

Question: "What impact did the Renaissance have on Christianity?"

Answer: The Renaissance was a time of renewed interest in a study of the Humanities, beginning in Italy and spreading throughout Europe in the 14th through the 16th centuries. The Renaissance brought a revival of art, literature, and learning and constituted the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern age. The widespread impact of the Renaissance affected Christianity and helped change the course of church history.

One way that the Renaissance impacted Christianity was that it increased curiosity about early church writings in Greek. In the medieval period, the emphasis was on Scholasticism. In the study of Scholastic theology, students studied commentaries on the Scriptures. The most widely used textbook was Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (12th century), which was a commentary on selected passages of Scripture arranged topically. Lombard had accumulated comments from the church fathers and more recent thinkers. A second widely used textbook was Duns Scotus's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Theological students of the Middle Ages studied commentaries and commentaries on commentaries more than they studied the Scriptures themselves!

The Renaissance brought an emphasis upon going back to the original sources. Many of the Greek classics made their way to western Europe as the great Greek libraries of the eastern Roman Empire were moved west to be kept safe from the advancing Muslim armies. Scholars began to want to read these classics in the original languages. Likewise, those who wanted to study the Scriptures began to see the need to study them in the original Greek and Hebrew, not Latin. (At that time, the Latin Vulgate, a 4th-century translation, was the officially recognized Bible of the Catholic Church.)

In an effort to aid this shift to original sources, Erasmus of Rotterdam published a Greek New Testament in 1516, using the Greek manuscripts that he had available. Even though Erasmus's text was far from perfect, it was a vast improvement over the Latin and was a key to the rise of Christian humanism in the Renaissance. As the Bible was studied in the original languages, errors in the Latin translation were

exposed. For instance, Martin Luther discovered that where the Greek has “repent” the Latin Vulgate had “do penance”—two very different things.

It is impossible to separate the Renaissance and the Reformation. Nascent Renaissance thinking helped to bring about the Reformation, which in turn helped to bring about the full Renaissance. Men like Luther began to study the Bible for themselves rather than rely upon the authority of the church to tell them what the Bible said. As they studied, they found something radically different from what they had been taught in official church dogma. These men were also burdened to provide accurate translations of the Bible in the common language of the people, and, thanks to the recent invention of the Gutenberg printing press, they had the means to disseminate the truth. Luther produced a German New Testament in 1522, based on the second edition of Erasmus’s Greek text. Meanwhile, William Tyndale was working on an English translation; Olivétan was penning a French translation; van Liesveldtin was working in Dutch; Petri was working on a Swedish Bible; Pedersen was producing a Danish Bible; Gotskálksson was toiling over an Icelandic translation; and de Reina was producing a Bible in Castillian Spanish. The common people, who could not read the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew (or in Latin), could now have a Bible of their own.

The natural outgrowth of Reformation thinking, which helped propel the spread of the Renaissance, was to question the authority of the church and to do away with class distinctions between people. If any person could approach God without a priest, if all believers are priests, and if salvation is through faith in Christ without the mediation of the church, then the authority of the medieval church was severely weakened. Likewise, thoughts of equality in Christ and in society came to the fore. Kings who had always assumed that they reigned by divine right were now called upon to justify their actions by Scripture; thus their autocratic freedom was curtailed. In the same way, secular rulers felt they could break with church authority in favor of their own consciences and understanding of Scripture. In the Reformation the seeds of “separation of church and state” were sown.

Renaissance means “rebirth,” and that is certainly what happened to society and culture as art and science came to full flower. Within the time of the Renaissance occurred a “rebirth” of the church as well, as men began thinking biblically and

independently from Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately, Renaissance thinking kept going where the Reformation stopped. The Reformation said that one could question the church where it disagreed with Scripture. The secular thinkers of the Renaissance said that Scripture, too, could be questioned where it disagreed with one's own understanding. For the secular Renaissance thinkers, man was the final authority and arbiter of truth—not God, not Scripture.

Evangelical Christians today are the heirs of the Reformation, which might be called the Christian Renaissance, and modern secular society is the heir of the secular Renaissance.

Source: Got Questions

Source: <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/high-renaissance/>

Below are some examples of High Renaissance art (1490s-1527):

Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*



“This painting was innovative for several reasons. Rather than depicting the Virgin as an idealized Queen of Heaven upon a throne with the customary halo, he created her as the Madonna of Humility, a version of Mary that would also be adopted by Raphael. Beauty and grace become the conveyor of the sacredness of the scene rather than traditional iconographic symbology, thus diffusing the boundaries between ordinary man and religious figures. This painting also pioneered the technique of *sfumato* to create the soft and gentle transitions of facial expressions to convey the fluidity of human interaction rather than a static, merely two-dimensional image.”

Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*

"Along with his innovative approach to the subject matter, Leonardo's study of optics, shadow, and light inform the work, creating a sense of movement that flows through the group like a wave of emotion. As a result it becomes what art historian Jacob Burckhardt called a "restless masterpiece."



The artist's radical experimentation with media can also be seen. To achieve an effect like oil painting, Leonardo used oil and tempera to paint on a dry wall, after first applying plaster and then adding an underlying layer of white pigment to increase the vibrancy of the colors.

Also of interest is the way Leonardo integrated elements into the scene in regards to its location. Duke Ludovico Sforza commissioned the painting for the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie monastery's refectory, and the artist created it so that Christ and his disciples seemed to be an extension of the space where the monks ate dinner. By using Italian models for the disciples, depicting a Tuscan landscape, and including a plate of orange slices and grilled eel, a popular dish at the time, he brought ordinary elements that the monks would recognize into the famous religious scene."

Raphael's *School of Athens*

This fresco, depicting a gathering of classical Greek philosophers, noted contemporary scholars, and artists, uses perspective to draw the viewer's gaze toward the central figures of Plato on the left and Aristotle on the right, walking as they discuss philosophical matters under the replicating arches. The scene is animated, as groups in discussion cluster on both the left and right, creating a contrast with other individual figures that sit in solitary reflection. For example, the figure of Heraclitus (thought to be a portrait of Michelangelo) sits in the lower center, his head resting on his hand, as he

seems to be sketching, while on the right of the stairs the cynic philosopher Diogenes sprawls. A statue of Apollo, god of music and art, stands on the left, while a statue of Athena, goddess of reason and wisdom stands on the right, symbolizing the division between Plato's philosophy of ideal forms and Aristotle's emphasis on logic and



empirical knowledge.

By combining figures from the contemporary world with revered ancient Greeks, the work becomes a visual embodiment of the thriving Renaissance adoption of humanism. Raphael innovatively uses color to create a sense of dynamic intellectual movement, as notes of blue on the right and red on the left draw the eye along the diagonals created by the perspective toward Plato and Aristotle.

Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*

This legendary painting, part of the vast masterpiece that adorns the Sistine Chapel, shows Adam as a muscular classical nude, reclining on the left, as he extends his hand toward God who fills the right half of the painting. God rushes toward him, his haste conveyed by his white flaring robe and the energetic movements of his body. God is surrounded by angels and cherubim, all encased within a red cloud, while a feminine figure thought to be Eve or Sophia, symbol of wisdom, peers out with curious interest from underneath Adam's arm. Behind Adam, the green ledge upon which he lies, and the mountainous background create a strong diagonal, emphasizing the division between mortal he and heavenly God. As a result the viewer's eye is drawn to the hands of God and Adam, outlined in the central space, almost touching. Some have noted that the shape of the red cloud resembles the shape of the human brain, as if the artist meant to imply God's intent to infuse Adam with not merely animate life, but also the important gift of consciousness.

The piece is an exquisite example of High Renaissance characteristics. Both figures are classical yet remarkably muscular and anatomically precise, informed by Michelangelo's sculptural approach and his knowledge of human anatomy. Whereas prior Christian art had previously connected the nude figure to shame and sin, reserving its presentation for demonic figures or depictions of Adam and Eve driven out of paradise, here, the nude is utilized to create a powerful depiction of profound male beauty. Pope John Paul II said, "The Sistine Chapel is precisely - if one may say so - the sanctuary of the theology of the human body," because of its endless number of portraits of figures from religious narrative that are displayed in all their stark, naturalistic, human glory.