



Impact of Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo as Cultural Change Agents during the Renaissance Period

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Abstract

This study discusses three cultural change agents: Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo. Each of these figures played a significant role in shaping the cultural landscape of their time, and their influence can still be felt today. Erasmus was a Dutch Renaissance humanist who promoted a return to classical learning and scholarship. His writings, which were critical of the established church, helped pave the way for the Protestant Reformation. Erasmus also advocated for the use of the vernacular in religious texts, making them more accessible to ordinary people. Martin Luther was a German theologian and monk who is best known for his role in the Protestant Reformation. Luther's ideas challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and led to the establishment of new Protestant denominations. Luther's translation of the Bible into German helped make religious texts more accessible to a wider audience. Michelangelo was an Italian Renaissance artist who made significant contributions to the fields of painting, sculpture, and architecture. His works, including the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the sculpture of David, are considered masterpieces of Western art. Michelangelo's works helped redefine the possibilities of art and inspired future generations of artists. Together, Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo represent a diverse set of cultural change agents who helped shape the course of Western culture. Their ideas and works continue to influence and inspire people today, reminding us of the enduring power of art, scholarship, and faith.

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Introduction

The Renaissance, a transformative period spanning the 14th to the 17th century, was a pivotal era that brought about significant cultural change in Europe. It marked a departure from the medieval mindset and ushered in a new era of intellectual curiosity, artistic exploration, and humanistic ideals. This research explores the Renaissance and its profound impact on cultural change in Europe, highlighting key developments and their enduring legacies. Delanty argues with the Renaissance, the concept of Europe arises, and uniquely

European patterns emerge. It is also the time when the modernization movement takes on new significance and Europe gets linked with the rest of the globe. The Renaissance gave birth to a cultural identity for Europe and established the groundwork for a budding political identity.¹ The world is changing. or, at least, more people are noticing the change as the world has always been changing. Humanity, in general, prefers to experience a change in small doses with time enough to process the ramifications before the next wave of change sweeps over them. Although much of human history has progressed in small steady steps, the global events of the last few decades have rendered this luxury elusive. The rapid pace of change has escalated uncertainty with people “crying for justice, honesty, and solutions”² while being scared and angry.

This response is not new as people throughout history tend to respond to rapid change with fear and anger. Standing strong against this tidal wave are leaders who embrace the change and help lead others through the darkness of the unknown. These, leaders, or change agents, can maintain a broad perspective on life while valuing questions, wisdom, and personal character over intelligence, knowledge, and presumed answers.

While history is brimming with amazing examples of such leaders, this paper will focus on three change agents within the pandemonium of sixteenth-century Europe who embraced the values previously mentioned. This time frame was chosen due to the parallel between it and the furor of modern culture within the United States. Both periods experienced change at a rapid pace as new concepts and ideas poured into their culture through globalization (i.e. European colonies in the Americas and Asia vs. airplanes, global tourism, and mass immigration), increased knowledge (i.e. Gutenberg’s printing press vs. the internet), religious discord (i.e. the Protestant Reformation vs. religious pluralism), and political mayhem (i.e. the end of the feudal system vs. the rebirth of nationalism).³ The agents themselves, Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo, were chosen due to their ability to give a voice to the emotions of their time while personally reflecting the values of questions, wisdom, character, and a broad perspective of life.

However, before looking at the lives of these change agents, it is worth pausing a moment to better understand the four values in question and how they interact with each other. The first value is that of asking questions. Though this may sound like an odd value, it

¹ Gerard Delanty. *The Renaissance and the Rise of European Consciousness: A Historical and Political Sociology of Europe*. (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95435-6_6.

² Tri Robinson, *Re:Form: The Decline of American Evangelicalism and a Path for the New Generation to Re:Form Their Faith* (Sweet, Idaho: Timber Butte Publishing, 2017), 92.

³ Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2005), 4.

is the proto value from which the other three flow. The prerequisite of asking a question is the humble acknowledgment that the answer is unknown to the one asking the question. Hence to value questions is to recognize one's limitations while seeking to move beyond those limitations. It is a multi-layered value that carries within it humility and curiosity coupled with boldness to receive answers that one may not like.

Wisdom, the second value, flows from the first in that one must understand the world around oneself before being able to wisely choose a course of action. *The New Bible Dictionary* defines wisdom as "the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results"⁴ whereas *Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines it as the "power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action."⁵ Both definitions carry a sense of practicality where information and knowledge are transferred from the theoretical into the best course of action for that time and place.

The third value is that of personal character development. This value can be defined as having moral strength and fortitude to embrace the uncertainty of questions while seeking the path of wisdom. Change agents who embrace this value seek to truly know themselves and learn their "strengths, weaknesses, values, and worldview"⁶ rather than being content to rely on their inherent intelligence and talent. Having embraced such a journey, the change agent is then able to move forward into the unknown, forearmed with the wisdom that comes with personal reflection and a deep moral conviction.

Having a broad perspective of life is the last value under consideration. This value means having the "ability to see things in a true relationship"⁷ across the broad spectrum of life. It is a value that embraces the vastness of humanity as reflected in the plethora of human cultures, personalities, and behavior. One cannot, however, embrace the broadness of humanity or begin to see the interconnectivity of things if one does not ask questions or have the personal character to move beyond past assumptions and narrow-minded views of life. Hence, to value a broad perspective of life means opening oneself up to new ideas and concepts that may or may not challenge previously held ideologies.

Those who embrace the values of questions, wisdom, personal character development, and a broad perspective of life may find themselves living on the edge of the unknown. While this may sound frightening to some, it is the best place to be as it means

⁴ Marshall, I.H, Millard, A.R., J.I. Packer, & Wiseman, D.J. (ed). "Wisdom." In *The New Bible Dictionary*. 3rd ed, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: IVP Academic, 1996).

⁵ *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 5th ed., s.v. "wisdom," 2014.

⁶ Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 95-96.

⁷ *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 5th ed., s.v. "perspective," 2014.

having to trust God as one enters the uncertainty of life. Therefore, these four values can be seen so clearly in the lives of change agents both in the modern era as well as in sixteenth-century Europe. A word of warning though, not everyone who embraces these values end up in the same place. As this paper will soon demonstrate, Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo all espoused similar values even though they ended up in different ideological and theological places. It is as Justo Gonzalez once commented, "In such an age of turmoil, many sincere Christians went through profound soul searching that eventually led them to conclusions and positions they could not have predicted. Others, equally sincere and devout, came to opposite conclusions."⁸

Discussion

The Renaissance Period

The Renaissance Period was a historical epoch in Europe that lasted roughly from the 14th to the 17th centuries. The term "renaissance" comes from the French word for "rebirth" and refers to an era of cultural, intellectual, and artistic renewal. The rise of new forms of government, such as republics, which were characterized by a more democratic and participatory approach to governance. The emergence of a new middle class, which was made up of merchants, bankers, and other professionals. This group had significant economic and political power and played a key role in the development of Renaissance culture. The Renaissance is distinguished by a revitalized interest in ancient Greece and Rome's classical knowledge, ideals, and creative achievements. It represented a break from the prevalent medieval worldview and resulted in profound changes in many parts of society, including philosophy, literature, science, art, and politics.⁹

There was a heavy emphasis on humanism throughout this period, which put the human being at the center of intellectual endeavors. Humanists emphasized the value of education and critical thought, as well as human potential and individualism. They studied humanities like as grammar, rhetoric, history, and philosophy to reconcile classical wisdom with Christian ideals. The arts and sciences advanced dramatically during the Renaissance. Masterpieces by artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael represented a renewed emphasis on realism, perspective, and emotional expression. Science and

⁸ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day*, vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2009), 10.

⁹ Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 88.

technology advanced as well, with renowned scientists like Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler questioning old scientific views and producing significant discoveries in astronomy, physics, and mathematics. The Protestant Reformation brought about enormous changes in religion throughout the Renaissance. Figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in theological conflicts and the formation of new Christian groups.¹⁰

The development of new forms of art and literature, which were characterized by a focus on individualism and humanism. This led to a greater emphasis on the individual's relationship with God and a shift away from the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. The invention of the printing press, which allowed for the widespread dissemination of knowledge and ideas. The printing press was invented, allowing for the mass spreading of knowledge and ideas. This resulted in a greater emphasis on education and the creation of a more educated culture, which aided in the growth of individualism.¹¹ This led to a greater emphasis on education and the development of a more literate society. The exploration and colonization of new lands, which led to the exchange of ideas and cultures between different parts of the world. This had a significant impact on political and social structures in Europe.

The emergence of new scientific discoveries and advancements, particularly in the fields of astronomy and anatomy. This led to a greater emphasis on empirical observation and experimentation, which paved the way for the Scientific Revolution in the following centuries. Exploration and colonization of new regions, which resulted in the flow of ideas and civilizations across the globe. This had a profound influence on European political and social systems, contributing to a greater appreciation for individualism and variety.¹²

The changing perception of old age, which was no longer seen as a time of decline and uselessness but rather as a time of wisdom and experience. The emergence of a new concept of sexual identity, which was seen as a part of the human life cycle and changed throughout stages of youthful experimentation, marriage, adult companionship, and old age. Humanism's evolution highlighted the value of individual intellect and reason, as well as an emphasis on the person's relationship with God. This was a rhetorical and educational movement that attempted to return to Ciceronian purity of language and thinking, away

¹⁰ George Minois. "History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance." *Phoenix* 46, no.1 (1992): 66-69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1088776>.

¹¹ Hendrik Birus. "The archeology of 'humanism.'" *Surfaces* 4 (1994). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064969ar>

¹² Hendrik Birus. "The archeology of 'humanism.'"

from un-Latin and unrhetorical scholastic terminology.¹³

Erasmus Dutch Philosopher, and Theologian

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466-1536 C.E.) is the first change agent under review. Born in the Netherlands towards the latter half of the fifteenth century, Erasmus was a Roman Catholic priest and Augustinian monk who was not content to live life inside the monastery walls.¹⁴ Rather, his desire to ask questions and learn about the broader world pushed him to travel all over Europe, meeting new people and encountering new ideas. Early on in his career Erasmus collected and subsequently published a book of sayings and phrases “culled from antiquity”¹⁵ which not only broadened his perspective of life but helped broaden the perspective of those around him.

As he processed the information and knowledge gained through his questions and travels, Erasmus began to challenge the status quo of his time. His moral character did not allow him to sit idly by while narrow-minded, though intelligent, people took advantage of the average person through devotion to prescribed answers. Writing with humor and tact Erasmus tackled the abuses of the Roman Church while insisting “that righteousness was more important than orthodoxy.”¹⁶ The wisdom of using humor and satire rather than straightforward logical arguments can be seen in the fact that it “enabled Erasmus to satirize everything and everyone in the world of his time while escaping the condemnation that would have been hurled at him had he tackled his subjects straight on.”¹⁷

Erasmus was a Dutch philosopher and theologian who was instrumental in the Renaissance humanism movement. He was a prolific writer, with works such as "The Praise of Folly" and a Greek New Testament translation to his credit. Erasmus was a Dutch philosopher and theologian who played a key role in the Renaissance humanist movement. He fomented desires for change in the religious and cultural values of his period. He contributed to the development of the vernacular, which encouraged the development of the common language. He contributed to the development of the Castilian Spanish language.

In summary, Erasmus was a change agent who placed a high value on asking questions rather than being content with prescribed answers. In helping others navigate the

¹³ George Minois. “History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance.”

¹⁴ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes: How Renaissance Artists and Reformation Priests Created Our World* (New York City: Nan A. Talese / Doubleday, 2013), 135.

¹⁵ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 132-133.

¹⁶ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 11.

¹⁷ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 136.

changing cultural landscape, he acted with wisdom, humility, and humor, rather than seeking to build himself up with pride and knowledge. Throughout his life, Erasmus refused to rely solely on his intelligence; rather he constantly sought to develop his character by placing “ethics and spirituality at the center of [his] theology and philosophy with Christ’s teaching as the model for fruitful Christian reflection.”¹⁸ All of this led to a broad perspective of life with friends and admirers on both sides of the primary cultural and religious divide of his time, that of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁹

Martin Luther' the German Monk

Martin Luther was a German monk and theologian who was a crucial figure in the Protestant Reformation. He questioned the Catholic Church's beliefs and practices, and his thoughts resulted in the formation of Protestantism as a distinct branch of Christianity.²⁰ The second change agent under review is Martin Luther (1483-1546 C.E.), the leader of the Protestant Reformation. Like Erasmus, Luther was an Augustinian monk and priest within the Roman Catholic Church. He also placed high regard on questions, wisdom, character, and a broad perspective of life, though his journey with these values took him in a different direction than Erasmus.²¹ For Luther, his desire to better understand the Way of Christ led him to reject the answers traditionally given by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church.²² The result of Luther’s questions was the posting of the famous Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, which led to the Protestant Reformation.²³

Throughout his life, Martin Luther engaged in an introspective journey to know and understand himself. Despite his fame as an international religious leader, Luther “never gave off the aura of a medieval saint”; rather, he would “realistically evaluate his strengths and weaknesses”²⁴ while publicly confessing his flaws. Luther’s focus on truly knowing himself led to his theological masterpiece, mainly that salvation is a “gift of divine mercy for which the human person can do nothing.”²⁵ This conclusion was in direct opposition to the predominant view that salvation could be bought and sold by the Roman Catholic Church

¹⁸ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 315.

¹⁹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 13.

²⁰ Rufus Hallmark, “Defenders of the faith: the case of Nicole Grenier.” *Renaissance Studies*. Vol. 11. Issue 2, 123-140 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1477-4658.1997.TB00016.X>

²¹ Francis A. Christie. “Luther and Others.” *Harvard Theological Review* 5, no.2 (1912): 240-250. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S001781600001347X>.

²² Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 155-157.

²³ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 22.

²⁴ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 164.

²⁵ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 380.

by drawing on the “merits of Christ – and of his saints.”²⁶ In challenging this perspective of salvation, Luther became a major change agent who helped bring correction to the wider church of his day.

As a change agent, Martin Luther was not afraid to pursue questions despite the uncertainty of where they might lead. He also demonstrated wisdom in knowing how to navigate the politically charged landscape of his day. Luther’s deep moral conviction was, as previously mentioned, a major bulwark against the pressures of fame, prescribed answers, and the narrow-mindedness of those in leadership roles above and around him.²⁷ All in all, Luther was able not only to broaden his perspectives on life, but those of others across Europe and, eventually, the world. He contributed significantly to the development of a common language, particularly the German language.

Michelangelo's Italian Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture

Michelangelo was an Italian sculptor, painter, and architect widely recognized as one of history's greatest artists. He was instrumental in the creation of the High Renaissance style, and his works include the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and David's sculpture. Michelangelo was an Italian sculptor, painter, and architect who is widely regarded as one of the greatest artists of all time. He played a key role in the development of the High Renaissance style, which emphasized realism and human emotion. He created works of art that have stood the test of time, such as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the sculpture of David.²⁸

Around the same time that Erasmus and Luther were changing the religious landscape of Europe, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564 C.E.) was changing the art world to the point that “no artistic education could be complete without a thorough knowledge of his work.”²⁹ Born in the Republic of Florence, Michelangelo loved to question the world around him in a desire to broaden his perspective of life. This desire to learn earned Michelangelo the label of the “greatest artist who had ever lived, supreme above all rivals in the fields of sculpture, painting, and architecture.”³⁰

Even though he was famous during his lifetime, Michelangelo “cared not a whit for

²⁶ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 151.

²⁷ Francis A. Christie. “Luther and Others,” 240-250.

²⁸ W. Michael Mathes. “Humanism in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Libraries of New Spain.” *The Catholic Historical Review* 82, no.3 (July 1996): 412. <https://doi.org/435,10.1353/cat.1996.0227>.

²⁹ Ross King, *Michelangelo & the Pope's Ceiling* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003), 313.

³⁰ Ross King, *Michelangelo & the Pope's Ceiling*, 312.

riches, nor even for food or clothing.”³¹ Rather, he maintained a humble lifestyle, seeking to devote all his energy and focus to crafting works of art. Michelangelo’s desire to create items of beauty was constantly challenged by the political upheaval within the courts of Pope Julius II, his primary benefactor. The wisdom he showed in navigating the treacherous waters of artistic rivalry, political backstabbing, and full-out national war is commendable.

Michelangelo was an important figure in the creation of the High Renaissance style, which stressed realism and human emotion.³² He made more lifelike and emotionally expressive works of art than his predecessors. Michelangelo’s paintings frequently have a spiritual or religious subject that represented his time’s religious beliefs. He did, however, include aspects of Greek mythology in his compositions, which was a break from his predecessors’ religious themes.³³

In summary, Michelangelo was a change agent who managed to capture the “expressive possibilities of the human form”³⁴ in a way that no one else had ever done before while maintaining his character amid a city full of political upheaval. He also challenged the status quo of the art world to broaden the perspective of those who gazed upon his work. Writer and Episcopal priest Ian Cron once stated that “artists help people to see or hear beyond the immediate to the eternal.”³⁵ Perhaps this is why Sir Joshua Reynolds described Michelangelo’s work on the Sistine Chapel as “the language of the Gods.”³⁶

Reflection on the Lasting Impact of Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo as Cultural Change Agents during the Renaissance period.

A generally high degree of spiritual and material culture created predominantly by cities, as well as rising secularization, set the stage for Renaissance culture. In Germany, like in Italy, urban culture is taking shape. However, not only internal elements, but also foreign ones, such as the impact of Italy - its arts, ideas, scientific and philosophical perspectives, and so on - were important in the formation of a new culture in Germany. German humanists absorbed and creatively utilized all of this while respecting local customs. Other European countries were similarly influenced by Italian culture. The advent of printing processes in the

³¹ Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes*, 109.

³² Colette Rabin. “The Theatre Arts and Care Ethics.” *Youth Theatre Journal* 23 (2009): 127 - 143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929090903281436>

³³ Monreal Pérez, Juan Luis. “Influencia Del Reformismo Religioso En El Uso De La Lengua Vulgar.” *Carthaginensia* 32, no.62 (2018): 479-500.

<https://revistacarthaginensia.com/index.php/CARTHAGINENSIA/article/view/58>.

³⁴ Ross King, *Michelangelo & the Pope’s Ceiling*, 299.

³⁵ Ian Morgan Cron, *Chasing Francis: A Pilgrim’s Tale* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 110.

³⁶ Ross King, *Michelangelo & the Pope’s Ceiling*, 313.

15th century had a significant impact on the resuscitation and diffusion of old humanist beliefs. After spreading throughout Western Europe in the 15th century, the Renaissance reached its pinnacle in the 16th century.³⁷ The Italian Renaissance became the driving force behind the Renaissance across Europe. Laying the groundwork for establishing the paradigm of modern European culture in the Netherlands, as well as the influence of the Italian Renaissance, turned out to be linked to internal conditions, such as the schooling and publishing activities of the "Brethren of the Common Life" community.³⁸

Erasmus opposed the Catholic Church's dominant religious practices by emphasizing humanist education and critical thinking. His essay, "The Praise of Folly," paved the way for the Protestant Reformation by denouncing church corruption. Martin Luther and other reformers were influenced by Erasmus' appeal for reform and a return to the basic origins of Christianity. His support for humanistic principles and the quest for knowledge has left an indelible mark on education and the value of intellectual curiosity.

Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation with his Ninety-Five Theses and subsequent publications, changing Europe's religious and cultural landscape. Luther's focus on individual religion, direct relationship with God, and the authority of the Bible challenged the Catholic Church's established authority. His views spawned new religious denominations and contributed to the expansion of religious plurality and freedom of conscience. Luther's influence may be seen in the long-standing differences between Protestant and Catholic Christianity, as well as in larger principles like human agency, religious autonomy, and the right to confront authority.³⁹

During the Renaissance, Michelangelo, a renowned artist, sculptor, and architect, changed the world of art. His masterpieces, such as the ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and the David sculpture, displayed technical mastery as well as emotional depth. Michelangelo's artistic technical mastery, research of human anatomy, and attention to detail continue to inspire artists today. His contributions to the world of art changed the way the human body was shown, introducing a new degree of realism and expressiveness. Michelangelo's legacy may be observed in the long-lasting influence of Renaissance art,

³⁷ Ejike Sam-Festus Chukwujekwu. Renaissance as a Cultural Phenomenon: Historical and Philosophical Analysis. *Conference: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society* (2019). <https://doi.org/10.2991/iccese-19.2019.151>.

³⁸ Alexei N. Tarasov. A philosophical analysis of Renaissance culture as a Sociocultural transformation in the continuum of European culture. *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCIET)* 9, Iss. 11, (November 2018): 2569–2577, Article ID: IJCIET_09_11_260. <http://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJCIET?Volume=9&Issue=11>

³⁹ P.G.R. De Villiers. "Renaissance and religion: the Bible in a time of radical change." *Acta Theologica* 23, no.1 (2003): 19-46. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v22i2.5377>.

aesthetic appreciation, and the celebration of human ingenuity.

Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo left an indelible mark on their respective disciplines. Rabb argues that their views and works have influenced how we think about human potential, individual agency, religious expression, and creative inventiveness. They questioned existing structures, instilling critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and a greater understanding of human capacities. He continued that the European Renaissance is sometimes defined by the conviction that a specific antique civilization represented the ideal for all human activities. Other unities that distinguished the age were a transition in the role of the aristocracy from a military class to a cultural elite, an increase in education, a more serious exploration of the sciences, and the use of the arts for nonreligious reasons.⁴⁰ Their impact on education, religion, art, and culture has left an everlasting impression on our society, helping to shape democratic principles, religious freedom, and the quest for knowledge. Erasmus', Martin Luther's, and Michelangelo's legacies serve as reminders that ideas and creative expressions may have tremendous and long-lasting effects on cultural, intellectual, and spiritual worlds. Their legacy transcends time and inspires future generations by underlining the necessity of embracing intellectual curiosity, questioning the current quo, and expressing our creative potential.

Conclusion

Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo all possessed the rare ability to tap into the emotions of their time and help people navigate the changing cultural landscape. Though their personalities and beliefs differed, they all valued the act of asking questions, seeking wisdom, being true to one's character, and having a broad perspective of life over and above preset answers, factual knowledge, personal intelligence, and narrow-mindedness. In doing so, they changed the course of their culture and, ultimately, the world.

Erasmus' emphasis on humanist education and critical thinking opened the path for intellectual curiosity and a broadening of knowledge inquiry. His quest for reform and a return to Christianity's fundamental origins paved the way for the Protestant Reformation and impacted later religious and intellectual revolutions. Martin Luther's audacious challenge to the Catholic Church's authority sparked the Protestant Reformation and changed Europe's religious landscape. His focus on individual faith, direct relationship with

⁴⁰ Theodore K. Rabb. *The Last Days of the Renaissance: And the March to Modernity*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 126.

God, and biblical authority continue to impact religious beliefs and practices, as well as conceptions of individual agency and religious autonomy. Michelangelo's artistic talent transformed the realm of art and left an indelible mark on how we view and appreciate beauty. His technical expertise, attention to detail, and investigation of the human form established new standards in creative expression. His paintings continue to inspire and influence artists, influencing the art world and our knowledge of human creativity.

Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo had long-reaching consequences that lasted well beyond their lives. Their beliefs and works continue to influence our perceptions of human potential, individuality, religious expression, and creative inventiveness. They questioned existing structures, sparked critical thinking, and fostered a more in-depth examination of human capacities. Their legacies are testaments to the ability of individuals to impact change and alter history. Erasmus, Martin Luther, and Michelangelo have left an indelible mark on history, reminding us of the transformational power of ideas, the worth of intellectual inquiry, and the eternal value of creative expression. We are reminded of the continued relevance and significance of their work in our modern environment as we reflect on their contributions. The Renaissance's cultural, intellectual, and spiritual revolutions continue to inspire and affect contemporary society, stressing the timeless pursuit of knowledge, the freedom to question, and the celebration of human creativity.

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