

Pre-Protestant Reformation Summary

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The Protestant Reformation is generally believed to have begun in the sixteenth century, with men like Martin Luther leading the way. Cultural paradigm shifts do not just happen within a vacuum but are precipitated by attitudes and events occurring within that culture. In other words, there was a Pre-Protestant Reformation world-view upon the European Continent that would greatly impact and help light the fire of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. These attitudes and values did not just involve the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. The secular or humanistic worldview that permeated society also had a tremendous influence on the people, the kings, and even church leaders. The events that were occurring during the Middle Ages, which included the fifth through the fifteenth century, would set the stage for major changes in the attitudes that people would have towards the state, as well as the church and state relationship with each other. The Middle Ages would see a time of social unrest, political turmoil, and religious conflict, as well as death from famine and the Black Death, killing a third of the European population. In looking back on the volatile fourteenth century, one can perceive the beginning of the restless stirring that would eventually lead to the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. The ingredients were there: the rise of science; the rise of the middle class; the printing press; followed by the ancient Greek culture as preserved in the Islamic world (Lamb, 2004).

The development of what became known as humanism began to make inroads into the intellectualism of the time. Humanism was not something new, but when various intellectuals began to define and name this belief system, it seemed to tie quite well into the Greek culture of the past. By the time that the fourteenth century rolled around this cultural movement began to spread rapidly. Humanists believed in the worth and dignity of the individual and that belief led, in turn, to the rediscovery of the culture of classical antiquity: literature, history, rhetoric, ethic, and politics (Rachum, 1980). The view of humanism was spreading but not necessarily to all of the population, because the majority could not read and was more interested in surviving than becoming more intellectual. The Greeks' form of humanism was the major philosophy of the day and it was able to control the major areas of religion and worldviews of many intellectuals. As humanism tried to reenter the European Continent it was obviously antithetical to the Christian worldview, so many tried to synthesize the two belief systems together. This secularization of the Christian view lessened the effectiveness and influence of the Church, as many individuals found it easier to follow their own way of thinking than the rules of the Pope. The Middle Ages were also a time of the development of a social structure that became known as Feudalism, which is hard to define. It is a term that we use today but was not used while it was actually occurring (Backman, 2002). This social structure gradually developed after the Roman Empire came to an end, as chaos within

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