

Sunday, April 10, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 29 The Renaissance Paves the Way for the Reformation

The Italian Renaissance

- “During the Middle Ages, Europe suffered from both war and plague. Those who survived wanted to celebrate life and the human spirit. They began to question institutions of the Middle Ages, which had been unable to prevent war or to relieve suffering brought by the plague. Some people questioned the church, which taught Christians endure suffering while they awaited rewards in heaven. In northern Italy, writers and artist began to express this new spirit and experiment with different styles. These men and women would greatly change how Europeans saw themselves and their world.” (Beck, 471)
- “About the middle of the 15th century a series of events began which transformed Europe. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks (1453) caused the flight of learned Greeks to the West. These carried with them priceless manuscripts containing the old Greek literature, long forgotten in the darkened West.” (Broadbent, 133)
- This movement that started in Italy sparked an explosion in creativity in art, writing, and thought that lasted approximately from 1300 to 1600. Historians call this period the Renaissance, a French word meaning “rebirth.” In this context it refers to revival of art and learning sparked by the rediscovery of classical literature. (Beck, 471)
- Three main Italian City-States (Milan, Florence, and Venice) were the driving force behind the early Renaissance. Each of these City-States had strong ties to Byzantine and Muslim merchants in addition they all specialized in at least one commercial activity:
 - Milan—metal goods and armor
 - Florence—banking and textiles
 - Venice—Asian goods.
- Florence was the most influential of the three. Dominated by the prominent Medici family the wealthiest family in Europe, Florence dominated that banking industry. The Medici family bank sold insurance to sea traders to protect their overseas investments. In addition, the Medici set up numerous bank branches where they specialized in making loans and exchanging currencies. This influx of money in the Italy allowed wealthy families to become patrons of the arts and is largely responsible for the artistic accomplishments by many Renaissance artists.

The Spirit of the Renaissance

- During the Renaissance people became interested in Ancient Culture. Knowledge from ancient Greece and Rome that had been largely lost during the Middle Ages was rediscovered. Scholars thought that ancient Greek and Roman writings could help them solve contemporary problems. (Beck, 472)
- Renaissance artist such as Donatello created statues that copied the Roman ideal of the human body. The architect Brunelleschi designed buildings after studying ruins in Rome. Using these rediscovered techniques artist such as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and

Raphael created some of the most celebrated art ever produced by Western culture. (Beck, 474-475)

- The study of classical texts led to the creation of a new type of scholar, the humanist. Alister McGrath explains how the Renaissance usage of the term humanism differs from its modern connotation. McGrath writes, “The term humanism has now come to mean a worldview which denies the existence or relevance of God, or which is committed to a purely secular outlook. This is not what the word meant at the time of the Renaissance. Most humanists of the period were religious, and concerned to purify and renew Christianity, rather than eliminate it.” (McGrath, 37)
- McGrath also confesses that modern scholars have offered two different definitions for Renaissance humanism stating, “According to the first, humanism was a movement devoted to the study of classical languages and literature; according to the second, humanism was basically a set of ideas, comprising the new philosophy of the Renaissance.” (McGrath, 37)
- It would be inaccurate to assume based upon McGrath’s writings that all humanists were religious. As an intellectual movement, humanists focused on human potential and achievements. Rather than trying to make classical texts agree with Christian teachings as medieval scholars had (Scholastics), humanists studied them to understand ancient Greek values. (Beck, 472)
- “In the Middle Ages, some people had demonstrated their piety by wearing rough clothing and eating plain foods. However, humanists suggest that a person might enjoy life without offending God . . . Most people remained devout Catholics. However the basic spirit of Renaissance society was secular—worldly rather than spiritual and concerned with the here and now.” (Beck, 472)
- In terms of literature, Renaissance writers popularized the practice of writing in the vernacular or native language of the people instead of Latin.

The Printing Press Changes the World

- “The Chinese invented block printing, in which a printer carved words or letters on a wooden block, inked the block, and then used it to print on paper. Around 1045, Bi Sheng invented movable type, or a separate piece of type for each character in the language. The Chinese writing system contains thousands of different characters, so most Chinese printers found movable type impractical. However, the method would prove practical for Europeans because their languages have a very small number of letters in their alphabets.” (Beck, 484)
- “During the 13th century, block-printed items reached Europe from China. European printers began to use block printing to create whole pages to bind into books. However, this process was too slow to satisfy the Renaissance demand for knowledge, information, and books.” (Beck, 484)
- “Around 1440 Johann Gutenberg, a craftsman from Mainz, Germany, developed a printing press that incorporated a number of technologies in a new way. The process made it possible to produce books quickly and cheaply. Using this improved process,

Gutenberg printed a complete Bible, the Gutenberg Bible, in about 1455. It was the first full-sized book printed with movable type.” (Beck, 484)

- “The Gutenberg Bible is the most beautiful piece of printing art ever produced and the most valuable printed book in the world. Hand-bound in two volumes, there were 648 pages in the first volume and 634 in the second. An illuminator handwrote the first letter of each chapter and the headings . . . Today forty-seven copies of the Gutenberg bible are evidence of its enduring quality.” (Brake, 76)
- “The printing press enabled a printer to produce hundreds of copies of a single work. For the first time, books were cheap enough that many people could buy them. At first printers produced mainly religious works.” (Beck, 484)
- Due to unsound business practices and mounting debt (2,026 guilders), Johann Fust, an investor repossessed the press, Bibles, and shop. According to Donald L. Brake author of *A Visual History of the English Bible*, after 1457 no printed document can be attributed to Gutenberg. Fust and Schoeffer, however, both gained immediate international fame as printers, but eventually Gutenberg, by virtue of his association with the famous Gutenberg Bible, would be remembered as the greatest printer of all time. (Brake, 72)
- “Gutenberg, destitute and forgotten, died February 3, 1468, in his native Mainz. By 1500, a mere thirty-two years after his death, Bible from printing presses were found in seventeen European countries. Towns with presses grew to 260, and there were 1,120 printing offices. Almost forty thousand different works in various editions totaling more than ten million copies had flooded the market. Clearly Gutenberg had an impact.” (Brake, 72)
- “Johann Gutenberg’s careful attention to detail and technical achievement, and his desire to print an accurate and complete text, guaranteed his success. Gutenberg’s contribution to printing made him *Time* magazines’ “Man of the Millennium.” The Message of God’s Word in Latin—and within a few years in other languages too—and the format for its printing made the Bible’s availability possible for all.” (Brake, 76)

Erasmus and the Textus Receptus

- Alister McGrath author of *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, discuss how the Northern Renaissance took a more religious tone than the Italian Renaissance. McGrath states, “Although there are major variations within northern European humanism, two ideals seem to have achieved widespread acceptance throughout the movement. First, we find the same concern for written and spoken eloquence after the fashion of the classical period, as in the Italian Reformation. Second, we find a religious program directed toward the corporate revival of the Christian church. The Latin slogan *Christianismus renascens*, “Christianity being born again,” summarizes the aims of the program . . .” (McGrath, 40)
- Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536) is generally regarded as the most important humanist writer of the Renaissance, and had a profound impact upon Christian theology during the first half of the sixteenth century. Although not a Protestant in any sense of the term, Erasmus did much to lay the intellectual foundations of the Reformation . . .” (McGrath, 40)

- According to the entry in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Erasmus “was educated at Deventer by the Brethren of the Common Life (1475-84), he spent six years as a monk and then attended the College de Montaigu in Paris (1494). In 1499 he visited England, where he met John Colet and Thomas More. This experience influenced him to employ literary talent, intellectual brilliance and clever wit in the service of Christ.” (Elwell, 383)
- The following is a summary of the life and career of Erasmus.
 - From Paris
 - 1500—*Adages* an annotated collation of classical proverbs was published
 - 1503—*Enchiridion* a handbook of practical theology as well as editions of Cicero and Jerome and a critical edition of the *Annotation of the New Testament* by Lorenzo Valla went to press.
 - From England
 - 1505—began his translation of the New Testament
 - Traveled to Italy in 1506 and experienced direct contact with humanist culture.
 - In 1509 Erasmus went back to England where he finished and published *Praise of Folly*.
 - Between 1509 and 1516 when his Greek edition of the New Testament was published, Erasmus traveled all over Europe studying Greek manuscripts. Moreover, it was also during this time period that critical editions of Jerome, Seneca, Plutarch, and Cato were published. Lastly, it was during these years that the *Education of a Christian Prince* was printed. (Elwell, 384)
- “Erasmus was a prolific writer, and each main category of his works reveals something of his personality.
 - First, he produced many scholarly books including historical material, lexicons, translations, and critical editions of earlier books. His purpose was to combat ignorance. He believed truth was attainable through clarity of expression.
 - A second, element of his approach is revealed in his satirical works such as *Praise of Folly*. Here Erasmus ridicules humanists and scholars who take themselves to seriously, but he saves his most biting satire for bigoted churchmen, pompous lawyers, warmongering rulers.
 - A final category of his work, the more overtly Christian writings, demonstrates that neither scholarship nor humor was to be an end in itself. These elements were pursued to reach the goal of the restoration of primitive Christianity. Erasmus felt called to cleanse and purify the church through the application of humanistic scholarship to Christian tradition.” (Elwell, 384)
- According to Alister McGrath, *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, was and landmark in religious publishing. “Although the work was first published in 1503, and then reprinted

- in 1509, its real impact dates from its third printing in 1515. From that moment onward it became a cult work, apparently going through twenty-three editions in the next six years. Its appeal was to educated lay men and women, whom Erasmus regarded as the most important resource that the church possessed.” (McGrath, 47)
- The *Handbook of the Christian Soldier* developed the revolutionary thesis that the church of the day could be reformed by a collective return to the writings of the fathers and Scripture. The regular reading of Scriptures is put forward as the key to a new lay piety, on the basis of which the church may be renewed and reformed . . . Erasmus does not understand Christianity to be a mere external observance of a moral code. His characteristically humanist emphasis upon inner religion lead him to suggest that reading Scripture transforms its readers, giving them a new motivation to love god and their neighbors. (McGrath, 47)
 - E.H. Broadbent author of *The Pilgrim Church* highlights the single biggest outcome of the Renaissance’s (humanist) interest in classical literature as the restoration and publication of the text of the Greek New Testament. (Broadbent, 134)
 - The first printed Greek New Testament was published by Erasmus in 1516. McGrath, a supporter of the new Bibles, reports that “Erasmus had access to a mere four manuscripts for most of the New Testament, and only one for the final part, the Book of Revelation. As it happened, that manuscript left out five verses, which Erasmus himself had to translate into Greek from the Latin Vulgate. Nevertheless, it proved to be a literary milestone. For the first time, theologians had the opportunity of comparing the original Greek text of the New Testament with the later Vulgate translation into Latin.” (McGrath, 52)
 - “When Erasmus came to Basel in July 1515, to begin his work, he found five Greek New Testament manuscripts ready for his use. These are now designated by the following numbers: 1(an 11th-century mss of the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles), 2(a 15th-century mss of the Gospels), 2ap(12th-14th century mss of Acts and the Epistles, 4ap(15th-century mss of Acts and the Epistles), and 1r(a 12th-century mss of Revelation). Of the manuscripts Erasmus used 1 and 4ap only occasionally. In the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles his main reliance was on 2 and 2ap.” (Hills, 198)
 - “Did Erasmus use other manuscripts beside these five in preparing his Textus Receptus? The indications are that he did . . . It is well known also that Erasmus looked for manuscripts everywhere during his travels and that he borrowed them from everyone he could. Hence although the Textus Receptus was based mainly on the manuscripts that Erasmus found at Basel, it also included readings taken from others to which he had access. It agreed with the common faith because it was founded on manuscripts which in the providence of God were readily available.” (Hills, 196)
 - “Through his study of the writings of Jerome and other Church Fathers Erasmus became very well informed concerning the variant readings of the New Testament text. Indeed almost all the important variant readings known to scholars today were already known to Erasmus more than 460 years ago and discussed in the notes which he placed after the text in his editions of the Greek New Testament. Here, for example, Erasmus dealt with such problem passages as the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:13), the interview of the rich young man with Jesus (Matt. 19:17-22), the ending of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), the

angelic song (Luke 22:43-44), the women taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11), and the mystery of godliness (I Tim. 3:16).” (Hills, 198-199)

- “In his notes Erasmus placed before the reader not only ancient discussions concerning the New Testament text but also debates which took in the early Church over the New Testament canon and the authorship of some of the New Testament books, especially Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Not only did he mention the doubts reported by Jerome and the other Church Fathers, but also added some objections of his own. However, he discussed these matters somewhat warily, declaring himself willing at any time to submit to “The consensus of public opinion and especially to the authority of the Church.” (Hills, 199)
- “Between the years 1516 and 1535 Erasmus published five editions of the Greek New Testament. In the first edition (1516) the text was preceded by a dedication to Pope Leo X, an exhortation to the reader, a discussion of the method used, and a defense of this method. Then came the Greek New Testament text accompanied by Erasmus’ own Latin Translation, and then this was followed by Erasmus’ notes, giving his comments on the text. In the second edition (1519) Erasmus revised both the Greek text and his own Latin translation . . . The 3rd edition (1522) is chiefly remarkable for the inclusion of I John 5:7, which had been omitted in the pervious editions. The 4th edition (1527) contained the Greek text, the Latin Vulgate, and Erasmus’ Latin translation in three parallel columns. The 5th edition (1535) omitted the Vulgate, thus resuming the practice of printing the Greek text and the version of Erasmus side by side.” (Hills, 197-198)
- The Greek text of Erasmus was the driving force behind the Reformation. Martin Luther based his translation into German on 1519 second edition of the Textus Receptus. (Brake, 235)
- The text of Origen, Eusebius, Constantine, and Jerome (NASV, NIV, ASV in modern form) was the official book of the Dark Ages popes. It was the official for the church that has dominated our study of church history between 500 and 1500 AD. Ruckman asserts that the Dark Ages began with the adoption of this text. In addition, there is no recovery from the blackout of the Middle Ages until the text of Jerome was replaced by the Byzantine, Antiochan, Syrian text of the Waldensians, St. Patrick, and the Albigenses. All of Europe was united during the Crusades but the blackout continued. It is not until local assemblies and the majority of Christian scholars abandoned this text that revival came. (Ruckman, 461-467)
- Erasmus’ Greek text and its underlying manuscript witnesses is the text that the Catholic Church has never approved of. For this was the text that the Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathari, and Waldensians died for. (Ruckman, 461-467)
- Despite the odds, the text of Erasmus with slight revisions by Stephanus, Elzevir, and Beza was translated into 1,600 languages with 1,000,000,000 copies of it in English Alone (1611-1990). The English translation built the British Empire and the republic of America, and it determined the thinking of the founding fathers of the United States of American when they framed the Constitution. It also brought about the evangelical conversion of over 40,000,000 sinners to Jesus Christ under the ministries of Luther, Calvin, Knox, Beza, Wesley, Edwards, Whitefield, Torrey, Moody, Sunday, Finney, Spurgeon, Scofield as well as scores of others. (Ruckman 461-467)

- “Erasmus reached the height of his fame at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. At first he encouraged Luther, but after the Leipzig debate (1519) he began to criticize him. Finally, he publicly broke with Luther in his *Diatribes on Free Will* (1524).” (Elwell, 384)

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