

RENAISSANCE**INTRODUCTION**

During the Middle Ages there were two institutions that controlled much of Europe. The Holy Roman Empire influenced the political life of the people. The popes of the Roman Catholic Church controlled the religious life. Both of these institutions began to lose power by the 1300s. Individual European nations also grew stronger. People started writing in their own languages instead of Latin (the language of the Catholic Church). People felt freer to think in new ways.

The Renaissance was a period in European history. It began in the 1300s, during the late Middle Ages. It ended during the 1500s, when the modern era began. Renaissance means “rebirth” in French. It refers to the rediscovery by scholars (called humanists) of the classical writings—those of the ancient Greeks and Romans. In fact, however, the Renaissance was a period of discovery in many fields—of new scientific laws, new forms of art and literature, new religious and political ideas, and new lands, including America. Nevertheless, the fuller appreciation of the writings, arts, and attitudes of the Greeks and Romans was perhaps the most distinctive feature of the period.

Humanism

Before the Renaissance, most people in Europe placed great importance on God and religion. During the Renaissance, some people began to think about the importance of humans as well. For this reason these thinkers were called humanists. Humanists wanted to make the most of their lives on Earth. They also wanted to understand the world around them.

One of the first humanists was Francesco Petrarch, an Italian poet who died in 1374. Petrarch was interested in what ancient writers had to say about humanity. He got many other people, including the great storyteller Giovanni Boccaccio, to share his interests.

Printing Press

In about 1450 a German named Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. This allowed people to make many copies of written works. Printed books soon spread the ideas of the Renaissance all over Europe. One of the first thinkers to have his writings printed was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (now in the Netherlands). Erasmus was a religious scholar, but he was interested in humanism.

Religion

Humanism encouraged Europeans to question the role of the Roman Catholic Church during the Renaissance. As more people learned how to read, write and interpret ideas, they began to closely examine and critique religion as they knew it. Also, the printing press allowed for texts, including the Bible, to be easily reproduced and widely read by the people, themselves, for the first time.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther, a German monk, led the Protestant Reformation – a revolutionary movement that caused a split in the Catholic Church. Luther questioned many of the practices of the church and whether they aligned with the teachings of the Bible. As a result, a new form of Christianity, known as Protestantism, was created

Science

The spirit of inquiry and discovery also led to a Renaissance in science. In the Middle Ages, scholars usually took their scientific knowledge from books. During the Renaissance, however, people began to experiment and observe for themselves. Nicolaus Copernicus, who was born in Poland, was one of the greatest astronomers of the Renaissance. He showed that Earth revolves around the Sun. For more than 1,000 years before that people had believed that everything in the universe revolved around Earth.

Andreas Vesalius was a medical doctor from Brussels (now in Belgium). Vesalius found out about the