

PART VI            RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION: FUSION OF THE ROOTS

Chapter 16        Humanism and the Early Italian Renaissance

1. Western conceptions of God, humanity, and nature emerged starting with the beginning of the Renaissance in the fourteenth century.
2. The transformation of thought and culture was particularly widespread in Italy, although Northern Europe also played a contributing role.

I. Beginnings of the Modern World

A. An Italian Phenomenon

1. The Renaissance (1350 to 1500) was dominated by Italy.
2. Medieval culture reflected an agrarian society while Italy was increasingly urban.
3. Lay literacy was high and the leading intellectuals were typically laymen.

B. The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century

1. By 1300 Europe was overpopulated for the technological level of the society.
2. Food costs were high.
3. A terrible famine in the early thirteenth century on the subcontinent reduced the population by ten percent.
4. The Black Death struck in 1348 and recurred throughout the remainder of the century.
5. The population of Europe fell by forty percent between 1300 and 1400.
6. The xenophobic Ming Dynasty cut off direct trade with Europe at a time when China was an important trade partner.

C. Humanism

1. The crisis of the fourteenth century helped to inspire humanism.
2. The Humanists were hostile to the Scholastics.
3. The Humanists were more self-reliant and less God-reliant.
4. The Humanists were literary scholars interested in Greek and Latin history and ideas.
5. The Humanists promoted eloquent speech as a means of bringing truth into action.
6. Humanism was an outgrowth of urban Italian culture.

D. Civic Humanism: Salutati and Bruni

1. Despite its republican form of government, a small number of families controlled fifteenth century Florence.
2. Coluccio Salutati challenged the medieval notion that monarchy was superior to a Republican form of government.
3. His disciple, Leonardo Bruni, developed a theory of civic humanism, which explained and promoted Republican ideals.
4. Bruni's theory can be traced to the writings of Aristotle and Cicero.
5. Bruni was one of the first of the humanists to read Greek.

E. Women and Humanism

1. Humanism held promise for women but only the most privileged had the opportunity to participate in the world of letters fostered by the Humanists.

2. Few of the noteworthy women humanists continued their scholarly pursuits after they were married.

F. The Medici and Neoplatonism

1. The richest family in Florence, the Medici, came to power in Florence in the middle of the fifteenth century.
2. Florentine Platonism began to overtake the ideas of Bruni and the Republicanism he espoused.
3. This movement marked a shift back to putting a person's relationship to God as the central concern of the human condition.