

The Renaissance and Reformation

Changing Ideas in Early Modern Europe

In the early 1400s, people in Europe were coming out of a dark time characterized by suffering. People who were lucky enough to survive the Black Death began to look for ways to enjoy life again. They adopted a new outlook on life called humanism. Humanism emphasizes the natural abilities of humans and our potential for achievement. This new perspective took the focus away from religion and put it on the individual. People tried to balance pleasing God with enjoying life on Earth.

A new focus on education developed during the Renaissance. Thinkers turned back to the classical knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome. Classical learning emphasized a particular way of thinking called rationalism. Rationalism emphasizes using logic and reason to come to conclusions. Together, humanism and rationalism encouraged people to think for themselves rather than blindly follow the Church as they had throughout the Middle Ages. This created conflict with the Church but some thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized that the religion and rationalism could exist peacefully because they both have the same ultimate goal: to seek truth and understanding.

During the Renaissance, art and learning flourished, especially in Italy where rich merchants like the Medici family became active patrons. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo created world-famous masterpieces. Writers such as Shakespeare created literary works that remain popular today. Inventors such as Johann Gutenberg changed the way the world worked. With the invention of the printing press, books became more affordable and were translated into the vernacular.

With a new outlook on life and a new confidence in their ability to think for themselves, people found the courage to stand up to the corrupt Catholic Church. The Church had grown very powerful during the Middle Ages; so much so that even a king's power could be easily threatened by the pope. The people had grown tired of abuses such as the way the Church earned and spent its money. Now that people could read and interpret the Bible for themselves, they began to call on the Church to reform.

One major figure in the Reformation was Martin Luther. His biggest complaint against the Church was the sale of indulgences. He argued that indulgences led people to believe they could sin and then buy their way into heaven. He posted a work called the 95 Theses to a blue church door in his hometown in Germany. As punishment, Luther was excommunicated by the pope. Luther burned the papal bull declaring him excommunicated and decided it was time to break away and begin a new Christian faith called Protestantism, named for the people who protested against the Church.

With the spread of Reformation ideas, more and more people chose to break away from the Catholic Church in favor of Protestantism. During this time of religious conflict, many people were forced to follow the sect that their monarchy favored. Many Europeans, including a group of Protestants called the Puritans, escaped to the Americas to avoid religious persecution. Missionaries also went to the Americas with the intent of spreading Protestantism and Catholicism. Both religions attempted to convert the natives. Because of this, colonies were seen not only as opportunities for trade and profit, but also for the spread of European religious ideas.

This religious environment set the stage for later reforms in government during the Enlightenment. Ideas from this era such as humanism, rationalism, and thinking for yourself would inspire people to stand up to European kings in favor of their God-given rights and a more democratic society.

Name _____ Period _____

Directions: Based on what you learned by reading and discussing the information, answer the following questions as best as you can. Be sure to answer each part of the question using complete sentences and citing evidence (using a quote) from the text at least once to support your answers.

- A:** Demonstrates thoughtful analysis by making notes, asking questions, and identifying key information; all questions are answered and responses cite ideas and opinions from the text; complete sentences.
- B:** All questions are answered but responses may or may not connect ideas and opinions to the text.
- C:** Most, but not all questions are answered; little attempt is made to connect responses to the text.
- D:** Little attempt is made to answer the questions. Answers are incomplete or inaccurate.
- F:** Did not attempt to answer any questions or did not turn in.

1. What is humanism and how did it change people's attitude towards life in Europe?

2. What is rationalism? What are its roots? How did it conflict with religion?

3. What was the major purpose/goal of the Reformation and why was it needed?

4. How did the Renaissance and Reformation change the role of religion throughout Europe? How might this have affected the role of religion in the newly developing colonies in America?