

Consequences of Ideas Lesson 5:

I. Cultural Rebirth and Spiritual Decline

- a. God is longsuffering with the remnant of His people and nowhere is this more apparent than during the 300 year history of the Church during the Renaissance. To ignore His warnings about spiritual decline is an invitation for **His judgment**. *Rev 3:1-3 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. KJV*
- b. Following the Middle Ages with its rampant political corruption and doctrinal decay, the work of mystics, reformers, councils, and humanists made an earnest attempt from different angles to bring about **internal** reform to the Church.
- c. These internal reformers who understood the biblical **warning** had three goals: 1. Make religion more personal; 2. Recover the Scripture as the source of authority; and 3. Make the Roman church more democratic in its organization. *Rev 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die:*
- d. The defeat of these internal movements or their absorption into the Roman church ended all attempts at internal reform. At the same time **external forces** were creating opposition to the papal system, but not out of spiritual motivations.
- e. These forces were: The **humanistic** spirit of the Renaissance; the growth of nationalism; and an expanding geographical world that was the result of exploration in the Far East and in the Western Hemisphere.
- f. Even though these forces were not spiritually motivated; nonetheless, they strengthened the movement that was to eventually break forth as the Protestant **Reformation** and to bring an end to the dominance of the papacy.
- g. If we are to understand the consequences of the ideas of the Renaissance upon the modern church we need to explore the forces that **shaped** this period of Western history.

II. Overview of the Renaissance

- a. The Renaissance, which took place in the important countries of Europe between the years **1350-1650**, marks the transition between the medieval period and the modern period.
- b. The name, which is derived from the Latin words for “**birth**” and “**back**”, expressed the idea of a rebirth of the culture. Most historians place the point of origin in 14th century Italy, in which there was an effort to rediscover the classical past.
- c. Humanists were a major force in the renaissance period to bring about change. Used in this context, “Humanists” refer to a **scholarly** pursuit of Latin and Greek literary, historical, and oratorical texts in their original languages.
- d. In contrast to the medieval **scholastic** mode, which focused on resolving contradictions between authors, humanists would study ancient texts in the original, and evaluate them through a combination of reasoning and empirical evidence.
- e. Above all, humanists asserted “the **genius of man** ... the unique and extraordinary ability of the human mind” to learn, to understand, and to advance. Far from denying Christianity, many humanists were devoted biblical scholars.
- f. That said, however, this was a transitional period in which there was a reorientation away from the medieval religious and corporate approach to life towards a modern, secular and **individualistic** view. Other shifts include:
 1. Away from paying attention to the streets of the **New Jerusalem** to paying attention to the streets of Rome.
 2. Away from the Theo-centric view of life, in which God was the **measure of all things**, to an anthropocentric view of life, in which man became the measure of all things.
 3. Emphasis was placed on the **glory of man** instead of the glory of God.
 4. Away from the agrarian society of feudalism to an urban middle-class society which earned its livelihood in **commerce**
 5. Away from the practice of religion as a daily matter to religion as a mere **formality** practiced only on holy days of the church calendar.
- g. Several things contributed to these shifts. First, Italian cities had become wealthy by means of the **merchant class** which participated in the lucrative commerce between Western Europe and the Near East.
- h. As wealth increased, these merchants, in their **leisure** time took up the study of philosophy and the arts. Many of them acted as patrons of artists and scholars.
- i. The new middle class with money to spend was interested in that which would make life more **pleasant** and comfortable. Centralized government, once again provided security and law and order.
- j. The invention of the printing press with moveable type about **1456** made it possible to spread information quickly during the latter part of the Renaissance.
- k. The Renaissance was a critical juncture in the life of a spiritually **declining** church and also in the shaping of the dominant thoughts that would guide Western Civilization for the next 500 years.

III. The Italian Renaissance

- a. The Renaissance **began** in Italy because Italians were surrounded by the remnants of the material history of classical Rome and were captivated by the spirit of their past greatness for which they longed.
- b. The presence of **wealthy** merchants who were willing to be the financial benefactors of artisans and scholars was widespread in Italy. Creativity flourished under this arrangement.

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Lesson 5:

- c. **Popes** of the Renaissance also became interested in literature and arts to such an extent that these interests took precedence over their spiritual functions. This was the time in which DaVinci and Michelangelo and others flourished.
- d. The **fall** of Constantinople in 1453 caused many Greek scholars to flee the destruction of the Muslims for the safety of Italy and they brought with them thousands of ancient Greek manuscripts.
- e. All of these forces acted to **bend** the Italian culture toward having a greater interest in the humanistic culture of ancient Greece and Rome than in theology.
- f. In addition, the attention of the populace drifted away from the afterlife to the life of here and now and thus religion was relegated to an **unimportant** position.
- g. The focus of the artisans on seeking pleasure as a worthwhile pursuit in itself led to a further secularism which was a **radical** departure from the otherworldliness of medieval society.
- h. Though the dogmas of the church were accepted and the rites of worship were practiced, there was a **disconnect** between man's religious practice and his daily life.
- i. Popes of this period began collecting literature and art as a part of the Vatican **treasury** and spent lavishly on restoring ancient buildings, bridges, aqueducts and the great churches of Rome. They had capitulated to the secular spirit of the age.
- j. With such a papal slide into secularism it is no wonder that **Luther** was scandalized when he witnessed the religious formalism of Rome's clergy while observing their lack of true spirituality when he visited Rome in 1510-1511.

IV. Rise of Nation-States and the Middle Class

- a. The concept of the **Nation-state** as the dominant political organization emerged in Europe with England, Spain, and France leading the way.
- b. In England, the development was along the lines of the **constitutional** monarchy in which sovereignty was shared by the monarch and parliament. In Spain and France the people lacked power and the rule of the monarchy was absolute.
- c. English **Common Law** and the jury system protected the liberties of individuals better than Roman law and became the standard. This guaranteed the protection of the individual from arbitrary acts of the ruler.
- d. In Spain, Roman Catholicism and nationalism became **partners** so that the power of the Church was as absolute as the power of the monarch. This led to the Spanish Inquisition in which more than 12,000 Protestants were condemned.
- e. The rise of the nation-state provided the **platform** from which opposition sprang up against the Roman Catholic Church. This was in response to the abuses and excesses of the pope and a general lack of **reformation** of the church.
- f. The fact that France and England both had a substantial population of wealthy middle class, who were hungry for church reform, ignited the opposition of the **noble class** who were resentful of the Roman church for its control of land.
- g. Throughout the European nations during this period there was an uneasy sharing of sovereignty in which the pope claimed authority over the **souls** of men while the kings claimed sovereignty over the bodies of those same men.
- h. Thus the battle for control of the populace and resistance of the kings to ecclesiastical **interference** in affairs of state facilitated the work of the reformers when they appeared on the scene in the early 1500's.

V. Biblical Humanists

- a. North of the Alps, the emphasis of scholars was on the study of biblical documents in their **original** languages more than they studied Plato or Aristotle. Their focus was on understanding their Judeo-Christian heritage rather than their Hellenic heritage.
- b. They, like the humanists of the south, **valued** human beings as individuals with a God-given right to develop their intellectual powers of the mind; but with a difference.
- c. The difference was that they were more interested in man as a human being **with a soul** than they were in man as a rational creature. Their humanism was ethical and religious VS the aesthetic and secular brand of humanism of the Italians.
- d. These humanists desired to integrate the Bible with Platonism and began to study the Bible from a literary point of view. They moved away from the allegorical method of interpretation and developed a **literal** and spiritual interpretive style.
- e. They studied Hebrew grammar and published the first Greek New Testament in 1514. When scholars began translating the Latin New Testament back into the Koine Greek, they discovered how the text had been **mistranslated** by the church.
- f. Education was on the rise and as literacy improved it was possible for the people to have a far more **accurate** knowledge of the Bible than had been the case before this time.

VI. Application

- a. God is longsuffering and even a mere casual reading of Scripture reveals that He provides multiple warnings to those who stray. The Church of the Renaissance had lost their way and judgment ultimately fell in the form of the Reformation.
- b. What parallels do you see between Western culture in the Renaissance and the culture of the United States today?
- c. What should your response be to the warning of God that judgment may be near?