

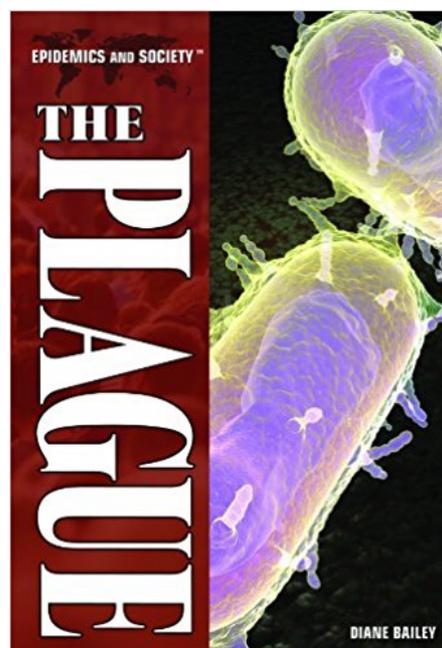
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PRELUDE TO THE RENAISSANCE

From the late 1300s into the 1600s, Europe experienced huge cultural changes. Previously, people had focused on the business of survival. Now, they looked to other interests. Art, literature, and education became more important. This explosion of culture was called the Renaissance.

The Renaissance affected Europe for centuries. A cultural movement that big cannot be pinned on a single event, not even one as big as the plague. However, historians believe the plague led to new attitudes that helped fuel the Renaissance.

A Crisis of Faith

As the plague raged through Europe, desperate people turned to the Catholic Church for help. However, with millions dying, it became more and more clear that priests and other clergy members had no power over the plague. They could not stop it in others, or even themselves.

Confused and shaken, people began to question the power of the clergy to serve as their ambassadors to God. Some people lost their faith

in God. Before the plague, the authority of the church was supreme. Afterward, it was not.

Some people began to treat religion differently. Instead of following the Catholic Church's rules exactly, they found approaches that worked for them as individuals. Formal religion lost a little of its grip.

The plague helped set the stage for a man named Martin Luther. In the early 1500s, Luther began speaking out against the church and some of its teachings. He even suggested that plague was evidence of God's displeasure with the Catholic Church. Because Luther protested the dominant religion, he became known as a Protestant. His opinions struck a chord with other Christians, as well. They believed in the basic teachings of Christ but did not always agree with how the Catholic Church interpreted those lessons. Christians became divided into Catholics and Protestants—the two major groups that still remain today.

