PATRIARCHY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

HISTORY 1100.3, 6-11 SEPT. 2007

I. "When Fathers Ruled":
The European Patriarchal Family

    A. Our approach: Linkage of the social and political ideals held by people in any particular place and time.

-- Social & political ideals seem to change together: civil rights, feminism, & the democratization of the family since 1960s.

    B. Family life under the "household mode of production"

-- Functions of the early modern family unit primarily economic and political and social rather than emotional.

    C. Christian religious teachings influencing ideas on child-rearing and family life.

        1. The doctrine of <u>original sin</u> (Adam and Eve) and the innate depravity of human beings.

–*Isaac Watts's hymn, "<u>Lord, I am Vile</u>"*

        2. English and German Protestants (the chief 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.***

    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 and "settlement" of younger children.

      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. Historian Steven Ozment: above all, husbands and fathers were supposed to rule:

−*"as a body can have but one head . . . So a household . . . can have but one lord"*

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. 17th 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."

C. Origins of "sovereignty" as a political theory:

      1. Definition of sovereignty: control of territory, supremacy, power, dominion, absolute independence of action, final authority.

      2. Rooted in need for strong, absolute rulers in times of war & turmoil.

      3. Hobbes' _Leviathan_ : life without sovereignty would be "nasty, brutish, and short."

      4. Power of monarchical states built on the "police power," right & duty of a patriarch to maintain an orderly household:

−***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* <u>Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes</u> *(part of* The New England Primer*).*

D. Patriarchy and sovereignty: the indivisible and perpetual nature of patriarchal/governmental authority.

1. The biological model: Families/communities were bodies with fathers/kings as the head. Hobbes' illustration.

2. The absurdity of "imperium in imperio": a divided sovereignty

E. These ideas about the necessity of sovereignty in government applied whether Europeans supported monarchy or not.