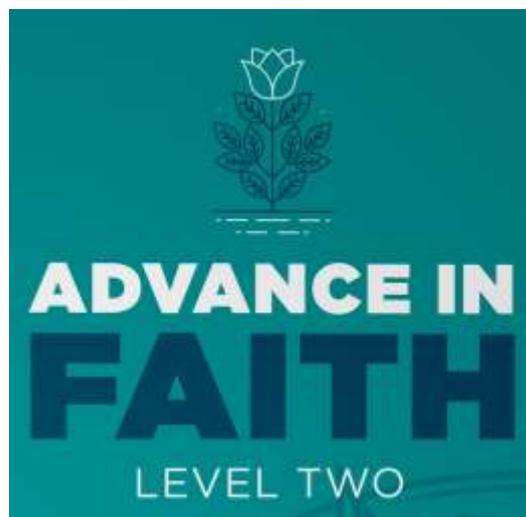


# Renaissance & Reformation

Church History Part 2 – Week 1



## 1. Introduction

By the year 1100, intellectual life was beginning to stir: universities began appearing and more theology began to appear. One writer, Peter Lombard, wrote a book called *Sentences*, which remained a standard theology text for many years. This book was one of the first to formally identify the **seven sacraments** of Roman Catholicism: baptism, confirmation, marriage, penance, Eucharist, extreme unction (last rites), and ordination. These sacraments addressed life from beginning to end and could only be performed by ordained priests. The clergy/laity distinction was now very rigid: the clergy did the spiritual “stuff”, the laity didn’t.

### **Middle ages 500 to 1500**

During this time the teaching and learning of the Greek and Roman culture gradually became lost to the public and to many of the learned class. Few people could read or write and much knowledge was lost. The Roman church became the greatest archivist of knowledge and literature. It dominated learning with its dominance of the universities.

### **1225-1274 - Thomas Aquinas**

He was the outstanding theologian of his day. He held that man had revolted against God and was thus fallen BUT he had an incomplete view of the fall. He thought that the fall did not affect man as a whole but as a part. In his view the will was fallen but the intellect was not affected. Thus people could rely on their own human reason in order to understand their world. Here is the foundation for man’s reasoning being placed above Scripture.

Aquinas relied especially upon Aristotle. Aristotle emphasised the ‘particulars’ as against the universals. A thing is a ‘particular’ a chair, a person, a rock. With Aquinas the ‘particulars’ were again beginning to be thought of as important.

Much of the church excesses of the Middle Ages were a result of a loss of belief in this life being of any importance. Aquinas brought nature back into some relevance. BUT, how could the particulars have meaning without the universals to give them such meaning. The most important individual thing for man became man himself. Without some ultimate meaning for a person what is the use of living and what will be the basis for morals, values, and law?

### **The Church of the Middle Ages**

During the Middle Ages, the authority of the church took precedence over the teaching of the Bible. There was an ever growing emphasis on salvation as resting upon man’s earning the merit of Christ instead of on Christ’s work alone.

Much of Christianity up until the 16th century was either a reaction against or a reaffirmation of, these distortions of the original Christian, Biblical teachings.

Due to the overwhelming power that the church came to hold in Europe it influenced many areas of life and of the future. For example the church furnished effective models of economic and political management. The church also helped to generate the checks and balances later used against the absolute power of the monarch by having to constantly deal with the boundary between secular leadership and church authority. Thus developed the theme of kingship balanced by priesthood and prophetic office.

### ***Indulgences and Relics***

Distinctive ideas that arose during the Middle Ages included Mary worship and Papal Indulgences. Indulgences were based on the idea that Mary and other saints had done more than enough to win their own salvation, so there was an “excess” of merit left over. The Pope possessed the keys to this treasury and could channel it to other individuals to reduce their time in purgatory.

Relics were also important in the Middle Ages. These were body parts of dead saints or items associated with them, and it was believed that they contained spiritual power.

### **Crusades**

The Crusades were several attempts over many years to recapture the Holy Land for Christianity. There were also other motives involved (kings encouraged nobles to go on Crusades to appropriate their lands and while occupied doing so, caused less problems for the Pope).

Although the Crusades were a total failure in their stated objective, they did contribute to a centralisation of land ownership and power.

More importantly they opened the travel routes to the East and brought back learning from the East with manuscripts and art works from the Greek culture, thus adding to the drive towards the Renaissance.

### **The Renaissance                      approx. 1500AD**

Two events helped to stimulate interest in the classical writings.

1. a stronger connection between the Roman church and the Greek Orthodox church was established around 1439 and
2. the fall of Constantinople to Islam brought reconnection to Greek scholars with manuscripts of the classical writers.

As classical, and particularly Aristotelian, thought became more accepted the 'particulars' were dwelt on more and more. This is seen in the great works of art produced by the Renaissance. This period was characterised by relentless curiosity especial about humanity itself.

In art they produced paintings that contained new perspective. Not flat and unrealistic but with depth and a view that represented reality. However, this concept of perspective gradually made its way into their view of the world. It placed man at the centre of this space and space became subordinated to the mathematical principles thought up by the mind of man.

In northern Europe many of the same breakthroughs in art and music were occurring BUT there was, because of a stronger foundation of Biblical thought, a keeping of nature in its proper place i.e. man is a part of a real nature but God is the centre of it. E.G Van Eyck's landscapes.

Michelangelo is acclaimed as the greatest artist of the Renaissance. (1475-1564)

His greatest sculpture is the statue 'David'. Standing 4.3m tall it represents the ideal man. The David was the statement of what the humanistic man saw himself as being tomorrow! In this statue we have Man waiting with confidence in his own strength for the future. Even the disproportionate sizes of the hands say that this man is powerful. This statue is idealistic and romantic. Humanism was standing in its proud self and the David stood as a representation of that.

Leonardo da Vinci - a creative genius in many areas including painting, sculpture, engineering, biology, human anatomy, physics, astronomy, engineering, drawing, mathematics. He is generally accepted as the first modern mathematician. He understood that man beginning with himself would never be able to come to meaning on the basis of maths. (in trying to do this he was influenced by neo-platonic thought, an emphasis on the universals).

The Italian Renaissance is the beginning of 'modern man'!

### **The Northern Renaissance:**

This was more an intellectual than visual rebirth and led to conditions being established in which the Reformation was to flourish. While the northern scholars studied the ancient books they kept to the view that there was no book about man or his place in the world as important as the Bible. They also used the increased study in Latin, Greek and Hebrew to facilitate a better study of the scriptures in the original tongues.

***John Colet***

In England, a Greek and Latin scholar, took a fresh approach to the Bible desiring to return to its real meaning and charging Thomas Aquinas, the official philosopher of the church with 'corrupting the whole teaching of Christ with his profane philosophy'. Colet was influenced by Wycliffe and himself influenced two great men, Thomas More and William Tyndale.

***Erasmus of Christendom***

Born in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, Erasmus lived and studied all over Europe. He was the scholar to the scholars. He sought to reform the Roman Catholic church through writing about the abuses that were occurring. His great work was in the production of a revised translation of the Bible. However, because he was pressured to rush the job many mistakes were included. His hope was that other scholars would take the Bible and translate it into the ordinary languages so all could read for themselves. He did not seek to break the Roman Catholic church but to reform it from within.

***The Failure of the Papacy:***

Perhaps the most serious of all conditions in Europe during the 14 and 1500s was the failure of the popes to provide spiritual leadership. For all intents and purposes they had become renaissance princes building a temporal kingdom in central Italy. Corruption became rampant during the reign of Innocent VIII (1484-92) and hit rock bottom when Alexander VI was elected pope in 1492. An established murderer and a man of no principles his goal was to establish a family principality in Rome. He was succeeded by Julius II who demolished the old basilica of St Peter and had plans drawn up for the greatest church in Christendom, St Peter's basilica. He commissioned Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and Raphael's decoration of the papal apartments. This building extravagance was continued with Leo X and the papacy had to raise a large amount of money. To do so the sale of both land and positions occurred along with the sale of indulgences. While all this spending made possible the great works of art we have today it led to wide criticism of the papacy and its excesses.