

TWELFTH EDITION

Volume 2

# Western Civilizations



Lerner • Meacham • Burns

ROBERT E. LERNER  
STANDISH MEACHAM  
EDWARD MCNALL BURNS

# WESTERN CIVILIZATIONS

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*Their History and Their Culture*

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VOLUME 2

TWELFTH EDITION



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## PREFACE

George Orwell once remarked that “keeping the past up to date is a full-time job.” This insight seems particularly telling as a result of the startling rush of events during the last few years. “Trends” that seemed so clear only yesterday have turned out to be no trends at all. In addition, dramatic advances in historical scholarship have cast new light on old problems and have placed into prominence subject matters that historians previously had all but ignored. Accordingly we have worked hard to keep the past up to date for this twelfth edition of *Western Civilizations*. Yet we have always worked within the framework of authorial principles bequeathed to us by E. M. Burns—principles that may have served to make this book a “text-book classic.” We offer a history of civilizations—an evolving account of the ways in which human beings have organized their lives in response to changing environments and persistent needs. Thus we complement narrative passages with discussions of ideas and societal institutions, and we draw heavily on pictorial material to give our readers the best impression possible of how our civilizations really looked. We try as well to avoid a tone of disembodied truth, both because we do not believe there is such a thing and because we want to engage and maintain our readers’ attention. Our urgent desire is to demonstrate without resorting to cheapness that “first-year history” need not be viewed as a chore but might be welcomed as a source of intellectual excitement, even delight.

Although we have gone over *Western Civilizations* line by line in our effort to keep the past up to date, teachers will wish to know where the most significant changes occur. Chapter 5, on Greek civilization, is almost entirely new. Among its new features are a completely reconceived section on women and men in the daily life of ancient Athens, a consideration of the role of the Greek alphabet and the transformation of military techniques in the rise of the *polis*, and an emphasis on the differences as well as similarities between Athenian and modern democracies. About half of the Roman chapter (Chapter 7) is also new. Major innovations here include an

altered treatment of the nature of family life (we have greatly changed our estimation of the role of women), a greater emphasis on the significance of slavery within the Roman economic and social system, and a reorganized discussion of Roman golden-age and silver-age literature. Other noteworthy changes in Parts One and Two are: a revised discussion of the stages of Hebrew religious development; an account of the volcanic eruption on the island of Thera; a reorganized presentation of Minoan social and cultural history; streamlined treatment of Epicureanism and Hellenistic religion; a new discussion of the conversion of Constantine. Finally, we have replaced the abbreviation “A.D.” with “C.E.”: students no longer know the meaning of *anno domini*, and C.E. (standing for “Common Era”) assumes no particular religious commitment.

In the medieval chapters certain terms that would not be readily understandable to beginners, such as *see* and *benefice*, have been eliminated. The treatment of the formation of the Russian Empire in Chapter 12 now distinguishes carefully between Russia proper and the other Slavic-speaking territories. In Chapter 13 the treatment of the Greek studies of the humanists has been rewritten; corrections have also been made in discussions of the work of Raphael and Michelangelo. Chapter 15 contains a rewritten paragraph on Pascal (students are reminded that a computer language was named after him!). Chapter 16 has been reorganized to place greater emphasis on the conflicts produced by changes occurring throughout the society and economy of early-modern Europe and particularly by the effects of proto-industrialization. Treatment of Rousseau has been moved from Chapter 19 (the French Revolution) to Chapter 18 (the Enlightenment) and has been completely rewritten with the aim of presenting Rousseau’s ideas on education as well as government.

Chapter 19, which deals with the French Revolution, has been reshaped; a rewritten section on the origins of the Revolution attends to recent scholarship on the relationship between social structure and politics. Material in Chapter 25, on the challenge of science, has been expanded, as have sections on Russia before the First World War (Chapter 26) and during the war (Chapter 27). In Chapter 28, the treatment of the Soviet Union, Italy, and Germany has been modified in the light of scholarly analysis that distinguishes between authoritarian dictatorships in those three countries. Finally, material in the last two chapters has been thoroughly updated and includes a discussion of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the re-ordering of politics in Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, the economic integration of Western Europe, as well as events in other parts of the fast-changing world of the 1990s.

Robert Lerner has been responsible for Chapters 1 through 15, as well as Chapter 18; Standish Meacham for the rest. To borrow a phrase from the tenth century savant, Gerbert of Rheims: “we write what we know, and what we do not know we learn.” In seeking guidance, we always learn much from colleagues and reviewers. For this edition we are enormously indebted to reviews provided by Clifford Backman (Boston University), David Graf (University of Miami), Carolyn Lougee (Stanford University),



Daniel Orlovsky (Southern Methodist University), Peter Sahlins (University of California, Berkeley), Richard Saller (University of Chicago), Arlene Wolinsky (San Diego Mesa College), and Stephen Wessley (York College of Pennsylvania), and the anonymous reviewers commissioned by our publisher. Robert Lerner is also grateful to Stephen Harris, Alauddin Samarrai (St. Cloud State University), Nancy Spatz (University of Northern Colorado), Heide Stier, Steven Williams (University of Northern Iowa), and Rachel Wolford for alerting him to numerous errors, dubieties, and infelicities. Standish Meacham acknowledges the thoughtful advice and suggestions received from Nancy Barker and David Crew (University of Texas). To Simon Cordery and Ann Rodrick he owes special and heartfelt thanks. Without their timely, patient, and professional assistance, he could not have completed this assignment. At W. W. Norton and Company the supervisors of this edition have been Robert Kehoe and Steven Forman. A. Deborah Malmud has gathered illustrations with resourcefulness and awesome perseverance. Our editor, Sandy Lifland, has been unfailingly patient and helpful, teaching us gracefully about a range of matters from Kepler's Laws to Lifland's Laws of "that and which."

Robert Lerner  
Standish Meacham

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## Chapter 15

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### A CENTURY OF CRISIS FOR EARLY-MODERN EUROPE (c. 1560–c. 1660)

I do not wish to say much about the customs of the age in which we live.  
I can only state that this age is not one of the best, being a century of iron.

—R. Mentet de Salmonet, *History of the Troubles in Great Britain* (1649)

What in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support.

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

On the night before St. Bartholomew's Day in August of 1572 the Catholic queen mother of France, Catherine de Medici, authorized the ambush of French Protestant leaders who had come to Paris to attend a wedding. Thereupon, during the hours after midnight, unsuspecting people were awakened and stabbed to death or thrown out of windows. Soon all the targeted Protestants were eliminated, but the killing did not stop because roving bands of Parisian Catholics seized the opportunity of licensed carnage to slaughter at will any enemies they happened upon, Protestant or otherwise. By morning the River Seine was clogged with corpses and scores of bodies hung from gibbets in witness to an event known ever since as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day.

*A massacre in Paris*

Had this lamentable incident been an isolated event it hardly would be worth mentioning, but in fact throughout the hundred years from roughly 1560 to roughly 1660 outbreaks of religious mayhem—with Protestants the ruthless killers in certain cases as Catholics were in others—recurred in many parts of Europe. Moreover, to make matters far worse, economic hardships and prolonged wars accompanied religious riots to result in a century of pronounced crisis for European civilization. Granted that Europe's early-modern period of crisis was much less uniform in its nature

*A century of crisis*



*The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.* A contemporary painting depicts the merciless slaughter of Huguenots in Paris. At the top left (in front of the large gate next to the Seine) the Queen Mother Catherine looks over a pile of naked dead bodies; to the right a Huguenot leader is being pushed out of a window.

and extent than the terrible times of the Later Middle Ages, seen from the broadest perspective the period from 1560 to 1660 was Western Europe's "iron century"—an age of great turbulence and severe trials.

## 1. ECONOMIC, RELIGIOUS, AND POLITICAL TESTS

### *Impending crisis*

Europe's time of troubles crept up on contemporaries unawares. For almost a century before 1560 most of the West had enjoyed steady economic growth, and the discovery of the New World seemed the basis of greater prosperity to come. Political trends too seemed auspicious, since most Western European governments were becoming ever more efficient and providing more internal peace for their subjects. Yet around 1560 thunderclouds were gathering in the skies that would soon burst into terrible storms.

### *Soaring prices*

Although the causes of these storms were interrelated, each may be examined separately, starting with the great price inflation. Nothing like the upward price trend that affected Western Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century had ever happened before. The cost of a measure of

wheat in Flanders, for example, tripled from 1550 to 1600, grain prices in Paris quadrupled, and the overall cost of living in England advanced well over 100 percent during the same period. Certainly the twentieth century has seen much more dizzying inflations than this, but since the skyrocketing of prices in the later sixteenth century was a novelty, most historians agree on calling it the "price revolution."

If experts agree on the terminology, however, very few of them agree on the exact combination of circumstances that caused the price revolution, for early-modern statistics are patchy and many areas of economic theory remain under dispute. Nonetheless, for present purposes two explanations for the great inflation may be offered with confidence. The first is demographic. Starting in the later fifteenth century, Europe's population began to mount again after the plague-induced fall-off: roughly estimated, there were about 50 million people in Europe around 1450 and 90 million around 1600. Since Europe's food supply remained more or less constant owing to the lack of any noteworthy breakthrough in agricultural technology, food prices inevitably were driven sharply higher by greater demand. Although the prices of manufactured goods did not rise as steeply because there was a greater match between supply and demand, the prices of manufactured items did rise, especially in cases where the supply of agricultural raw materials crucial to the manufacturing process remained relatively inelastic.

Population trends explain much, but since Europe's population did not grow nearly as rapidly in the second half of the sixteenth century as prices, other explanations for the great inflation are still necessary. Foremost among these is the enormous influx of bullion from Spanish America. Around 1560 a new technique of extracting silver from silver ore made the working of newly discovered mines in Mexico and Bolivia highly practical, soon transforming the previous trickle of silver entering the European economy into a flood. Whereas in the five years between 1556 and 1560 roughly 10 million ducats worth of silver passed through the Spanish entry point of Seville, between 1576 and 1580 that figure had doubled, and between 1591 and 1595 it had more than quadrupled. Inasmuch as most of this silver was used by the Spanish crown to pay its foreign creditors and its armies abroad, or by private individuals to pay for imports from other countries, Spanish bullion quickly circulated throughout Europe, where much of it was minted into coins. This dramatic increase in the volume of money in circulation further fueled the spiral of rising prices. "I learned a proverb here," said a French traveler in Spain in 1603, "everything costs much here except silver."

Aggressive entrepreneurs and landlords profited most from the changed economic circumstances, while the masses of laboring people were hurt the worst. Obviously, merchants in possession of sought-after goods were able to raise prices at will, and landlords either could profit directly from the rising prices of agricultural produce or, if they did not farm their own lands, could always raise rents. But laborers in country and town were caught in a squeeze because wages rose far more slowly than prices, owing to the pres-

#### *Causes of inflation:*

(1) *population increase*

(2) *influx of silver*

*Effects of inflation on the  
laboring poor*

*Political results*

ence of a more-than-adequate labor supply. Moreover, because the cost of food staples rose at a sharper rate proportionately than the cost of most other items of consumption, poor people had to spend an ever-greater percentage of their paltry income on necessities. In normal years they barely managed to survive, but when disasters such as wars or poor harvests drove grain prices out of reach, some of the poor literally starved to death. The picture that thus emerges is one of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer—splendid feasts enjoyed amid the most appalling suffering.

In addition to these direct economic effects, the price inflation of the later sixteenth century had significant political effects as well because higher prices placed new pressures on the sovereign states of Europe. The reasons for this were simple. Since the inflation depressed the real value of money, fixed incomes from taxes and dues in effect yielded less and less. Thus merely to keep their incomes constant governments would have been forced to raise taxes. But to compound this problem, most states needed much more real income than previously because they were undertaking more wars, and warfare, as always, was becoming increasingly expensive. The only recourse, then, was to raise taxes precipitously, but such draconian measures incurred great resentments on the part of subject populations—especially the very poor who were already strapped more than enough by the effects of the inflation. Hence governments faced continuous threats of defiance and potential armed resistance.

*Economic stagnation after  
1600*

Less need be said about the economic stagnation that followed the price revolution because it interfered little with most of the trends just discussed. When population growth began to ease and the flood of silver from America began to abate around 1600, prices soon leveled off. Yet because the most lucrative economic exploitation of the New World only began in the late seventeenth century and Europe experienced little new industrial development, the period from about 1600 to 1660 was at best one of very limited overall economic growth, even though a few areas—notably Holland—bucked the trend. Within this context the rich were usually able to hold their own, but the poor as a group made no advances since the relationship of prices to wages remained fixed to their disadvantage. Indeed, if anything, the lot of the poor in many places deteriorated because the mid-seventeenth century saw some particularly expensive and destructive wars, causing helpless civilians to be plundered either by rapacious tax collectors, looting soldiers, or sometimes by both.

*Religious wars*

It goes without saying that most people would have been far better off had there been fewer wars during Europe's iron century, but given prevalent attitudes, newly arisen religious rivalries made wars inevitable. Simply stated, until religious passions began to cool toward the end of the period, most Catholics and Protestants viewed each other as minions of Satan who could not be allowed to live. Worse, sovereign states attempted to enforce religious uniformity on the grounds that "crown and altar" offered each other mutual support and in the belief that governments would totter where diversity of faith prevailed. Rulers on both sides felt certain that religious minorities, if allowed to survive in their realms, would inevitably en-



gage in sedition; nor were they far wrong since militant Calvinists and Jesuits were indeed dedicated to subverting constituted powers in areas where they had not yet triumphed. Thus states tried to extirpate all potential religious resistance, but in the process sometimes provoked civil wars in which both sides tended to assume there could be no victory until the other was exterminated. And of course civil wars might become international in scope when one or more foreign powers resolved to aid embattled religious allies elsewhere.

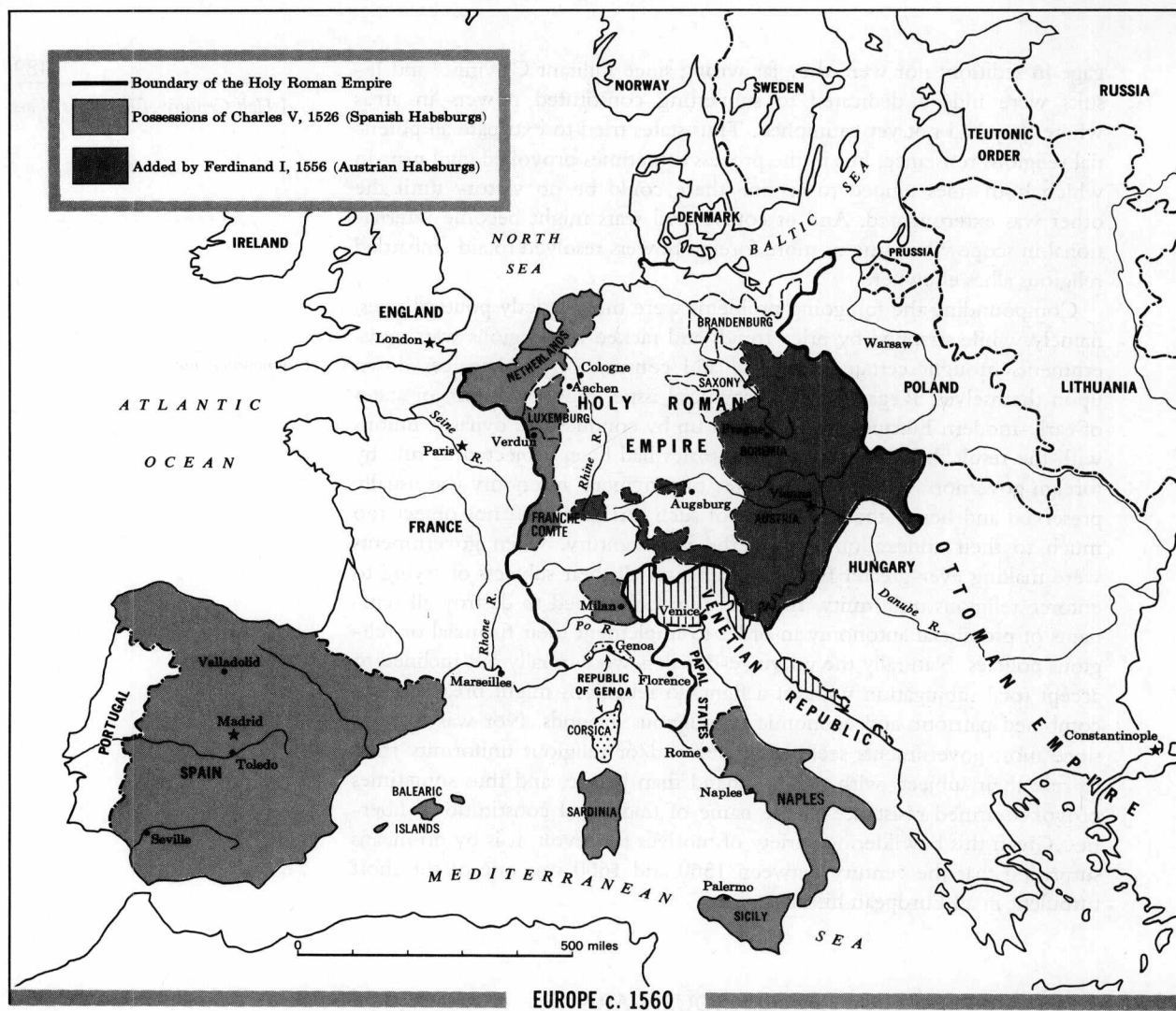
Compounding the foregoing problems were more strictly political ones: namely, while strapped by price trends and racked by religious wars, governments brought certain provincial and constitutional grievances down upon themselves. Regarding the provincial issue, most of the major states of early-modern Europe had been built up by conquests or dynastic unions with the result that many smaller territories had been subjected to rule by foreign governors. At first some degree of provincial autonomy was usually preserved and hence the inhabitants of such territories did not object too much to their annexation. But in the iron century, when governments were making ever-greater financial claims on all their subjects or trying to enforce religious uniformity, rulers customarily moved to destroy all remnants of provincial autonomy in order to implement their financial or religious policies. Naturally the province-dwellers were usually not inclined to accept total subjugation without a fight, so rebellions might break out on combined patriotic and economic or religious grounds. Nor was that all, since most governments seeking money and/or religious uniformity tried to rule their subjects with a firmer hand than before, and thus sometimes provoked armed resistance in the name of traditional constitutional liberties. Given this bewildering variety of motives for revolt, it is by no means surprising that the century between 1560 and 1660 was one of the most turbulent in all European history.

*Governmental crises*

## 2. A HALF CENTURY OF RELIGIOUS WARS

The greatest single cause of warfare in the first half of Europe's iron century was religious rivalry. Indeed, wars between Catholics and Protestants began as early as the 1540s when the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V tried to reestablish Catholic unity in Germany by launching a military campaign against several German princes who had instituted Lutheran worship in their principalities. At times thereafter it appeared as if Charles was going to succeed in reducing his German Protestant opponents to complete submission, but since he was also involved in fighting against France, he seldom was able to devote concerted attention to affairs in Germany. Accordingly, religious warfare sputtered on and off until a compromise settlement was reached in the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555). This rested on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ("as the ruler, so the religion"), which meant that in those principalities where Lutheran princes

*Religious wars in Germany  
until the Peace of Augsburg*



ruled, Lutheranism would be the sole state religion, and the same for those with Catholic princes. Although the Peace of Augsburg was a historical milestone inasmuch as Catholic rulers for the first time acknowledged the legality of Protestantism, it boded ill for the future in assuming that no sovereign state larger than a free city (for which it made exceptions) could tolerate religious diversity. Moreover, in excluding Calvinism it ensured that Calvinists would become aggressive opponents of the status quo.

Even though wars in the name of religion were fought in Europe before 1560, those that raged afterward were far more brutal, partly because the combatants had become more fanatical (intransigent Calvinists and Jesuits customarily took the lead on their respective sides), and partly because the later religious wars were aggravated by political and economic resentments.

*Background of the French wars of religion*