



Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Analyze the political, cultural, and social contexts out of which the West developed.
 - 2.1 Recall political, cultural, and social contexts that shaped the West.
4. Evaluate significant developments of Western culture in art, literature, history, and architecture.
 - 4.1 Recall significant works or events in Western art, literature, history, and architecture.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 12:

European Society in the Age of the Renaissance, 1350-1550

Chapter 13:

Reformations and Religious Wars, 1500-1600

Unit Lesson

The Renaissance

Unit VII looks at the Renaissance in Europe, the period roughly covering about 1350 to 1600. From the Renaissance came a great flowering of art, literature, and academic thought. With it came intense new debates about religion, resulting in the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

The Middle Ages ended with an explosion of logic and imagination. This period came to be called the Renaissance. Renaissance comes from a French word meaning “rebirth.” Historians often put different dates on the Renaissance, often putting the beginnings between 1350, just after the end of the Black Death, to around 1400 or so. Similarly, its ending is placed typically around 1550 to 1600.

The Renaissance began as old Greco-Roman texts began to be discovered in monasteries across Europe. Centuries of careful copying and storage by monks preserved this knowledge down through the generations. This information filtered into palaces and universities across the continent. After Johann Gutenberg perfected movable-type printing in Europe by 1414, printers began making even more copies available, spreading the information even further. With these ancient texts available to answer all sorts of questions Europeans had about the world, and to fill their minds with ideas from logic and philosophy to art and literature, Europeans began to awaken from their centuries-long intellectual slumber.

Inspired with this new wealth of knowledge, European thinkers began to explore the world around them with renewed vigor and fascination. They began to dispel old, erroneous ideas about the world to embrace new facts and new truths. Along the way, they also began to ask questions about the natural world that led them to ask questions about humanity and spirituality. They began to question everything, from man’s relationship with the natural world, to man’s relationship with his fellow man, to man’s relationship with God.

This time period also produced perhaps some of the greatest works of art in history. These artists included Michelangelo, an architect, sculptor, and painter from Italy. Pope Julius II commissioned him to produce works of art for the new Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo produced numerous works for the Vatican, several of which were on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, portraying various scenes from the Bible. Completed in

1508, one of these works, *The Creation of Adam*, shows God in the clouds reaching out toward the newly created Adam.

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the most famous minds of the Renaissance. He was known for creating amazing works of art, including the famed *Mona Lisa* from 1506. Throughout his career, he experimented with a variety of painting techniques, some of which were more successful than others. One such effort was the panoramic *The Last Supper*, which took three years to complete between 1495 and 1498. His creation became so iconic that his depiction of Jesus eating the last meal with his disciples has since become the dominant image of the scene in the western imagination.

He also developed a variety of inventions. One of his plans included a crude version of a helicopter and even a primitive glider. He also designed buildings, canal systems, and new types of bridges for river barge traffic.

Other Renaissance artists included Donato di Donatello, a famed sculptor known for such works as the statue of the biblical figure of David; Italian painter Raphael; and painter Albrecht Durer. Durer became an example of Northern Renaissance Humanism, or Christian Humanism, a distinct artistic style of the time period that predominated in northern Europe.

The Reformation

The Renaissance also sparked a deep division in Christianity as questions over religion and the management of the Roman Catholic Church simmered. While many church officials served with integrity, others were notoriously corrupt. The Great Schism had only intensified discussions over these issues. Desiderius Erasmus, a former monk and scholar, wrote several books in the early 1500s calling on Christians to make the faith more than just a series of rituals and called for reforms to correct serious problems within the church.

Perhaps the most vocal critic was Martin Luther, a monk and professor of theology in Germany. Frustrated with church corruption and other issues, he famously posted his 95 *Theses* in 1517 on the door of his local cathedral to protest the problems within the church as well as give his ideas for change. The church, in response, excommunicated him four years later. Luther broke with the church, sparking the Protestant Reformation. Germany, Scandinavia, and other areas of Northern Europe quickly rallied to Luther and his ideas of salvation by faith alone (as opposed to faith and works), ending clerical celibacy, ending the papacy, and rejection of using the saints as intercessors between the faithful and God.

Backed by powerful German nobles, the Lutheran Church became a powerful movement in the region. The Lutheran Wars erupted in Germany when Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (who was also the King of Spain) attempted to suppress the rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church. Charles V, however, was weighed down by wars against the French as well as the Ottoman Turks who threatened Central Europe with invasion.

By 1555, the religious wars ended with the Peace of Augsburg, which brought peace to the land and equal footing between Catholics and Lutherans in the Holy Roman Empire. This peace would not last, however, as the Thirty Years War erupted in 1618 between nobles in the Holy Roman Empire over the question of Catholic versus Lutheran supremacy.

Other figures challenged the Roman Catholic Church across the continent. Ulrich Zwingli, a radical Catholic priest, called for wholesale reforms to the church in his fiery sermons before being excommunicated. He organized his Protestant followers into an army, sparking a civil war in his native Switzerland that ended with his death in 1531.

Menno Simons led the Anabaptists in Northern Europe, a movement calling for strict pacifism and a rejection of worldly goods and luxuries to follow Christ's example. He also called for a complete withdrawal of followers from what they saw as a sinful society. The Anabaptists were widely persecuted, but the Mennonite and Amish movements emerged from his work.

John Calvin, with his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1534-1536), took Protestantism in a new direction. He disagreed with the Anabaptists and Lutherans on a number of issues and called for the end to the papacy and salvation by faith alone, and he also called for the doctrine of predestination and the idea of the Bible as the sole source of God's laws. Calvin's austere system of morality shaped many movements, including the Presbyterian and Baptist churches.

King Henry VIII of England, at one time a devout defender of the church and fierce critic of the Protestants, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church after the church refused to approve his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. On his orders, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy in 1534, making him the head of the Church of England.

France erupted into civil war between 1562 and 1598 over Protestantism. The French Wars of Religion pitted the Protestant nobility against the Catholic kings until the victory of Henry IV in 1589. The new king converted from Calvinism to Catholicism to keep the peace with the vast majority of the country but issued the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which gave Protestants freedom of religion.

The Roman Catholic Church responded to these developments with the Counter-Reformation, hoping to end the criticisms once and for all. Pope Paul III called for a Reform Commission in 1537 to study church problems, but Paul III refused to act on its recommendations to curb corruption and nepotism. He created the Roman Inquisition in 1542 as a church court to settle theological issues that he believed the church alone could solve.

Pope Paul IV increased the powers of the Roman Inquisition in the 1550s and created the Index of Forbidden Books to stamp out Protestant ideas and other works seen as blasphemous. The Council of Trent was also convened to answer the most pressing questions posed to the church by its critics; however, the council sided with the traditional Roman Catholic teachings on every issue, from clerical celibacy to salvation by faith and works.

Suggested Reading

The following textbook is optional. It has additional readings that correspond with the topics covered in the course textbook, and you may find these sources interesting. You will not be tested on any information from this textbook:

McKay, J. P., Crowston, C. H., Weisner-Hanks, M. E., & Perry, J. (2014). *Sources for western society: From antiquity to the enlightenment* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.