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 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 (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 *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 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.