

Comparing and contrasting two world famous politic essay



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al Theorists Both leaders of their generations, Martin Luther and Niccolo Machiavelli were also religious and political icons. Through their theses, essays, and books they were able to successfully convey their views to the public. Martin Luther was a lawyer turned priest, who tried to open the eyes of the public to the general corruption of the Catholic Church. His 95 theses were the foundation of the Protestant Reformation, while Machiavelli used his skills as a writer, with *The Prince*, and other works, to bring to light the issues of politics. Known as the father of modern day politics, Machiavelli took his ideas public and changed government, as we know it. Both men were determined to break up the monopoly of knowledge and power that the Catholic Church held over the people. Through examination of Machiavellis *The Prince*, and Martin Luthers *Christian Liberty*, their different views on the individual, God, and the state will be compared and contrasted to better understand their issues with the Catholic Church.

Many people say that Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation by nailing his 95 theses on the front gate of the Catholic Church. Some of these people also say that these theses were an attack on the Church. Both of these statements are false. Martin Luther, a brilliant philosopher during the Renaissance, traveled to Rome in 1511 as the delegated representative of seven allied Augustinian monasteries to protest against some improvements of Staupitz. His experiences as a monk and a priest were fulfilling to his Catholic enlightenment. For example, his trip to Withberg to receive the sub-prior position helped Luther to gain respect and earn more important and valued positions with in the Church. While moving his way up in the Church, Luther was able to see the corruption and deceptiveness that the Catholic

Church had become involved in. During his year associated with the Church, he was able to develop his own view on God and the behavior of the Church.

All throughout Martin Luthers life, even before his work with the Church, his faith God was limited. His beliefs were based on his personal experiences with God. He constantly felt that God had left him, and would consistently punish himself through starvation. He felt that through starvation he could cleanse himself of all the things God felt was impure. As stated in Christian Liberty Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. (Luther, 22). This was Luthers personal feeling about the relationship between man and God. Personal conflicts with God did not keep Luther from helping other people find their own peace with God. Luther spread his interpretation of the bible to help the common people find their faith. Through his work with the Catholic Church and observations of the corruption it holds, Luther was set to help the oppressed people overcome their battle with the Church by preaching a new word of God. For the person is justified and saved, not by works or laws, but by the Word of God, that is, by the promise of his grace, and by faith, that the glory may remain Gods, who saved us not by works of righteousness which we have done Titus 3: 5, but by virtue of his mercy by the work of his grace when we believed I Cor. 1: 21. (Luther, 26). Luther felt that if a person believed in God and had their own personal relationship with Him, then the Church had no right to condemn that person to Hell just because they could not pay the taxes or go to Church every Sunday. Luther felt that the Church did not have the right to run peoples lives through their beliefs in God.

To eliminate some of the corruption of the church, Luther felt that with the new understanding about the relationship between man and God, that the people should be able to elect their own pastors. The Word of God should come from a person with the same views as the people. The free cities could not resist this and it gave them the freedom from taxation. Luthers views and theology, as the nobles viewed it, was a way to contain the powers of the Church within their own states. The individual towns felt that the influence of the Church within their states was too much, because it proved that the Church had too much power over them.

Machiavellis felt somewhat differently than Luther on the subjects of the individual, the state, and God. As an individual, Machiavelli felt that the most important quality in a true person it the value of his word. For example, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli expresses his feelings about the individual through the story of a prince. How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his word and to live by integrity and not by deceit everyone knows; nevertheless, one sees from the experience of our times that the princes who have accomplished great deeds are those who have cared little for keeping their promises and who have known how to manipulate the minds of men by shrewdness; and in the end they have surpasses those who laid their foundations upon loyalty. (Machiavelli, 58). His view on the individual was more negative. Drawing from this quote he felt that people had the ability to do important things, but they are either too lazy to complete their tasks or are too manipulative to let their accomplishment go unrewarded. Like these men, those who become princes through their skill acquire the principality with difficulty, but they hold on to it easily; and the difficulties they encounter in acquiring the

principality grow, in part, out of the new institutions and methods they are obliged to introduce in order to found their state and their security.

(Machiavelli, 21). Machiavelli based these observations on medieval Christian tradition. Their traditions taught that the individual was weak and corrupt. This corruption did not suggest that government was impossible, but in fact, the government should be able to regulate the freedom of man, in order to contain further weakness and corruption.

Machiavelli's view on the state and their ideals came down to the strength and slyness of a ruler. The strength will not be enough to enable the ruler to escape the traps set by enemies; the slyness is also needed. Especially for new princes, strength and slyness are tested through the acts of war. The questions arise about, is the prince smart enough to win the war and not lose too many men. Let me say, therefore, that the armies with which a prince defends his state are made up of his own people, or of mercenaries, or auxiliaries, or of mixed troops. Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous. And if a prince holds on to his state by means of mercenary armies, he will never be stable or secure; for they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, disloyal; they are brave among friends; among enemies they are cowards (Machiavelli, 41-42). This shows that new princes are put in compromising situations; they either go into battle with these mercenaries and auxiliaries, or risk the land they conquer to be taken away by their enemies. Machiavelli opens *The Prince* by stating that there are two types of government, monarchs and republics. Concentrating on monarchical governments, Machiavelli tries to help the reader understand why having a prince is more beneficial than a republic. Machiavelli tries to prove that it is

the value of the princes associates than his qualities that make this type of government more desirable. Many readers of *The Prince*, believed that it was a satire on absolute rulers like Caesar Borgia. However, this theory fell apart when a letter was found that was written by Machiavelli, which stated that he wrote *The Prince*, to endear himself to the Medici family for how they ruled Florence with such authority. Through these two pan flits, both *The Prince* and *Christian Liberty* were able to open the eyes of the world.

Whether it was through political standing or the start of the Protestant Reformation, both Luther and Machiavelli were able to enlighten their generations through these two books. The role on God, the individual, and the state were not only crucial during the Renaissance, but in fact it is and will be forever a part of peoples everyday lives. This was why both Luther and Machiavelli felt that the injustice against the people, by the three largest factors in their lives, needed to become public. Through their teaching and writings, they were able to convey their political and religious standpoints with enough support to build up a revolt. Both men were religious and political icons for their generation and ours. Machiavelli, the father of politics, and Luther, the fire behind the Protestant Reformation, changed government and the world as we know it. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather he lives only for others and not for himself. (Luther, 27).

Bibliography: