of its seventy-nine inhabitants. Further south, Johann Rauch, a surveyor from the Vorarlberg, prepared a sequence of estate maps for the eastern shore of Lake Constance and Upper Swabia. On his plot of the village of Rickenbach, prepared in about 1628, each house is numbered and the owner’s name and the corresponding fields identified. In Bavaria, Peter Zweidler mapped the estates of the bishop of Bamberg at the end of the sixteenth century, detailing the roads and villages, fishponds and even the stones which marked the edges of the properties in question.

Europe’s patterns of settlement did not change dramatically in this period. The equivalents to the ‘lost villages’ of the Middle Ages (following the Black Death) were to be found in Mediterranean lands after 1600, especially in Spain where rural depopulation became serious in its more arid upland central regions.

Count-Duke Olivares left money in his 1642 will for eight pious foundations to help repopulate such deserted communities. Those villages and hamlets which disappeared from Christendom after 1500 did so because of social engineering (emparkment by ambitious aristocrats), revenge (the erasure of the Waldensian communities in the Luberon mountains of Provence in 1545 or in Calabria in 1558), depredations (southern Slovakia and parts of Hungary in the wake of the Turkish offensive in the early sixteenth century) or as a result of climatic change. By contrast, as the marshes and fens of western and southern Europe were reclaimed, new communities sprang up. Fresh villages of miners, salt-workers, quarrymen and fishers took root. Virgin forest and untamed lands still lay to the north and east. The number of farms in Norway began to match those of c. 1300 – there were around 57,000 by 1665. In Norrland (North Sweden) and Savolax (East Finland) new colonization was noticeable by 1570 although there was still vast countryside where habitation was rare. Germans and Slavs colonized central eastern Europe. Further south, in Bohemia and Moravia, villages abandoned in the fifteenth century were resettled. The dominant rural reality was human replenishment.

#### NAMES ON A PAGE

Modern-style population censuses do not exist in Europe before the French Revolution. Instead, there are census-like documents, especially in Europe's cities and more urbanized environments. Their purposes were not demographic. Europe's rulers wanted to tax their populations, enlist them into military service or target new immigrants. Humanist wisdom favoured censuses, albeit for different reasons. Niccolò Machiavelli supported the Florentine property tax, introduced in 1427, because he felt it followed Roman precedents and prevented tyranny. His contemporary Francesco Guicciardini disliked property taxes as an attack upon the notables, but supported other progressive taxes which relied on censuses. The French humanist Jean Bodin advocated a census in his *Six Books of the Republic* (1576), seeing it as the basis for a tax system that would reflect the geometric proportions ('harmonies') in the world at large. In spite of this desire to measure, there was a profound underlying conviction that population had declined since Antiquity and was still diminishing. In the utopian writings of the period (Thomas More's *Utopia*, 1516; Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, 1624; Tommaso Campanella's *La Città del Sole*, 'City of the Sun', 1602), the state had a role in promoting the number of those who are born its citizens. 'We must never believe that there are too many subjects, too many citizens,' said Bodin, 'seeing that there are no riches and no forces beyond people.'

With the advent of the tax-state, population enumeration became more frequent. Italian polities were precocious in this respect – Venice, Milan, Tuscany, Genoa, Rome, the kingdom of Naples and Sicily. In the southern Low Countries, taxation depended on the enumeration of hearths. In Languedoc, it was based on an evaluation of wealth which was then recorded in land and wealth surveys. Not before the early seventeenth century was there anything approaching a civil registration of the population. Then, following Pope Paul V's *Rituale Romanum* (1614), various Italian dioceses started to keep annual congregational lists recording the age and family of each recipient of the Easter communion. To the north, the Lutheran clergy of Sweden were required from 1628 to keep annual registers, noting the literacy and religious instruction of their parishioners.

These documents are sometimes no more than names on pages. Fiscal records enumerate hearths; church documents list communicants. They require interpretation. Demography in this period is a black art. Everyone agrees that there was a 'pronounced secular upswing' in population, but when it began and when it ended is unclear. Very hesitant in the late fifteenth century, it was not significant in many places before 1520. In England, growth started to be registered only around 1510 and then nearly doubled over the next century. In the Low Countries, it was more precocious. In the northern provinces of the Netherlands, it continued towards 1650, but it faltered in the south.

In German lands increases appeared early on – more vigorous in the west than in the east. Whether they slowed down by 1618 is debatable, but they were certainly wiped out by the Thirty Years War. In France, the

growth rhythms emerged strongly and evenly from 1500 to 1545, unsteadily from 1545 to 1560; renewed, and then uncertain to 1580. They then declined to coincide with the worst of the civil wars through to the end of the century. Population increase resumed unsteadily in the early seventeenth century but petered out from 1630 onwards, with different regions revealing contrasting trends. The plagues of 1628–32 and 1636–9 often wiped out what the previous generation had replenished. In parts of northern Italy, growth started before 1500 and in most places it continued through to the second half of the sixteenth century, and in some into the seventeenth century. Plagues in the first half of the seventeenth century (in Lombardy, those of 1628–32, 1635 and 1649), however, eliminated most of the increases of the previous century.

In the Spanish peninsula, Castile's population increased through the sixteenth century, with perhaps the fastest growth occurring in the 1530s. Then, as in Italy and France, epidemic disease (and possibly dearth-related mortality) swept away the gains of a generation in a sequence of bad years. The epidemic of 1599–1600 was frightening in its intensity. Up to 750,000 Spaniards – a tenth of the population – probably fell victim to pestilence in the period from 1596 to 1614. Some places do not seem to have recovered their demographic buoyancy thereafter. Others did, only to find it succumbing to later attacks, especially in 1647 and 1650. A study that concentrates on the number of baptisms in sixty-four parishes from across Castile suggests steep declines in the interior of the peninsula (in Extremadura and Old Castile). Elsewhere, the expulsion of the Moriscos (converted Muslims) in 1609 had a catastrophic impact. Some 275,000 were expatriated, meaning Valencia lost a quarter of its population. The impact in Castile and Andalusia was less, but no doubt important, especially in towns. The real difficulty is to make sense of the general upswing of the sixteenth century in the context of the evidence for stagnation in the first half of the seventeenth century. The latter was not a general crisis on the scale of the Black Death. But it raises questions about the systemic weaknesses that underlay the growth in the century before.

Converting these trends into overall figures requires a deep breath. The numbers, tentative as they are, put the population growth of the 'long sixteenth century' into perspective. By some time towards 1600, Europe's population was about 75–80 million. That is towards the *lower* end of the estimates for its population in the early fourteenth century on the eve of the Black Death. Europe replenished its countryside in the sixteenth century; it did not transform it. In 1340, Europe's population might have been around 17 per cent of the world's total (74 million out of 442 million). By 1650, it was no more than 15 per cent of that total. By 1600, China's population, which probably grew at a faster rate than Europe's in the sixteenth century, may have been between 175 and 200 million. Despite losses in the period to 1650, it remained much more than double that of Europe. Europe's demographic advance in the 'long sixteenth century' was not dramatic in world terms. By modern standards, it was modest (1 per cent per annum) and uneven – sluggish in the Mediterranean, more dynamic on the northwestern flanks. France dominated Europe's heartland, accounting for something like a quarter of Europe's population: approaching 20 million.

This was the first age of parish registers. Some dioceses, especially in Italy and Spain, were precocious. The bishop of the diocese of Nantes enjoined his parish clergy to keep baptismal registers from 1406 and that is a region with some of the earliest surviving examples. The motives were religious, not demographic – to prevent 'spiritual incest' (that is, to stop people marrying into the families of their godparents). Gradually such local initiatives were enshrined in religious and state decrees. The final session of the Council of Trent (24 November 1563) pronounced that parish priests had to keep registers of births and marriages. Secular authorities, too, wanted the means to prove that people had been born, married and buried at a particular place, and on a particular date. In France, the Ordinance of Blois (1579) justified such record-keeping as a way to avoid fraud. The Protestant Reformation's redrafting of boundaries between Church and state resulted in parochial registration in parts of Switzerland (from the later 1520s), England (from 1538) and elsewhere. In Zürich, parish registers were introduced in 1526 in order to control the spread of Anabaptism. Jean Calvin insisted upon the introduction of registers in Geneva in 1541 as part of his vision of a well-ordered polity.

Approximately 100,000 folios of parish registers survive from the sixteenth century just for one French department (Loire-Atlantique): thousands of ‘Jean’-s (one boy in four) and ‘Jeanne’-s (one girl in five). In theory, by using ‘family reconstitution’ (reconstructing the genealogy of a sufficient number of families over a long period of time) a demographic projection can be generated. In reality, the process is complicated, especially for the period before 1650. Early baptismal registers only irregularly recorded the births of those who died before baptism. In some parts of Europe (for instance, the Basque country and Estonia), the use of a patronym was by no means established. In Holland, those in the lower classes tended not to use their family names in baptismal records, though they might in others. Names were written as they sounded, and people were known by what others chose to call them. Above all, migration makes the problem of family reconstitution a jigsaw puzzle in which some of the vital pieces are missing, and some of the rest belong to another picture altogether.

Once reconstituted, however, the results are like listening through a stethoscope to a breathing organism, in which living is the systole and dying the diastole. The latter was dominated by numbing rates of perinatal and post-natal mortality. In most places, a quarter of the children born did not survive until their first birthday, and only a half lived to celebrate their tenth. The diary of Jean Le Coullon from the countryside around Metz tells an all too familiar story. He was from a family of thirteen children, ten of whom died before they were married. He himself married in January 1545, and his wife bore him his first son, Collignon, the following year, his second son two years later, his third son, Jean, in 1549, and his fourth in 1552. In 1553 his wife died of plague, by which time two children had already died. Jean remarried eleven months later and went on to have other children by his second marriage, but of all the nineteen children of his and his surrounding family mentioned in the diary, only six lived to be twenty years old. He recounts these deaths in his diary alongside details of the weather and the state of the crops. One might imagine that he did not care very much, were it not for the moment when his first namesake son, Jean, died in 1549. Then he writes: ‘It was of such great displeasure to me that I became inconsolable.’

Large surviving families were not common. Life expectancy at birth was low (say, twenty-five years) and, although it improved if you survived to adulthood, you would be lucky to see the age of fifty-five. Those surviving that long tended not to know how old they were. In 1566, Wiriot Guérin, local provost from the village of Gondreville on the river Moselle, declared that he was forty-four years of age. A decade later, he equally solemnly told the officials of the duke of Lorraine that he was ‘sixty years old or more’. Epidemics of killer disease – bubonic plague, but also typhus, scarlet fever and influenza – could wipe away whole families and have a serious impact on local communities. Our demographic stethoscope registers the spasm of the demographic organism as it tries to cope with death rates that suddenly spiral to 6–10 per cent and, on occasion, 30–40 per cent. An important part of the spasm was the primal, or rather social, urge to replenish. Baptismal rates stutter, then recover fast as the organism worked to restore equilibrium; mini baby-booms were a familiar response to demographic catastrophe. Marriage registers reflect the widows and widowers reconstituting their families and consolidating their inheritances.

How, then, was Europe’s population replenishment sustained? The longer series of surviving parish registers pick out cycles of local and regional growth, periodically arrested by a major mortality crisis, each crisis creating its own peaks and troughs in the family and age cohorts of the future. Most of all this lay outside people’s power to control. So the answer to this question lies not in those elements that prevented demographic growth but in how it was that Europe’s population managed to secure relatively high levels of fertility despite all the constraints that prevented it from doing so. Here is where the demographic evidence is (literally) pregnant with as many questions as answers. How many men and women chose not to get married at all remains unknown, though it may have been as high as 10–20 per cent of the population. For those who married, the pattern of marital fertility corresponded to the modern biological clock, highest for women aged between twenty and twenty-four, and declining thereafter, gently at first, but more rapidly the closer the mother reached forty, by which time most women had conceived for the last time in their lives. Illegitimacy

rates, however, were at levels that modern advocates of family values could only dream of. Somewhere between 4 and 10 per cent of brides plighting their troth were already pregnant – but over half of them were in the early months and legitimating their condition. Illegitimate children were rarely more than 4 per cent of the total births, and often under 2 per cent. They were also a declining percentage. Was this a sign of the greater emphasis upon social and sexual discipline that resulted from the religious reformations of the sixteenth century? Perhaps, but illegitimacy rates tended to move in sequence with trends in nuptiality. In early-modern Europe, illegitimate births complemented births within marriage; they were not an alternative to them.

Human fertility across Europe varied widely. Before 1650 there is no evidence for widespread, artificial birth control. Religious strictures and social norms worked together to outlaw it. They did not, however, preclude couples deciding to stop having sex in order to avoid further conceptions, although that does not seem to have been widespread. So the explanation for Europe's population growth is embedded in that complex social institution, marriage.

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The social foundation of Christendom rested on the family. What changed in the relationships between women and men in this period? The continuing subordination of women to men inside and outside marriage is no surprise. The more strident voices in favour of patriarchy that emerge in the wake of the religious changes of the Reformation are. They hint at a fear of possible change. Subordination could mean very different things, depending on the context. Arranged marriages were common but they still involved courtship and negotiation. Widows were not generally forced to remarry by their families and if they had an inheritance it gave them a certain power. Many offspring lived away from home after puberty so that parental authority was not an ongoing reality in their lives. Women's educational opportunities were very restricted but they had employment possibilities and the Church tried to protect their freedom of conscience. The constraints on women's behaviour were, above all, social. In the wake of the Reformation, Church and secular courts took an even closer interest in controlling sexual behaviour. Prenuptial pregnancy was widely regarded with fear precisely because it threatened to turn a patriarchal domestic world on its head. In Europe's rural world especially, women's lot was not a happy one. They could not hold offices. They generally could not be tenants of land without guardianship. And there was hideous routine male violence directed at women, documented through their attempts at legal redress, risking their honour and reputation, and the counter-charge of being a 'shrew'.

What stands out most is the variety in Europe's marriage patterns. There were late marriages and a significant number of celibate individuals (mainly servants) in the family reconstitutions for England and the northwestern urbanized regions from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards. Both help explain how parts of Europe weathered the economic adversity of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Late marriages were a form of natural contraception. The age of marriage followed the inverse of real wages; as the latter fell, the former rose. The pool of 'life-cycle servants' (sexually mature people, waiting their turn to be married) was a reservoir of demographic replenishment. Parts of urbanized Europe were demographically resilient in the seventeenth century because of this elasticity.

Beyond this more urbanized region, east of the Elbe and in Denmark for example, marriage choices were determined by the realities of serfdom where landlords could impose a marriage and refuse a household with a female head. In the Baltic countries, Hungary, southern France or central and southern Italy, different family structures reflected a mixture of pressures: the ways of exploiting the land, the relationship of population to resource, the customary laws of inheritance and modes of taxation. In southern Italy – and wherever cereal production was concentrated in the hands of large estates (*latifundia*) employing day-labourers – marriage patterns reflect a hard life where men did not last long. Marriage came early for both

men and women – between sixteen and twenty years old for the latter. Celibacy was almost unheard of outside the monastery or convent. Women did not work outside their home and strongly held notions of family honour prevented its occurring. Widows remarried almost immediately and men queued to take the place of those who had died.

In Calabria, the Campagna, Sicily and elsewhere, wherever farming was more mixed or specialized (vineyards, olive groves, fruit trees) and where there were small peasant proprietors, girls married later (between twenty-two and twenty-six years of age), and boys who did not want to stay on the farm were encouraged to move away. In Sardinia, marriages were very late and there were lots of live-in servants – male and female, milkmaids and farmhands. Sardinian children were expected to accumulate their own dowries before marriage by working outside the home, and Sardinian women had a share in the paternal estate. In Umbria, Tuscany and the Romagna, and especially in those regions which practised share-cropping (sharing the farming risk between a farmer and a proprietor), day-labourers lived in nuclear families alongside peasant proprietors whose households included several generations of their own family as well as share-croppers and day-labourers. Where Roman law required the nomination of a single heir, the father generally chose his eldest son, but it could also be the first son to marry. Upon marriage, he handed over control of the farm to the heir and became what in Elizabethan England was known as a ‘sojourner’ in his own home, with arrangements already in hand for the elderly parents to be looked after in their declining years. Family complexity was a function of status. Families with wealth and notability had extended possessions and interests whose preservation and enhancement by marriage and inheritance led to complex domestic and family arrangements. Family formation was an individual and collective way of trying to secure the best conditions of living in a world where recurrent economic and demographic crisis threatened the survival of the whole family unit, and there was no one recipe for all.

Custom played a large part in who inherited what. Negotiation determined the levels of dowries for women and the marriage portions for men. Even more so, customary law dictated what was supposed to happen to a succession after death. When people attended seigneurial courts, notaries reminded them of what the customary law allowed. But there was a bewildering array of customary laws in northern Europe and, as jurists set about ‘codifying’ them in the sixteenth century, they became perplexed by the discrepancies they uncovered. In southern France, northeastern Spain and the hereditary domains of the Holy Roman Emperor, Roman law determined successions. The result favoured the *pater familias*, who could decide how to order the succession of his property and could hand it on to whomsoever he chose, using preferential legacies and donations to favour a particular individual. Children could choose to stay at home, in which case they retained their interest in the succession. If they chose to leave, however, they had the right to a dowry, but nothing more, and they were cut out of the inheritance. In Baltic lands and the British Isles common law also favoured male primogeniture (inheritance by the eldest son). Elsewhere – in Spain, Italy, northern France and the Low Countries – the customary law was more careful to protect the rights of all the heirs in a succession. It dictated ‘partible inheritance’. So, for example, in Normandy and western France, even individuals who had received property in the form of a dowry were obliged to return it to the family estate when the parents died so that it could all be collectively redistributed on an equal basis around the heirs. These patterns mattered, not least because a dowry created a ‘charge’ on a family – most often acquitted in this period in the form of a rent, thus expanding rural credit and debt arrangements.

Partible inheritance offended jurists because it led to property subdivision and the weakening of patriarchal authority. A chorus of legal treatises demonstrated that, whatever customary law said, the experience of the Hebrews and the accumulated wisdom of the ancients favoured male primogeniture. In a dialogue, probably written in Italy in the early 1530s, the English humanist Thomas Starkey tried to represent both sides of the argument. It was cruel ‘utterly to exclude [younger sons] from all as though they had commit[ted] some great offence and crime against their parents’. It was against reason and natural equity and ‘seemeth to diminish the natural love betwixt them which nature hath so bounden together’. Yet partible inheritance was a slippery

slope to the dissolution of wealth: 'If the lands in every great family were distributed equally betwixt the brethren, in a small process of years the head families would decay and by little and little vanish away. And so the people should be without rulers and heads . . . you shall take away the foundation and ground of all our civility.'

So the great change in this period was the triumph of male primogeniture among Europe's élites. With it, the science of genealogy enjoyed heightened legal and social respectability, as primogeniture became retrospectively validated by antiquarian researches into noble families and state-sponsored investigations into claims of nobility. Primogeniture became widespread in England among the gentry and merchant élites. The French nobility had long been constrained to practise male primogeniture, while commoners aspiring to join its ranks attempted to bypass customary law in order to concentrate their wealth and estates in the hands of the eldest son. The Italian nobilities practised functional unigeniture – either leaving their estates to a single heir or undivided to a collectivity of brothers, only one of whom would eventually marry. Only among German princes and the landed nobility of eastern Europe and Russia did partible inheritance survive, reflected most dramatically in the bewildering chequerboard of divided domains in Germany.

To what extent did customary law make a difference when it came to family formation? Twenty per cent of all couples had no surviving children at all; a further 20 per cent would have only daughters. That constrained the degree of planning for the future. In any case, there were ways round the customary law and these were increasingly exploited in this period as families adapted the law to their own needs. The growing proportions of wealth in non-landed forms made inheritances more flexible. In two respects, laws of succession seem to have had an important impact, however, on family formation – thus affecting the way that different parts of Europe responded to demographic growth. By comparing two areas in Lower Saxony one can detect both of them. Around Calemburg, imitable inheritance was enforced by the customary seigneurial law and the state. The result was the maintenance and reinforcement of large rural holdings in the hands of wealthy farmers, often living in complex households with more than one generation under the same roof. To deal with the problem of those members of the family who cut loose, the farmers gave them dowries and marriage portions which were paid for by loans on the strength of their property. At the other end of the scale, there was a growth in the numbers of cottage labourers (called *Brinkkötter* in German lands because they lived on the brink, the common land outside the village), dependent upon others for work. By contrast, fifty miles to the south around Göttingen land tenure permitted partible inheritance. The result was a growing number of smallholders living in nuclear families, sometimes adapting the sheds and stalls attached to the family house as living accommodation. The result was property subdivision especially when sixteenth-century demographic growth turned into a question of economic survival for those who had inherited patches of land which gave them no margin to live on in hard times. Partially disinherited young people, longer periods of domestic service or increasing servitude, peasant debts, smaller property holdings, contested inheritances – these were what linked succession to the broader history of what was happening to Christendom.

#### THE RED HORSE, THE DARK HORSE AND THE PALE HORSE

In 1498 Albrecht Dürer produced fifteen graphic illustrations for an edition of the Book of Revelation. The apocalyptic vision of John had an undeniable fascination for Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Between 1498 and 1650, over 750 editions of the text or commentaries on it were published, many of them in cheap print formats. Of Dürer's illustrations, none became more celebrated than that of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Where earlier illustrators had depicted them one by one, he presented them as a posse, riding across a brooding sky, slaying everything in their path, while the monster of hell below devoured the rich and powerful. In the Book of Revelation, the second horseman rides a red horse representing war. The third horseman rides a dark horse, the herald of famine, while the fourth is mounted on a pale horse, the omen of disease and death.

The impact of war is difficult to measure but it was more prominent in the century and a half to 1650. The size of Europe's armies changed and warfare became more attritional. The Spanish siege and capture of Maastricht in 1579 resulted in a third of the city's inhabitants losing their life. The population of La Rochelle was reduced from 27,000 to a mere 5,000 as a result of the famine and disease of fourteen months of siege in 1627–8. When Magdeburg fell to imperial troops, perhaps as many as 25,000 people (85 per cent of the population) perished amid the flames of the burning city. The cumulative military casualties from the Thirty Years War may have been in excess of 400,000 although, if we take disease into account, the losses may well have been four times that number. The impact of warfare on the local population was greater.

Destruction of civilian livelihood to delay an enemy advance became an accepted military practice.

Mercenary contingents in the Italian peninsula in the first half of the sixteenth century regularly included 'devastators', who not merely built fortifications but destroyed crops and uprooted vines and olive trees in order to cripple a region's agriculture for years to come. Constable Anne de Montmorency employed just these tactics in Provence to delay the imperial invasion in 1536, as did the troops which invaded the duchy of Lorraine in the early 1630s and the Swedish forces in Bavaria in 1632 (and again in 1646). Unpaid and badly provisioned soldiers were especially dangerous to civilians, as those towns in the Netherlands occupied by mutinying troops during the Dutch Revolt experienced to their cost. In the engraving *Peasant Sorrow (Boereverdriet)* the Dutch artist David Vinckboons (1576–1632) depicted peasants brutally abused by soldiers. But he followed it up with another piece, showing peasants getting their own back on them. Armies on the move were held in real hatred and fear. Peasants outside Nuremberg massacred straggling Spanish and Italian contingents in the Bavarian army in 1622; stray Swedish units were slaughtered after their defeat at Bamberg in 1631.

Fleeing to the relative protection of a fortified town meant the abandonment of farmsteads and the loss of the harvest. Such migration, however, increased the risk among ill-nourished people of spreading still further the epidemic disease of which armies were often the carriers. The documentary record is fragmentary but warfare probably reversed population growth in the Netherlands and France in the later sixteenth century. Post 1600, the civilian and military deaths, those directly and indirectly related to conflict, during the Civil Wars of the British Isles as well as the Thirty Years War in Germany, were (as a proportion of the overall population) worse than those of the First World War. In Russia, the disastrous Livonian War (1558–83) provoked internal political and financial collapse that led to the Time of Troubles (1598–1613). As tax burdens doubled, peasants fled to the black-soil forest-steppe, leaving (by some accounts) over half the farmsteads deserted. The resulting famine which gripped Muscovy between 1601 and 1603 was intensified by civil war, peasant uprisings and foreign interventions. By 1620, the depopulation in many regions exceeded the disastrous levels of the 1580s. The Russian heartland took longer to repopulate than Germany in the wake of the Thirty Years War. Among the Eurasian civilizations of this period, Europe was unique in the human cost of its conflicts.

Bubonic plague was still capable of wiping out Europe's population in pandemics, Europe's interlinked urban regions acting as its conductor. In the period from 1493 and 1649, Amsterdam witnessed twenty-four outbreaks, Leiden twenty-seven, Rotterdam twenty, Dordrecht eighteen. In fourteen English towns during a similar period (1485–1666), plague occurred one year in every sixteen and was a regular London visitor. Large conurbations were most at risk. Plague aetiology required, if rats were its carrier (as seems irrefutable), regular re-infection to take place, something that was sustained by the more marked degrees of European contact and mobility. By the first half of the seventeenth century, however, civil authorities implemented quarantines – not on the basis of agreed medical science but on pragmatic grounds that it controlled the spread of disease. Following the advice of physicians they monitored the causes of mortality, established arrangements for early warning of plague elsewhere and limited contact accordingly, building temporary immunity hospitals to control outbreaks when they occurred.

Plague was rightly feared. A high number of those infected died quickly from it. It was painful and showed

no consideration for social class. The French surgeon Ambroise Paré described it as an enemy entering the 'Fortress or Castle of Life' and taking it by storm. There was no cure. The best that Paré could offer was a palliative antidote, a mixture of treacle and mithridatum (an old 'sovereign' remedy) along with a cream to 'draw' the poison out of the body. That did not stop medical practitioners from rivalling one another with explanations, the favoured being 'miasma', a corruption in the air. The best antidote was flight – which, of course, further spread the disease.

Plague was joined by other contagious infections (such as smallpox, typhus and influenza), reinforcing the perception of the increasing interdependence of one region with another. Outbreaks of typhus, for example, may have claimed a million Russian peasant lives in the period from 1580 to 1620. It was called 'typhus' by physicians from the migraine 'stupor' that often accompanied it. No one could remember it appearing much before the last campaign against the Moors in Granada in 1489–92. More commonly it was known as 'camp-fever' because of its prevalence in armies. It afflicted the military forces in the Italian Wars and decimated the armies of both Christendom and the Ottomans fighting in Hungary at the end of the sixteenth century. The troops of Count Mansfeld which fled from the battle of the White Mountain (1620) to the Lower Palatine, and then to Alsace and the Netherlands (1621), carried typhus with them; 4,000 died of the disease in Strasbourg alone as a result. French troops returning from the Mantuan campaign in 1629–30 infected over a million people in southern France.

Europe's soldiers also spread syphilis. Its first major outbreak had occurred in the French armies invading Italy in 1494, who called it the 'Neapolitan disease'. Elsewhere in Europe it became known as the 'French (or German, or Polish, or Spanish) Pox'. In 1527 a physician in Rouen, Jacques de Béthencourt, proposed an alternative to the pejorative *Morbus Gallicus*. He suggested 'Malady of Venus' (*Morbus Venereus*) and three years later, a Venetian medical practitioner in Verona, Girolamo Fracastoro, wrote a Virgilian epic about a shepherd called 'Syphilus'. With Columbus's voyage to America in mind, he described how a flotilla reached a new land to the west where the explorers offended the gods by destroying exotic fauna. The natives explained that their ancestors had once ceased to worship the gods and been punished for it with a disease. The shepherd Syphilus was the first to be afflicted. The story perpetuated the myth that syphilis had originated in America. It was a disease 'by Traffic brought' (as Nahum Tate's verse translation of Fracastoro put it), a reminder that international commerce came with a cost.

Hunger was frequent and famine not unknown. Chronic food shortage – when foodstuffs became in short supply and impossibly dear – often occurred. In England, there were significant food scarcities in 1527–8, 1550–52, 1555–9 and 1596–8 (the 'Great Hunger'). In Paris, there were periods of dearth in 1520–21, 1523, 1528–34, 1548, 1556 and 1560. The Mediterranean lands experienced widespread shortages in 1521–4; the Baltic and Poland in 1570 and 1588, and many parts of Europe in the 1590s. In Mediterranean lands after 1600, significant shortage of food occurred so regularly that it was no longer a subject of report. But did people die from famine? There is only a complicated and provisional answer to that question. Major infections did not need malnutrition in order to kill. But severe malnutrition reduced immunity and opened the door to illness. King James I's physician, Théodore Turquet de Mayerne, advised the English Privy Council that it should control food supplies, since famine was 'almost inevitable to breed the Plague'. In parts of northern England, there is evidence for the distinctive footprint of dearth-related mortality (a sudden crescendo in the late winter months) in surviving parish registers, especially in the 1590s and 1630s. That same marker has been found in parts of inland Castile, northern Italy, the Papal States and Naples in the 1590s. There are credible reports of itinerant people dying from hunger and cold in winter months following bad harvests, with particular years marked out as killers: 1635, 1649 and 1655. Such dearth-related mortality was not an age-old problem. It was a late sixteenth-century creation, a reflection of the razor-sharp impact of economic change in this period on the traditional patterns of resilience.

Food shortage was a localized problem. Grain markets, especially in the rural world, remained autonomous,

prices in them moving independently of one another. In major cities, conscious of the anger that high prices generated (magistrates feared grain riots, by all accounts significant occurrences), there were determined efforts to smooth out high prices by creating municipal granaries. Cities on the Mediterranean littoral stockpiled Polish rye, supplied by Dutch merchants, who consolidated their hold on the long-distance bulk grain trade there from the 1590s. In Dutch towns public authorities almost never interfered in the grain trade, so conflicting were the interests of its traders and its magistrates. Not so elsewhere, where stricter controls upon the grain trade became a staple of mercantilist political economy. Overall, it is as though there were two different sorts of Europe emerging: one which could get by in periods of dearth, and one which could not. Both knew of the other's existence, and their fates impacted on one another.

## EUROPE'S REPLENISHMENT AND GLOBAL COOLING

Was there a pattern to crop failures? Europe's weather system is complex and a minor change creates excessively cold springs and wet summers which damage crop yields. Paleoclimatologists have databases in which climate and environmental evidence at different dates from across Europe and the globe is collated. Europe already had climatologists in this period. David Fabricius kept a weather diary in Emden from 1585 to 1612, recording evidence for the large number of late frosts and cold summers in that period. The Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe left a detailed account from the island of Hven in the Danish Sound, confirming Fabricius's account. Renward Cysat, a notable from Lucerne, summarized more detailed observations in monthly reckonings while also reporting on conversations with herdsmen whom he met when botanizing in the mountains. This 'human archive', when combined with the 'natural archive' (the changing dates of the wine harvest and opening of communal pastures; dendrochronological, palynological, glaciological and ice-core evidence) has enabled a tentative reconstruction of weather patterns and an impact analysis of weather events upon grain, dairy and wine production. It indicates that European (and global) climate changed quite rapidly, and with significant results at this time. There was a period of warming from the mid-fifteenth century through to around 1560. Thereafter, there was a period of notable weather events, typified by the early onset of winter, very wet winters, cold and wet springs, low temperatures in summer and excessive rainfall during the harvest months (July and August). Its severity is noticeable from around 1560 through to the 1640s.

The worst times were when cold springs and wet harvest months occurred in two successive years. These correlated with the years of highest food-grain prices – 1569–74, 1586–9, 1593–7, 1626–9 and 1647–9. In parts of Europe, climate change may well have lowered food production significantly. The impact of the 'Little Ice Age' culminated in the 1640s; 1641 was the third-coldest summer on record in Europe's history. Scandinavia recorded its coldest winter in 1641–2. In the Alps, fields and houses disappeared as glaciers advanced; 1647–9 also witnessed serious climatic anomalies. On the other side of the world, prolonged cold and drought contributed to the demographic crisis of the mid-century and the rebellions that led to the fall of the Ming dynasty.

Explanations centre on very low solar activity (the lowest recorded level in two millennia) and major volcanic eruptions (twelve around the Pacific between 1638 and 1644, the highest number ever registered). Telescopes enabled observers to enumerate sunspots with unprecedented precision. A good number appeared between 1612 and 1614, but almost none in 1617 and 1618, and very few in 1625–6, and then again in 1637–9. Between 1642 and 1644, the astronomer Johannes Hevelius made daily drawings of the sun, recording the location of all spots. They were rare and, after 1645, they almost disappeared until the eighteenth century. The aurora borealis also vanished from the northern hemisphere's skies. Equally, the known volcanic eruptions produced dust clouds which also served to cool the atmosphere and create unstable weather conditions around the world, including Europe. A Seville shopkeeper noted that, during the first half of 1649, 'the sun did not shine once . . . and if it came out, it was pale and yellow, or else much too red, which caused greater fear'.

There were some summers that never came, and some exceptional weather events (hailstorms, summer snowfalls, long rainy spells) which contemporaries interpreted as the hand of God and possibly the work of witches. The Spanish agronomist Lope de Dexa advocated a government ministry of astrologers to predict bad weather. The changes were small by modern climate change standards – a fluctuation of not more than 2 per cent over annual mean temperatures and 10 per cent in overall rainfall. But they may have been a significant element in destabilizing farming routines, causing dearth and contributing to a sense of crisis. By 1650, Europe was more dependent on the bulk transportation of grain-stuffs than ever before to feed its urban populations. Europe's communication systems informed the latter more about their vulnerability and amplified their anxiety.

It would be easier to explain the impact of food shortages if more was known about what people ate. In reality, the diet of all but the rich is largely a matter of inference from the records of what was purchased to feed those in institutional care – the sick in hospital or students, lodging in colleges. What mattered most was the grain to make bread. It was a staple to a monotonous degree, accompanying every meal as loaves, piecrusts, and starch in soups and gravies. It gave people the strength to work and it was the most calorific and least expensive foodstuff. Cereals produced six times more edible calories than milk, as well as more protein per hectare than grazing livestock. Christendom was defined by its dependence on wheat, and dry cultivation, less productive than the irrigation agricultures on which over 60 per cent of the world's population relied by 1600.

For those on day-wages, bread cost them half what they earned. Wheat was the most prized for making bread and pasta. But it was expensive because it was a 'winter corn' (sown in the autumn and reaped the following summer) which drained good soils of their nutrients, and needed a fallow one year in three or four, or some form of marling or liming to enable poorer soils to yield a crop. For the mass of the population, wheat was grown for sale or mixed with rye to provide bread flour. Rye was more widespread than wheat, and the two were sometimes sown together since the rye might survive a cold, wet spring when the wheat did not. Harvested together, they provided a bread flour known as 'maslin' which was mostly rye with a little wheat added. Spelt, barley and oats were 'summer corn', sown in the spring and harvested that same year. Spelt was widely grown in Switzerland, the Tyrol and Germany where it tolerated short summers. Barley was 'drinking corn', widely used in northern Europe for making ale and beer, while oats served as provender for horses except in places such as Scotland and Scandinavia where it was also the human staple.

The Columbian Exchange introduced more calorific staples into the European diet, bolstering Europe's demographic resilience. In the region around Valencia in southern Spain, rice became important (imported from North Africa), and this 'marsh corn' was increasingly part of the diet in parts of northern Italy and southern France. Maize ('Indian corn') was introduced from the Americas into the Spanish peninsula in the 1490s and increasingly grown in Mediterranean Europe. Fed to cattle initially, it could be turned into corn-bread, while in Italy it was refined into a ground meal (polenta). In the Cévennes, ground chestnuts furnished the 'nut-bread' of the poor. But the attitude to food remained conservative. Henry Best, a farmer from Elmswell in Yorkshire, recorded who ate what in his household during the year 1641: wheat for the family, maslin for the servants, and brown bread from rye, peas and barley for the workers on the farm.

Grain mattered because it could be stored for comparatively long periods of time. Most other foodstuffs were perishable. Despite the emphasis on food which could be stored, more vegetables appeared on people's tables. Parsnips, carrots, cabbages and turnips either made their appearance for the first time, or did so in significant quantities in this period. Many of these were the result of cultural exchange with the Near East, a more significant influence on Europe's diet than the New World. Pumpkins, melons, cucumbers and courgettes were also cultivated in Europe's kitchen gardens for the first time. Lettuces and artichokes, grown for the tables of the rich in Rome, conquered France and spread to irrigated gardens around Valencia in Spain. Calabria and Catalonia served as greenhouses for new varieties of almond, fig, pear and damson trees.

Dried pulses were a convenient way of overcoming seasonality, though they attracted hostility: 'more meat for hogs and savage beasts to feed upon than mankind' reported William Harrison in 1587. In southern Europe, however, haricots, an import from Peru, alleviated food shortages. Annibale Carracci's painting of *The Bean Eater (Il Mangiafagioli)*, c. 1580, depicts a rural labourer tucking into his bowl of haricots accompanied by onions, a bread roll, vegetables and a glass of wine. Fermenting, for instance cabbage, in salt water was another method of preserving vegetables, much developed in Germany and eastern Europe. When stored in butter-barrels or stone-crocks, sealed with wet muslin and a weighted wooden top, they offered an additional staple through the winter months. Butter, cheese and olive oil could easily be stored.

Meat and fish, however, remained more local and seasonal. Freshly slaughtered meat was mostly to be found on Europe's tables in spring and autumn, although a proportion was also preserved by pickling in brine, or salting, smoking, spicing and drying it. The resulting raw or cooked sausages had a rich variety of shapes, colours, flavours and names. For François Rabelais, they were the height of cuisine and a subject of ribald fun. Fish became second only to grain as a commercialized foodstuff. Fishing was a great source of employment and an even more important 'ghost acreage' of food reserve. White cod (from the Atlantic) was salted. Red cod (from the Mediterranean and Atlantic) was smoked. Herring was fished from the northern Atlantic. Eels, caught around the sluices of the newly drained marshland in the Netherlands, were sold in bulk in the fish markets of Amsterdam and London. If, as seems possible, global cooling brought the migratory shoals of herring southward, it made their commercial fishing that much easier. Europe's northwest Atlantic marine calorific reservoir was more important than its American 'ghost acreage' in the years up to 1650 in making up the dietary shortfalls that resulted from population growth and climatic uncertainty.

There are no entirely convincing and comprehensive explanations for the patterns of human mortality in this period. The devastating impact of demographic crises is evident. But no one can be sure about the relationship between epidemic disease and under-nourishment even though there clearly was one. That is because there is insufficient evidence about people's diets and about the changing relationship of man to microbe, flea and rat. There is no explanation for why some communities escaped major demographic crises from one generation to another, whereas others did not. Much must have depended on the most vulnerable members of communities, those least able to feed and fend for themselves, or those who were the most mobile and the most likely to carry infectious disease from one locality to another. The aetiology of epidemic disease remains uncertain, and the impact of harvest failure was localized. Europe's demographic growth was vulnerable to the inveterate forces of nature, but also to those of human conflict. In southern and central Europe, the gains of the sixteenth century were mostly wiped out in the first half of the seventeenth. The resilience in other regions, especially the economically advanced northwestern Europe, accentuated the regional divergences which pulled Christendom in different directions.

### 3. Urban and Rural Worlds

More people lived in cities in 1650 than was the case in 1500. This period saw the emergence of a more populous North Italian–Rhineland corridor, an axis of economic strength. The prosperity of that region was as much based on transformations in its rural hinterland as in its urban centres. Globally, such a development was not unique. In China, regions of advanced economic development and urbanization existed before they emerged in Europe. By 1650, the dynamism of Europe's urbanized corridor became more focused in northwestern Europe, in the lower Rhineland and across the North Sea in eastern England. By some estimates, the proportion of Europe's population living in towns had surpassed that of China by 1650. The consolidation of this more densely populated and urbanized economic region and other economic changes weakened the social cohesion which underpinned Christendom. This social cohesion is the subject of this

chapter.

## URBAN SPACES

Towns made an impact on contemporaries in various ways: as military strongholds, places where justice was administered, centres of commerce, locations for élites and points for cultural exchange. They were competitive nodes of concentrated presence that made their mark on the world around them. Their impact was ambiguous and paradoxical. On the one hand, they had an energizing effect upon their environment. On the other, they grew at others' expense. They increased inequality and risk.

That Europe's urban space was seen in a new light is evident from the emerging genre of 'chorography' or imagined representations of the city. Oblique views conveying an urban 'presence' to the contemporary eye were initially preferable to city plans. Sebastian Münster's *Cosmography* (1544) and Guillaume Guérout's *Epitome of Europe's Chorography* (1552–3) contain townscapes depicting public buildings, fortifications and ecclesiastical foundations. The viewer could visualize their surroundings. It was like taking a visitor up the tallest building in a city and looking *Chorography* over it – which is what the Florentine humanist Anton Francesco Doni recommended as the best way of introducing people to his own town. Cityscapes were part of the art of travel to which humanists initiated their readers.

In 1567, Lodovico Guicciardini published his influential *Description of All the Low Countries* – the inhabitant of one highly urbanized environment commenting on another. His work was a masterpiece of sixteenth-century urban geography, illustrated by chorographic engravings. Five years later the first volume of *The Cities of the World (Civitates Orbis Terrarum)* appeared, envisaged as an accompanying volume to the world atlas of Ortelius. The initial volume of 132 town engravings was followed by five further volumes, published mainly in Cologne, so that by 1619 the eventual collection totalled some 546 magnificent bird's eye views and accompanying text. Many of them were drawn by the project's creator, the engraver Frans Hogenberg. It became a status symbol for a city to have its plan in the collection. The views were enlivened with human figures and heraldic crests around the margins. These served a double purpose: besides illustrating customs, these figures were believed in Europe to dissuade the Turks from using the engravings, on the grounds that their religion forbade them from studying portrayals of human beings.

The growth in urban space was not, however, uniform. In the Italian peninsula, Milan was a big city of 91,000 inhabitants in 1500, but it shrank by a third after a terrible demographic crisis in 1542, recovering slowly to its former size only by the end of the century. Florence did not match until 1650 the population of 70,000 inhabitants that it enjoyed in 1520. Bologna (55,000 inhabitants in 1493, 36,000 in 1597), Brescia (48,500 inhabitants in 1493, under 37,000 in 1597) and Cremona (40,000 in 1502 and again in 1600) found it hard to compete with smaller neighbours (Padua, Verona, Vicenza) who expanded faster. By contrast, Venice grew by 50 per cent (105,000 in 1509, 168,000 in 1563, 150,000 in 1600). Naples almost doubled in size to rival Paris as Europe's largest city (150,000 in 1500, 275,000 in 1599). Sicily's towns (Palermo and Messina) grew at an extraordinary rate. Rome was a modest regional capital of 55,000 inhabitants on the eve of its sack by imperial forces in 1527 but by 1607 it had a population of 109,000.

North of the Alps, the picture was similarly varied. Paris was Christendom's great metropolis, the only place with over 200,000 inhabitants in 1500. It continued to expand, perhaps reaching 300,000 by 1560. Thereafter, the impact of the French civil wars undermined the fortunes of the great city, its growth resuming only after 1600. London, by contrast, grew no matter what demographic misfortune (the Great Plague of 1665 lies ahead) befell it, a key element in England's political economy. Lyon may have doubled its population in the years from 1500 to 1560 (40,000 to 80,000), but it struggled to maintain that size thereafter. That was the pattern for other French cities (such as Rouen and Toulouse), although Marseille managed to triple its inhabitants between 1520 and 1600 (15,000 to 45,000). In the Low Countries, the great

conurbations (Bruges, Ghent and Brussels) struggled to grow against smaller locations (Liège, Namur and Amsterdam). Antwerp, by contrast, tripled in size between 1490 and 1568, by which date it had over 100,000 inhabitants. But the conflicts of the Dutch Revolt – it was ransacked by mutinying troops (1576, 1583) and besieged (1584) – halved its population, and it only slowly recovered.

Some larger cities in central Europe (Cologne, Lübeck) barely held their own while others (Gdansk, Hamburg) grew. Nuremberg became the largest city in Christendom east of the Rhine. In the Spanish peninsula, Lisbon and Seville more than doubled their populations. Other Spanish cities saw significant growth (Valencia, Toledo, Granada). Madrid expanded from being a small town of 5,000 inhabitants in 1500 to over 35,000 by 1600. The population of cities with at least 10,000 inhabitants has become a classic way of representing how the overall balance of urban Europe tilted from the Mediterranean to the northwest.

Yet a traveller was five times as likely to spend the night in a small town (under 10,000) than in a metropolis. England had over 700 small towns, France over 2,000, the Holy Roman Empire over 3,000 and Poland over 800. The densities varied widely too. In southern and western Germany the average was one every 2.5 square miles. To the cosmographer Sebastian Münster, the towns in the Vosges foothills were so close ‘that you could fire a harquebus from one to the next’. Functional diversity and urban aspirations defined small towns better than population density. In those of Sweden and Finland, there was generally a shoemaker, tailor, blacksmith and carpenter. Urban pretension was reflected in infrastructure – walls, gates, a town hall, fountains and marketplace.

New towns flourished as nobles maximized the value of their estates and princes fostered urban investment; 270 new baronial burghs (incorporated towns) were founded in Scotland after 1500. In Lithuania, almost 400 seigneurial or ‘private’ towns were created in the late sixteenth century to capitalize on the growth of commercialized agriculture around the Baltic. The Vasa dynasty in Sweden granted thirty new charters for towns in the century after 1580 as part of its colonization of space. Meanwhile, the newly chartered towns in Ireland – Philipstown (Daingean) and Maryborough (Portlaoise) for example – became flagships for English plantation under the Tudor and Stuart monarchies. In Spain, there was a new incorporated town almost every year as local communities purchased a privilege that a cash-strapped monarchy was only too willing to sell.

Small towns depended for their viability on the economic landscape around them, and they did not all survive. Ambleside and Shap in the English Lake District, for example, could not sustain their town markets and sunk back to being villages. About three quarters of the new burghs in Scotland and new chartered towns in Norway ended up as ‘shadow towns’, villages in all but name. Hondschoote, a small commune to the east of Dunkirk, blossomed suddenly into a town with more than 15,000 inhabitants, thanks to the manufacture of lighter cloth made of wool mixed with linen. With the conflict in Flanders during the second half of the sixteenth century, however, its prosperity vanished. Oudenaarde, to the south of Ghent, doubled its population in the first half of the sixteenth century. By 1600, however, it had shrunk to under half its earlier size as the population emigrated en masse during the troubles. Urbanization was not a measure of ever-continuing European growth.

The economic relations between town and country acted as widening circles of influence around an urban nexus. Most intense was the space dominated by the weekly market, no more than a day’s journey away, where perishable products were sold in quantities; 75–90 per cent of local production was generally confined within this space. The monthly or quarterly fair represented a more extensive circle of influence. That was where grain and livestock were taken to market, often from places two or three days’ journey away. As with the inner zone, the scale depended upon the size of the city in question. The catchment area that supplied grain to Nuremberg was around 1,930 square miles, and its town council had its factors operating over a radius of 62 miles. That space corresponded to a definable economic region or ‘country’ and it was no coincidence that it also often mapped onto local judicial and administrative space. In economic terms, this

region counted for the majority of the remaining 10–25 per cent of local production, the proportion being dictated by the marginal costs of bringing bulk goods to market. To carry the grain to the market of Valladolid in 1559 added 2 per cent to the price for every league (the distance traversed by a cart in an hour – less than four miles) that the sack travelled. That left the most extensive third sphere, represented by the annual market, in which wool, cloth and yarn were traded, often at distances exceeding 25 miles. These circles of influence were particularly significant in the case of large cities, which tended to asphyxiate the smaller communities around them. Rural protest might find an echo inside capital cities, but their patrician oligarchs deployed their authority to close off and patrol their walls and gates. The mutual suspicions between citizens and peasants were too great for them to make common cause for long.

## MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

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