**Printing and Thinking**

When Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1445, he forever changed the lives of people in Europe and, eventually, all over the world. Previously, bookmaking entailed copying all the words and illustrations by hand. Often the copying had been done onto parchment, animal skin that had been scraped until it was clean, smooth, and thin. The labour that went into creating them made each book very expensive. Because Gutenberg's press could produce books quickly and with relatively little effort, bookmaking became much less expensive, allowing more people to buy reading material.

**The Demand for Books Grows**

In the Middle Ages, books had been costly and education rare; only the clergy had been regular readers and owners of books. Most books had been written in Latin, considered the language of scholarship. In the Renaissance, the educated middle classes, who could now afford books, demanded works in their own languages. Furthermore, readers wanted a greater variety of books. Almanacs, travel books, chivalry romances, and poetry were all published at this time. Simultaneously, a means of printing music was also invented, making music available at a reasonable cost. As the demand for books grew, the book trade began to flourish throughout Europe, and industries related to it, such as papermaking, thrived as well. The result of all of this was a more literate populace and a stronger economy.

**Humanism Emerges**

Books also helped to spread awareness of a new philosophy that emerged when Renaissance scholars known as humanists returned to the works of ancient writers. Previously, during the Middle Ages, scholars had been guided by the teachings of the church, and people had concerned themselves with actions leading to heavenly rewards. The writings of ancient, pagan Greece and Rome, called the "classics," had been greatly ignored. To study the classics, humanists learned to read Greek and ancient Latin, and they sought out manuscripts that had lain undisturbed for nearly 2,000 years. The humanists rediscovered writings on scientific matters, government, rhetoric, philosophy, and art. They were influenced by the knowledge of these ancient civilizations and by the emphasis placed on man, his intellect, and his life on Earth.

**The Humanist Philosophy**

The new interest in secular life led to beliefs about education and society that came from Greece and Rome. The secular, humanist idea held that the church should not rule civic matters, but should guide only spiritual matters. The church disdained the accumulation of wealth and worldly goods, supported a strong but limited education, and believed that moral and ethical behavior was dictated by scripture. Humanists, however, believed that wealth enabled them to do fine, noble deeds, that good citizens needed a good, well-rounded education (such as that advocated by the Greeks and Romans), and that moral and ethical issues were related more to secular society than to spiritual concerns.

**Rebirth of Classical Studies**

The rebirth of classical studies contributed to the development of all forms of art during the Renaissance. Literature was probably the first to show signs of classical influence. The Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374) delighted in studying the works of Cicero and Virgil, two great writers of the Roman age, and he modeled some of his own writings on their works. Although he often wrote in Latin, attempting to imitate Cicero's style, Petrarch is most renowned for his poetry in Italian. As one of the first humanists, and as a writer held in high esteem in his own time, he influenced the spread of humanism--first among his admirers, and later throughout the European

world.

**Spiritual Matters**

During the Renaissance, a churchman named Martin Luther changed Christianity. On October 31, 1517, he went to his church in the town of Wittenburg, Germany, and posted a list of things that worried him about the church. His list included the church's practice of selling indulgences, a means by which people could pay the church to reduce the amount of time their souls must spend in purgatory instead of atoning for their sins via contrition. Luther also requested that, when appropriate, Mass be said in the native language instead of in Latin so that the church's teachings would be more accessible to the people. This request for reform ignited the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Many other Christians agreed that the church needed to change, and several new Christian religions were established during this time. The old church became known as Roman Catholic, and new Christian sects were known by their leaders--among them Lutherans (Luther) and Calvinists (John Calvin).

**Questions**

1. Explain why the invention of the printing press is considered to be one of the greatest inventions of all-time?
2. What was the link between the newfound availability of books and the growth in popularity of the Humanist religious philosophy?
3. Contrast the belief systems of the Catholic Church and the Humanist religious movement in the Italian Renaissance.
4. Why was Martin Luther so upset with the Catholic Church? Explain what an “indulgence” is.
5. Why did Martin Luther want to move away from masses held in the traditional Latin language and have priests say mass in the local language?