RS Notes: Social Crises, War, and Revolution

Economic and Social Crises

* From 1560 to 1650, Europe experienced economic and social crises.
  + One economic problem was inflation–rising prices–due to the influx of gold from the Americas and increased demand for land and food as the population grew.
* By 1600, an economic slowdown had hit Europe.
  + For example, Spain’s economy seriously fell by the 1640s because New World mines were producing less silver, pirates grabbed much of what was bound for Spain, and the number of Muslim and Jewish merchants and artisans had declined.
* By 1620, population began to decline, especially in central and southern Europe.
  + Warfare, plague, and famine all contributed to the population decline and general social tension.

Witchcraft Trials

* A belief in **witchcraft,** or magic, had been part of traditional village life for centuries
* The zeal behind the **Inquisition** was soon focused on witchcraft, and many people in Europe were seized by hysteria about the matter.
  + Perhaps more than one hundred thousand people were charged with witchcraft.
    - Most often common people were accused.
    - More than 75 percent of the accused were women, mostly single, widowed, or over 50.
    - Accused witches were tortured and usually confessed to such things as swearing allegiance to the devil, casting spells, and attending revels at night called sabbats.
  + By 1650, the witchcraft hysteria had lessened.
    - As governments strengthened after the period of crises, they were not tolerant of having witch trials disrupt society.
    - Also, attitudes were changing: many people found it unreasonable to believe in a world haunted by evil spirits.

The Thirty Years War

* Religious disputes continued in Germany after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 principally because the peace settlement did not recognize Calvinism, which spread throughout Europe.
* Religion, politics, and territory all played a role in the **Thirty Years’ War**, called the “last of the religious wars.”
  + The war began in the Holy Roman Empire in 1618 as a fight between the Hapsburg Holy Roman emperors and Protestant nobles in Bohemia who rebelled against the Hapsburgs.
    - All major European countries but England became involved.
    - Most important was the struggle between France, on the one hand, and Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, on the other hand, for European leadership.
  + The battles took place on German soil, and Germany was plundered and destroyed for 30 years.
  + The **Peace of Westphalia** ended the war in 1648.
    - Some countries gained new territories, and France emerged as the dominant nation in Europe.
    - The Peace of Westphalia said all German states could determine their own religion.
    - The states that made up the Holy Roman Empire became independent.
      * The Holy Roman Empire died, and Germany would not reunite for two hundred years.
* The Thirty Years’ War was Europe’s most destructive ever.
  + The flintlock musket, soon fitted with a bayonet, was a new, accurate weapon that could be reloaded faster than earlier firearms.
  + Increased use of firearms and greater mobility on the battlefield meant armies had to be better disciplined and trained.
  + Governments began to support standing armies.
  + By 1700, France had a standing army of four hundred thousand.