

62. HUMANISM AND THE RENAISSANCE

We are slowly getting closer to the time in history when God will say:
"This far, and no further!"

With this, I mean the time of the Reformation. The Roman Catholic church refused to listen to all God's warnings and calls to repentance. Yet throughout Europe, those warnings had opened the eyes of many thousands of people. They saw the terrible corruption in the church and called for reforms. But the Roman Catholic church stubbornly refused to budge. They continued in the errors which had stealthily crept in over time. The Roman Catholic church, as a church, showed bitter hostility toward the men who dared to attack their doctrines.

They killed John Huss and Jerome of Prague. They persecuted and ill-treated the Waldenses, John Wycliffe and Gerhart Groote. The inquisition performed its terrible work. They shed the blood of thousands of innocent people. Rome sank deeper and deeper into the cesspool of sin and corruption. God's patience was incredible, but the time finally arrived when the Lord said:
"Enough!"
Although God is longsuffering, His great patience is not endless.

In the century before the Reformation, a new evil crept into the Church. This new evil was the *Renaissance* and *Humanism*. Strange words! What do they mean? This chapter will try to explain that.

ISLAM ATTACKS CONSTANTINOPLE

In Constantinople, the capital of the East Roman Empire, the people are concerned. Groups of soldiers march through the streets while the inhabitants stare at them. Everyone is looking worried. Nobody is doing much work. The people stand together in groups and discuss the situation.

What's going on?
Just look at the walls.
The heavy gates are closed day and night.
Sentries are at their post.
And outside the walls?
There it swarms with soldiers.
Constantinople is under siege!
The enemy is at the gates!
Which enemy?
The Turks (followers of Mohammed) came and laid siege around the city. They are trying to conquer Constantinople. They have attempted to do that so often already. But so far, they have failed.

For centuries the Turks have been the mortal enemies of the East Roman Empire. The emperors have desperately waged long, deadly battles against the intrusive Mohammedans for many years. The crusades did not help. True, for a while, they did give some relief. But the crusades were a total failure. They did not achieve their aim of conquering the Holy Land. The Turks drove the Christians out of Palestine again. And then, like a tidal wave, the Turks surged forward. They conquered city after city, fortress after fortress. And now, in April 1453, they have arrived at the gates of Constantinople. Things do not look very promising for the city. The Turkish sultan surrounded the city with an army of about 90,000 men, while in



Fall of Constantinople 1453. <https://www.heritagedaily.com>

Constantinople, there were only 9,000 defenders. The superior Turkish force is too great.

The city holds out for about six weeks. At the end of May 1453, the Turks attacked and captured Constantinople. The Romans bravely fight in the streets of the city to defend it. But the Turks kill the emperor and thousands of citizens and soldiers. The remainder flees into the cathedral. There they try to find some protection. But it does not help. Without pity the Turks cruelly murder all who hide in the church. Roman blood flows through the aisles.

From now on, the crescent or half-moon will rule in Constantinople. With the crescent, we mean Mohammedanism. That religion still exists in Constantinople today. The Christians suffered terribly. The Mohammedans made every effort to make them apostatise and accept the Islam faith. They took children away from their parents to bring them up in the Mohammedan religion.

HUMANISM

Many educated men left the Eastern countries and went to live in Rome and other Italian cities. They fled to the West to escape oppression. They established schools and taught many young people.

Was that so bad? Teaching the youth is a good thing!

Not always. It all depends on what kind of instruction you give the youth. This education was evil because those learned men who fled from Constantinople taught the school students the pagan wisdom of the Greeks and the Romans. That pagan wisdom poisoned many young people. According to those teachers, intellectual knowledge had to change, "for", they said, "that was much too old-fashioned".

Believe everything the Church taught? No way! They were too intelligent for that! Get rid of those old-fashioned doctrines! They will introduce something new and different! They called that renewal of knowledge *humanism*! The humanists no longer believed in the Lord Jesus.

What? To believe that the Lord Jesus had come to earth to suffer and die for sinners? Nonsense! The humanists didn't believe that. They 'knew better' and laughed scornfully at the ideas the Bible taught. That entire so-called work of redemption of the Saviour was a fantasy, a myth! The *Saviour* is not central, but *man*! They did not want to speak about *heavenly* things anymore, but only *temporal* things. *They* were the most important! How appalling!

But those humanists did not leave the Roman Catholic Church. They remained church members outwardly but no longer believed in it. They lived on indifferently.

They no longer thought about death and eternity. They lived for pleasure and served sin. They wanted to enjoy the good of this world to the full.

The wickedness of the Roman clergy was already disgusting, but now it became much worse. These men shamelessly committed the most terrible sins. Murder and manslaughter were the order of the day. There was no God anyway, Who could see and hear everything. Repentance and conversion were old-fashioned theories that did not belong to the new knowledge science. If enmity arose between two people, they tried to kill each other.

They secretly put poison in the food and drink so that the one who ate that poisoned food would die. They also killed their enemy with a dagger or some other weapon. Assassinations often took place. True, similar things happened before then



Perugino's painting depicts the vibrant life of Renaissance cities: young men play ball or strut in groups in a large square. <https://smarthistory.org/>

as well, but humanism promoted this sinful

behaviour because it no longer took God's Word into account. They let go of that Word, so crime and unrighteousness reigned supreme.

We understand that this trend is very dangerous. That pagan humanism corrupted the people. But didn't the Roman clergy warn the people against humanism?

Regrettably not! Many Roman clergymen became humanists themselves! There were even humanist popes! One pope even dared to speak about 'the fable of Christ.'

Isn't that awful?

With all this, the Roman Catholic church sank even deeper into unbelief. Through pagan humanism, the Roman Catholic Church departed even further from the Word of the Lord. The Church accepted humanism instead of rejecting it. And that was profoundly sad.

THE RENAISSANCE

Not only must intellectual knowledge be renewed, but also art must change. All those old things weren't good enough anymore. In those days, some famous artists made beautiful pictures. They were extraordinary works of art. Their mural paintings brilliantly adorned church ceilings and monasteries.

Those old-fashioned churches littering the countryside?

Pooh! They weren't attractive enough anymore! They should build other, more beautiful churches. So in the Italian city of Milan, they made a beautiful cathedral. The city of Rome got St. Peter's church. They also raised other buildings, beautifully crafted with artistic decorations. Scholars wrote books that were different from those old-fashioned ones.

Poets made enchanting poems in which they praised the new ideas. They renewed every sphere of art.

They called that renewal of art: '*The Renaissance*.' So remember:

Humanism was the renewal of knowledge.
The Renaissance was the renewal of art.
They venerated what was beautiful.

The people continued to live on in wickedness and unbelief.

The pope lived in Rome. He was the so-called vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. But that pope was so wicked that even the Roman Catholic people cried shame on him.

Murder and manslaughter were part of life at the papal court. Drunkenness and adultery were common. Wasn't it sad that people said:

"The closer to Rome, the worse the Christians?"

The pope set a bad example.

The high Roman clergy set a bad example.

The lower clergy and the people followed suit.

North of Rome lies a city called Florence.

In those days, an exceptionally evil dynasty ruled Florence. The name of that dynasty was: de Medici. We will learn more about them later.

The members of that royal family were humanists. Florence was a grossly wicked city. Rome and Florence were the centres of pagan humanism where humanism reached its climax.



Logo of the Medici Bank. The Medici family started the most popular bank in Europe, the Medici bank, and they pioneered writing rules about loans. At one point, the Medicis managed the majority of great fortunes in Europe, from merchants to members of royalty.
<https://theromanguy.com/>

In those days of apostasy, a monk in Florence warned against humanism with all his energy. That monk's name was *Savonarola*! We hope to tell you about him in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS

1. Summarise the story of the downfall of Constantinople.

2. What impact did the fall of Constantinople have on education in the West?
3. State how a humanist regarded the following:
 - a. Traditions of the church
 - b. The work of the Lord Jesus
 - c. Repentance and conversion
 - d. The Bible
 - e. Sin.
4. What was the centre of humanism?
5. What changes occurred in art?
6. What is the Renaissance?
7. Explain the expression: "The closer to Rome, the worse the Christians."
8. Who were the Medici?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. In His longsuffering, God had patiently endured the errors of the church for several centuries. The chapter states that the time when God would say: "Enough" was approaching. What would God do with the Roman Catholic church? What would God do with His Own?
2. Why is humanism so dangerous?
3. Choose one of the following and discuss the impact of humanism on it during the last few hundred years: education, music, art, science.