

# THE EUROPEAN AWAKENING

(1400-1600)

I was traveling with Richard and Rumpi. Rumpi asked me about Italy and Europe. Being deeply involved in the study of history and philosophy with Ed, I welcomed the question. Quite frankly I was surprised by my answer.

The history of the Western world overwhelms you once you focus on its major trends. The power and impact of the Roman Empire were gradually dismantled over 1400 years. As the Christian era began, dominated by the secular and spiritual power and reach of the Church, Europe fell in what the historians call the Dark Ages.

Europe shrank from the superb heights reached under the Roman leadership. Wars, diseases, and poverty accompanied the lack of great thinkers (except religious ones). It lasted 1400 years, 1400 unbelievable years.

It took that long for England to grow powerful enough to refuse to pay tributes to the Church of Rome (thanks also to Wycliffe). It took an unbelievable 1400 years for giants like Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin to urge people to break from the traditional Church constraints and take responsibility of their thoughts and actions.

A momentous wave of events followed (about 200 years). The discovery of America. The circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan. The advance of the Ottoman Turks who destroyed Constantinople, the last remnant of the Roman Empire. The end of Latin as the official European language. The collapse of Genova and Venice caused by the Ottomans' blockage of the trading routes with Asia. Trade moving north, to the Atlantic states. The waning of the Italian Renaissance with the financial centers and culture migrating from Florence to Holland and England. Italy sinking again into oblivion. The secular power of the Church greatly reduced.

These are magnificent and unbelievably great historical events. We are what we are because of what discoverers, thinkers, leaders, traders dared to do in just 200 years. The world order was never the same again.

Italy gave birth to this new order, but failed to unite, cut in two by the Papal States. For the next 500 years it has been struggling, trying to break the shackles of its past.

Rumpi was surprised by the answer. I was too.

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The Peter Dag Portfolio Strategy and Management  
Since 1977

11/10/06