

The Renaissance: Christian Humanism

Sources

Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250-1550)* (1980)

Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (1969)

E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of Reformation* (1956)

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 6

I. “Christian Humanism”

A. Terminology

1. “Renaissance”: “re-birth” of classical/ancient learning
2. Renaissance “Humanism”
 - a. *Not* modern secular humanism
 - b. Study of human endeavors and nature with the aid of ancient learning
 - 1) Stress on Humanities
 - 2) Stress on going back to original sources
 - 3) Pursue virtue in non-Christian sources

B. Nature

1. Summary: Renaissance learning aimed at religious reform
2. Goals
 - a. Search for ideal *church* of the past
 - b. Follow pattern of the Sermon on the Mount
 - c. Recover NT and Patristic literature as well as Classical → “Christian classics” instead of “pagan classics”
3. Somewhat Pelagian in emphasis
 - a. Tendency to think of natural goodness and perfectibility of man
 - b. Less stress on *grace* and more on *education*

C. Methodology

1. Grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture
2. Attack corruption—not false doctrine
3. Promote education—lower schools to universities
4. Advanced through printing

D. Humanist pattern of reform

1. Clean out corruption
2. Clean out superstition
3. Set a pattern of good works
4. Pursue scholarship and learning
5. Reform *within* the church

II. Examples of Christian Humanism

A. France: Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples

1. Foremost French Christian humanist
2. Bible translation basis for later Protestant edition
3. French humanism the breeding ground for reform in France: John Calvin a product of French humanism

B. Spain

1. Hebrew learning strong in Spain from Jewish influence

2. Leading product: Complutensian Polyglot, “parallel Bible” w/ major languages and versions
 3. Reformation provokes crackdown on humanist reform
 - C. Germany: Johann Reuchlin
 1. Controversy over Jewish literature
 2. His prominent student: Philipp Melanchthon
 - a. Humanist of the German Reformation
 - b. University of Wittenberg: A product of the Renaissance and birthplace of the Reformation
 - D. England: Thomas More
 1. Layman, studied law at Cambridge
 2. *Utopia*: Humanist ideal
 - a. Picture of a perfect society, modeled on Plato’s *Republic*
 - b. Very uniform society: No private property, government-regulated dress and housing, etc.
 - c. Ironically, no punishment for religious dissent in More’s ideal state
 3. Chancellor to Henry VIII
 - a. Supported king’s early efforts against the Reformation
 - b. Beheaded in 1535 for opposing the Reformation
 - c. Shows limits of Christian Humanism
- III. Erasmus: Preeminent Humanist
- A. Character
 1. “Erasmus of Christendom” (Bainton)—a universal figure
 2. Advocated a “philosophy of Christ”—a life of Christian devotion based on the pattern of Christ
 3. Salvation through education
 4. Contribution to biblical studies (Bainton)
 - a. Greek text of NT
 - b. Latin translation of NT
 - c. Method of exegesis
 - d. Popular exposition
 - B. Works
 1. *The Praise of Folly*: Pointed satire on church, politics, society in general
 2. Edition of the Greek NT—probably his greatest contribution
 3. *Freedom of the Will*
 - a. Rejected the view of human depravity advocated by the reformers
 - b. Answered by Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*
 - C. Attitude toward reform
 1. “Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.”
 2. Schaff: Erasmus represented fourfold break w/ medieval times
 - a. Condemned monastic ignorance and empty ceremonialism
 - b. Applied the critical method to the Scriptures
 - c. Issued the first Greek NT
 - d. Advocated translation of the Bible
 3. Erasmus and the Reformation
 - a. Ultimately rejected Luther and the Reformation

- b. Direct influence on reformers such as Zwingli
- c. Luther: “He will probably die like Moses in the land of Moab.... He has done enough to overcome the evil, but to lead to the land of promise is not, in my judgment, his business.”