'No Scientific Revolt' Says Historian White

By DEBBY ROMOTSKY

That the "Classical Renaissance created scarcely a ripple in technology" was the basic theme of the lecture delivered last Thursday, February 14, in the Fondren Library Lecture Lounge by Dr. Lynn White, Jr., Professor of History at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Speaking under the aegis of the Rice History Department's Medieval History lecture series, Dr. White emphasized scientific and technological continuity in his address on the "Medieval Roots of Science and Technology."

THE NOTED historian, former president of Mills College, explained that although overwhelming changes have taken place in technology since the early Middle Ages, they have been continuous in nature. The history of Western science, while showing discontinuities in early medieval times, exhibited no distinct break in thought which could accurately be called a "Scientific Revolution."

As an example, Dr. White pointed to the credit which has been given to translations of classical scientific works as providing the impetus for revived Renaissance interest in science. CITING THE fact that by 1286 a great bulk of Greek and Moslem science had been made available, in Latin, to the West, Dr. White pointed out that it was these, and not the sixteenth century translations, which were responsible for a great deal of the work accomplished during the Renaissance, such as Copernicus' universal theory, which appeared in 1545, the same year in which many of the works of Archimedes first appeared in translation.

In tracing the continuity of medieval technology, the lecture indicated the effect of both agricultural and military innovations upon the life of the populace. Improved methods of agriculture, for instance, resulted in greater productivity, which, in turn freed greater numbers of men from the land, thus helping to create a new pattern of urban bourgeois life.

Dr. White took the occasion, too, to contradict the prevailing notion that the Middle Ages was a time of opposition to technological change.

He indicated, instead, that the object of any prohibition, made primarily by the guilds, was to protect the quality of the product, not to forbid its use.

THE OPPOSITION which the guilds did offer to later technological advance, was, in the historian's view, primarily a method in their fight to keep alive. "So long as guilds were part of the flourishing medieval society, they welcomed technological change; it was only when they began to get senile that they blocked it."

Dr. White continued to present many examples of medieval strides in both science and technology, all the while emphasizing the basic continuity which he feels underlies these fields from their roots, some ten decades ago, to today.

DR. LYNN WHITE
UCLA Historian