

The Catholic Church (I)

By the 15th century Italian wealth and power was concentrated in the Vatican, and in powerful city states like Firenze (Florence), itself run by the Medicis. Attempts to fight this (such as that of the fanatic Savonarola (1542-98)) were quelled ruthlessly. The sheer decadence of the Church in this period had been building for at least 2 centuries, and reached its height during the reign of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo de Borgia, r.1492-1503).



St. Peters dome , which Michelangelo completed (1546-64)

At that time very few people doubted the basic tenets of Christianity, and the dominant theme in art and architecture was the glorification of God. The humanist ideal was shaped by many people, from writers such as Petrarch (1304-74) to artists such as Brunelleschi (1379-1446), Leonardo (1452-1519), and Michelangelo (1475-1564).



Dome interior

The Catholic Church (II)

Many of the things which figured large in the thoughts of people at this time can be seen in their art- sin, redemption, myths and magic, good and evil. Education was geared to the training of the clergy, and covered grammar, rhetoric, and logic- a hangover from the Greco-Roman system, but now dogmatic. Literature and music were devotional. The renaissance brought a growing conviction that Man could control his own destiny, and admiration for 'l'uomo universale'.

Scenes from the Sistine Chapel (Michelangelo, painted from 1508-11).

