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**Question:** Analyze three reasons for the rise and one reason for the decline of witchcraft persecutions during the period 1550 and 1680.

**Contextualization:** During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many Europeans remained preoccupied with sin, death, and the devil. Religious people, including many among the learned and many who were sympathetic to the emerging scientific ideas, continued to believe in the power of magic and the occult. **Thesis:** Europeans continued to have superstition as it explained natural phenomena. Any negative occurrences caused accusations of people being witches, but this later declined as a more scientific worldview became more prominent and credible. **Argument:** Witchcraft persecutions rose due to social and economic stress, influence of the clergy, and fear of women while it declined due to scientific discoveries.

**Body Paragraph #1: Topic Sentence:** Witchcraft persecutions rose because of social and economic stress, influence of the clergy and fear of women.
- **Example:** People turned to cunning folk when plague and famine struck.
- **Argument:** Cunning folk were people respected with supernatural powers. Many said they had these powers, which led to the rise of witchcraft. People could then easily blame witches for misfortunes.
- **Example:** People in the countryside believed in witches.
- **Argument:** Village society believed in witchcraft as a way of defying urban Christian society attempts to impose its laws and institutions on the countryside. Also, some of the rural population had a foundation in local fertility cults, designed to ensure good harvests, and acquired features of diabolical witchcraft under church persecution.
- **Example:** The Church made a distinction between good and bad magic.
- **Argument:** The clergy practiced magic of the holy sacraments and exorcism of demons. These were for religious purposes as these powers came from God. Any other magic was considered bad magic. This caused non-Christian magicians to be accused and persecuted of witchcraft.
- **Example:** Also, the Church accused, tried, and executed witches.
- **Argument:** This was for the Christian society to try to extend its power and influence new areas. The attacks on witches caused the cunning folk to be revered and feared by the villagers.
- **Example:** *Malteus Maleficarum* was written by two Catholic monks and was endorsed by the Church.
- **Argument:** It talked about how to find and identify witches and even said that women by nature are instruments of Satan. This work increased the persecution as many people believed and used the ways of identification primarily upon women.
- **Example:** The Bible makes Eve the cause of original sin so many women were inferior to men.
- **Argument:** Women who sought for empowerment for themselves in their communities claimed they had supernatural powers. This caused people to think that they were witches and accused them of witchcraft.

**Body Paragraph #2: Topic Sentence:** Witchcraft persecutions eventually declined in the seventeenth century due to a rise in science.
- **Example:** People no longer believed that words and thoughts could affect the material world.
- **Argument:** This meant that a witch’s curse was merely words. Witchcraft had to do with a lot of spells and such that were verbal. People started to only believe what they saw, and figured that witchcraft wasn’t real.
- **Example:** There were advances in medicine and the beginning of insurance companies.
- **Argument:** People began to rely on themselves when faced with natural calamity and physical affliction and no longer searched for supernatural causes and solutions.

**Conclusion:** Between the years of 1550-1680 witchcraft persecutions greatly increased, but eventually declined. Social and economic stress, influence of the clergy, and fear of women greatly impacted the way witchcraft was viewed and evidently boosted the superstition in Europeans as well as suspicion of those that they believed possessed supernatural abilities. The new prominence in scientific discovery caused people to believe in what they saw and not what they were told to believe, which led to the end of the witchcraft persecutions. **Synthesis:** Many people were wrongly accused of witchcraft by the Church, which benefited them in the way that they could enforce religious discipline upon all people. Similarly, there were other times when the Church persecuted certain people. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain persecuted and forced many to conform to Catholicism with their Spanish Inquisition. Add to this: Jews and Muslims in Spain were tortured until they converted... etc.