

PROJECT: CHRISTIANITY, INDIVIDUALISM, AND SECULARISM

To the Dutch humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), the greatest danger to faith was following traditional teachings of the Church without understanding the teachings of Christ himself. Erasmus lived during the Renaissance, a time of vibrant new art and just as vibrant new thought, and he was one of its greatest thinkers. Erasmus wrote about how important it was for an individual to know and understand one's own faith while still belonging to the Catholic Church, whereas Martin Luther emphasized that salvation was contingent upon an individual relationship with God, and the Church did not determine your salvation.



Quentin Metsys

The Moneylender and His Wife

Quentin Metsys, 1514

Metsys's picture above, "The Moneylender and his Wife," symbolizes the way people viewed Christianity and the Bible. This image illustrates that, while personal piety could now be considered a part of everyday life, greed (pearls and gold) can distract from this. Religious symbolism abounds: the scales of judgment, the fruit on the shelf (original sin), the snuffed out candle (our coming death), the carafe of water and the rosary (the purity of the Virgin). The small wooden box represents a place where faith has retired. All of this symbolism demonstrates the move to a more individualized Christian faith and the dangers of secularism.

Before You Begin

Think about the terms individualism and secularism as they relate to what you've learned. The Renaissance opened up a Church-dominated Europe to these new, compelling ideas. Many argued that individualism and secularism conflicted with Christianity, and, yet, these ideas came from thinkers within the Church.

The Church was also losing its iron grip on the political landscape of Europe. In England, Henry VIII simply broke off from the Catholic Church and started his own Church of England when the Pope refused to grant him a divorce. This move sent shockwaves throughout all of Christendom and irreversibly impacted the political and ecclesiastical landscape.

Directions

Create a slide presentation explaining the relationship among Christianity, individualism, and secularism in the political landscape of the Renaissance. Your presentation must be a minimum of 7 slides and include the following:

Slide 1 – Title page

Slide 2 – Discuss Christianity during this period. What was important to the Christians of this time?

Slide 3 – Discuss individualism during this period in history. How does individualism relate to Christianity at this time?

Slide 4 – Discuss secularism during this period in history and how it relates to Christianity and individualism.

Slide 5 – How does Christianity, Individualism and Secularism fit in with the political climate of King Henry VIII's court and the break with the Catholic Church? How did this change Politics and ecclesiology? What was the role of Cardinal Wolsey?

Slide 6 – How are these ideas represented in the Metsys's painting "The Moneylender and his Wife"?

Slide 7 - References