The Thirty Years War (1618-48)

The Protestant Reformation & the 1555 Peace of Augsburg provided basic stability until the Thirty Years War. But then ....

1572 Rebellion in the Netherlands was supported by Calvinists

1581 The Netherlands secede from Catholic Spain (the Netherlands and Spain had been part of Habsburg holdings)

By the beginning of the 17th century, two religious armies had formed:

1608 The Protestant League (led by the German prince Frederick IV of Palatine, who was the son-in-law of King James I of England)

1609 The Catholic League (led by Duke Maximilian of Bavaria)

1609 Emperor Rudolph II granted the free exercise of religion to his subjects in Bohemia. The Catholic Dukes Maximilian of Bavaria and Ferdinand of Styria opposed. 1612 Rudolph II dies. His brother Matthias becomes emperor.

Phases of the Thirty Years War

1. Bohemian Phase
2. Swedish Phase
3. French Phase

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1. Conflict in Bohemia

In 1618 Bohemian Calvinists revolted against the (Catholic) Habsburgs. Emperor Matthias had designated his cousin, the Catholic Duke Ferdinand of Styria, as his heir and future king of Bohemia. Bohemian nobles threw the emissaries of the emperor out of the Royal palace window ("the defenestration of Prague").

1619 Emperor Matthias dies, Ferdinand becomes the new emperor (now known as Ferdinand II).

1620 Imperial forces and Catholic League defeat the Bohemians.
England, the Netherlands, Denmark and German Protestant princes fear the growing power of the Catholic Habsburgs. But England's King James I never comes to the aid of his son-in-law Frederick IV of Palatine. King James has ambitions of marrying into the Spanish branch of the Habsburg dynasty, but with no luck. So he marries instead Henrietta Maria, a Catholic, and sister of King Louis XIII.

The Imperial General Albrecht von Wallenstein (a Bohemian Catholic of Protestant parents) and his army of 50,000 Catholics and Protestants join the Catholic League. The combined Imperial-Catholic forces defeat the Danes.

1629 Ferdinand II wanted to get rid of Protestant sects and issued the Edict of Restitution (which ordered the return of all Catholic properties seized since 1552). Since Gen. Wallenstein opposed the order, he was dismissed.

2. Swedish Phase (1630-1635)

The Swedish King Gustavas Adolphus enters on the side of the Protestants, financed by Cardinal Richelieu, the prime minister of France under Louis XIII, who feared the growth of Habsburg power.

Thus: Catholic France and Protestant Sweden become allies against the Catholic Habsburgs. In addition, the Elector of Brandenburg also joins the Protestant armies (for which he would be well rewarded with land as a result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648).

In response, Emperor Ferdinand II reinstates Wallenstein to fight the French and Swedish armies.

1632 French armies join up with the Swedes. King Gustavas Adolphus' Protestant troops defeat Wallenstein's Imperial-Catholic armies near Leipzig, but King Gustavas Adolphus is killed.
1634 Wallenstein's troops desert him, Wallenstein is assassinated
1634 Imperial troops defeat the Swedes
1635 The emperor negotiates peace with the Protestant German princes, who in turn end their alliance with Sweden. The war could have stopped her, but instead the French decide to continue it.

3. French Phase (1635-1648)

1635 France (allied with the Netherlands), declared war on Spain, thereby extending the war another 13 years - a war fought primarily on German soil.
1648 Peace of Westphalia

1. ended the Thirty Years War and provided basic stability until 1806 when the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved

2. boundaries of Protestant/Catholic territories were established (as of 1624)

3. revealed that the Holy Roman Empire was weakened from the outside:
   
   a) in France, the Bourbon dynasty was restored as a leading European power, received Alsace in the strategic southwest
   
   b) in Brandenburg, the Hohenzollern dynasty received eastern Pomerania and other lands, and soon began to rival Austria (the Habsburg dynasty) as most important German territorial power.

4. revealed that the Holy Roman Empire was weakened from within (e.g. Wallenstein's conflict with the Emperor; amnesty granted to princes who fought against the Empire)

Effects of the Thirty Years War

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) devastated the German economy. Population decreased from 20 to 13.5 million. Thousands of castles, villages and cities were destroyed. In addition, the Plague again struck Europe (1634-35). Hunger and epidemics were the norm. The cities and the Hanseatic League declined; schools and universities were deserted.

The power of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was greatly diminished. Of the 3000 kingdoms and small German principalities before the Thirty Years War, only 300 remained, and they began to assert their separate authority.

Individual princes became more powerful as the nobility continued to decline economically, as they had been since the late Middle Ages. The middle class was becoming more powerful economically, but they had no access to political power. The aristocratic courts of the 17th century, however, did gradually find a place for members of the middle class - as secretaries, historians, librarians, and poets.

A new form of government (absolute monarchy, Absolutism) emerged from the ashes of the Thirty Years War, and found its justification in an analysis of what some believed caused the war, namely the intertwining of religion and politics. The prince (the monarch) ruled and acted with absolute power and authority which he believed was granted him by Divine Right, i.e. granted by God.

► The prince maintained he was God’s representative on earth - placed there to keep religion out of politics so that religious civil war would never occur again. Thus the prince preserved inner-peace within the kingdom. His actions were free of religion and therefore considered rational, i.e. it was rational for the state to want to preserve peace and avoid religious disputes (raison d' état,
the reason for the state's existence at all). There would be no place for questions of morality (i.e. religion) in the politics of the state. Freedom from the kind of destruction which occurred during the Thirty Years War was granted in exchange for the complete acquiescence and subjugation on the part of the monarch's subjects. In exchange for preserving civil peace, the absolute monarch demanded absolute obedience from his subjects. As subjects (not citizens), people were not free. Only in an abstract sense as "human beings" could they imagine themselves free, but only as private individuals in secret, not in the public realm of politics.

The basis for this argument is found in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes had been in France when France's King Henry IV, a Protestant who converted to Catholicism, was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic in 1610. In France, see Jean Bodin's *Six livres de la République* (1557) who wrote: "Whoever turns against the king, sins against God, whose image on earth is found in the prince."

The greatest model for an absolute monarch was Louis XIV of France (also known as the Sun King), who supposedly said "L'état, c'est moi" ("I am the state"), and whose Palace of Versailles became the visual representation of absolute power which many German princes copied.