

2  **PATRIARCHY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE**  
HISTORY 1100.3  
24-29 AUG. 2006

3  **I. "WHEN FATHERS RULED":**

**THE EUROPEAN PATRIARCHAL FAMILY**

- ◆ A. Private and public mixed together in the "household economy" of Early Modern Europe
  - Family homes doubled as workplaces, family determined occupations and political affiliations.
  - Political & social ideals overlapped: God was the father of all, the king was the father of his people, and each father was the king of his family.
- ◆ B. Functions of the early modern family unit primarily economic and political and social rather than emotional.
- ◆ C. Christian religious teachings that bore on child-rearing and family life.
  - 1. The doctrine of original sin (Adam and Eve) and the innate depravity of human beings.
    - Isaac Watts's hymn, "Lord, I am Vile"
  - 2. English and German Protestants (largest groups of voluntary American colonists) held these ideas most strongly. Calvinist doctrine of "election" said most people were damned.
    - On the other hand, Protestants also led the way in reforming marriage and laying the basis for the modern institution of "companionate" marriage.

4  **I. "WHEN FATHERS RULED":**

**THE EUROPEAN PATRIARCHAL FAMILY**

(CONT.)

- ◆ D. Growing Up & Bowing Down in Early Modern Europe
  - 1. What original sin taught: children & women were inherently evil, needed to be controlled.
  - 2. Requirement for submissive behavior of children toward parents: bowing, kneeling or standing, silence, no familiarity.
  - 3. Child-rearing: the goal was "breaking the will," preferably by force; emphasis on immobilization (swaddling of babies) & body-shaping (corsets for women).
  - 4. Education operated by same principles: flogging & ferulas.
  - 5. Parental control over career choice: primogeniture for eldest son and "settlement" for girls & younger sons.
  - 6. Parental control over, & economic basis of, marriage choice.
  - 7. Marriage: wife legally merged into husband through coverture.
    - Wives had nearly same behavior required as children, expected to obey and could be beaten if necessary.
  - 8. Above all, husbands and fathers were supposed to rule:
    - Body metaphor -- "as a body can have but one head . . . So a household . . . can have but one lord"

5  **II. RULERS AS FATHERS OF THE PEOPLE: EUROPE'S AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS**

- ◆ A. Colonization era (16th-17th centuries) as the end of a long struggle by monarchs to build "nation-states" that they & their officials, not local barons & bishops, really controlled.
  - Example: Kingdom of Castile's creation of Spain.
- ◆ B. 17<sup>th</sup> Century (1600s) as golden age of "absolute monarchy."
  - 1. English kings during colonization were the absolutist Stuarts: James I (1603-25), Charles I (1625-49), Charles II (1660-85), James II (1685-88).
  - 2. Stuarts believed in the Divine Right of Kings, based on the idea of the universe as a hierarchy, "The Great Chain of Being" with God and kings on top.
  - 3. The cult of the absolute monarch & the "royal touch."

6  **II. RULERS AS FATHERS OF THE PEOPLE: EUROPE'S AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS (CONT.)**

- ◆ C. Rise of "sovereignty" as a political theory
  - 1. Characteristics of sovereignty: control of territory, supremacy, ability to use & control the use of force, independence of action, final authority.
  - 2. Justification: need for strong, absolute rulers in a time of war and turmoil.
  - 3. Hobbes' Leviathan: life without sovereignty would be "nasty, brutish, and short."
  - 4. The structure of patriarchal family translated into politics.
    - Just as in family life, submission was held to be natural and liberty to be unnatural. No one was "free." Robert Filmer's Patriarcha.
    - Religious authority was cited for this idea, even in America: John Cotton's Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes (part of The New England Primer).
- ◆ D. Patriarchy and sovereignty: the indivisible and perpetual nature of patriarchal/governmental authority.
  - 1. The body metaphor in politics: Families/communities were bodies with fathers/kings as the head. Hobbes' illustration ([click for larger web version](#)).
  - 2. The indivisibility of sovereignty & the absurdity of "imperium in imperio"
- ◆ E. These ideas about the necessity of sovereignty in government applied whether Europeans supported monarchy or not.