

Review of niccolo machiavelli's book, the prince



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The Prince by Machiavelli is one of the most influential treatises in human history, conceived by Italian political theorist and diplomat, Niccolo Machiavelli. The Prince is often regarded as one of the first true examples of modern philosophy, most notably, political philosophy, and Machiavelli addressed many different attributes of politics, war-time strategies and the implementation of religion in correspondence with politics. As Machiavelli believed, the Catholic Church was a similar type of "princedom" as the others, capable of competition to attempt to conquer Italy against all of the other types of princes. To Machiavelli, the Catholic Church was capable of strict governance of Italy and was actively engaged in politics in the 15th and 16th century. As such, a significant portion of the The Prince is dedicated to understanding the extensive reach of the Catholic Church into the political realm during this time.

To Machiavelli, the final type of principality that exists is that of the ecclesiastical state, which is comprised of and led by a center of organized religion. (Strauss, 103) Machiavelli believed that the chief capacity of this principality to remain in power was the ability to govern people and command their attention and loyalty, as the churches and religious institutions are delegated this authority by a higher power, and one that can instill a sense of unflinching servitude into the people. (Machiavelli, 31) As Machiavelli illustrates, they do not have a system of defense for their countries nor do they actively govern their body of citizens, and yet, the people never attempt to overthrow them or remove them from office. Machiavelli points to the success of these states as the defining attribute of the types of servitude that the citizens perform and engage. Machiavelli

believed that these institutions and the regions controlled by them were so powerful, that the only realistic avenue for obtaining control of these states is through unusually good fortune or a high level of military prowess.

(Machiavelli, 31)

As Machiavelli discusses, the strength of the Catholic Church came in the form of its capacity to govern without some ingrained system of government. The church's prominence is brought forth by the strength of religion and the capacity through which religious individuals are able to serve the leaders of these institutions without question or fault. Often times, other entities will also not seek to invade or harm these lands and principalities due to the religious consequences of doing so. (Machiavelli, 32) Such an action could potentially harm one's own ability to receive rewards of good behavior during one's life, which is a tenant of many different religious sects. This in itself is enough to guarantee the prominence of these states and their own safety. Furthermore, the subjects of these states require little administration, in Machiavelli's belief, due to the same reasons that are mentioned above. The religious doctrines that govern individuals is prominent enough in its execution and meaning to deter those who would otherwise interfere with politics and the aims of the church's political advances. This, coupled with the establishment of the Catholic Church as the principle administrator of the ideas and opinions of God, limited any and all political interference from the public and the citizen class throughout the country. (Machiavelli, 31)

Machiavelli also notes the capacity of the Church's ability to gain affluence and their willingness to navigate through political avenues and strategies to continue this level of power. As Machiavelli highlights, Italy itself was once

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segmented into the different city-states of Florence, Milan, Naples and Venice. (Machiavelli, 31) Each one of these powers was very wary of the authority and dominion of the other and often times did everything in their capacity to stop the foreign intervention of any other state. During this time, the authority of the Pope was fairly limited, due to the disagreements between the barons in Rome regarding this authority and the overall short duration that the papacies tended to last. (Machiavelli, 31) Machiavelli noted that the short lives of the Popes was often a cause for a general inability of the Church to actively engage in politics or make any significant advances in how politics were conducted and the Church's authority in these matters. In this regard, the establishment of the Church as a power was not able to be realized because of the inability of the Church to have time to ensure that their goals were achieved before the next Pope took the throne. This in itself changed significantly though, after the rise of Alexander VI, who was both an ambitious and militaristic individual. Popes Alexander VI and Julius II were able to greatly increase the affluence of the Pope in these regions. Pope Alexander VI was able to acquire wealth and land for the Church, while simultaneously commanding armed forces and factions to weaken the opposition that stood in the way of the Church. (Machiavelli, 32)

Julius II operated in much the same way, catering to a sense of factionalism with any remaining authorities as a way to guarantee the prominence of the Italian state as a representative of the Church, and vice versa. Through the implementation of force and the bearing of arms that happened by these two individuals, the strength and prominence of Italy was able to rise exponentially and the country was largely unified under the authority of the

Church itself. (Machiavelli, 31) Machiavelli was a staunch opponent of the Church and the presence that it had in politics at all, and it is largely due to the influence of the church that he notices while he is theorizing on politics. (Machiavelli, 31) Machiavelli believed that the Church's authority in matters such as those concerning politics was far too extensive. Realistically, he understood the capacity of religious entities to be models for the consolidation of power and authority. As he viewed it, it, the Church was largely able to gain dominion over the country due to the extreme consolidation of authority and the way that they implemented armed forces as an extension of the Catholic God's will. (Machiavelli, 32) Furthermore, the Church was able to vastly acquire wealth and systems of strategic advantage as a means to perpetually assert the control over their opponents.

By the time that Julius II came into authority, the Church was already so prominent due to their strict and swift managing of political dissidents and the overall lack of barons or opponents. (Parsons, 14) Machiavelli believed that one of Julius' chief concerns was to accumulate a significant amount of wealth to differentiate the Church from the other authorities throughout the region. As such, it was the belief of Machiavelli that this was Julius' most defining, successful characteristic. He was able to keep the factions such as the Colonna and Orsini within the same boundaries that they had before he came along. (Machiavelli, 31) In this regard, Julius was able to essentially eradicate these factions from prominence as he was swiftly in control of the fact that they were not allowed to have any cardinals of their own, which further supplanted the authority of the Church itself. Julius understood the role that cardinals often played in helping catalyze rebellions or open acts of

resistance but Machiavelli argues that they were quickly and authoritatively suppressed by the Church at essentially every attempt that they made to move against the Church. (Machiavelli, 32)

One of the most prominent ways that the Church was able to manifest its political power was through the collecting of indulgences and the active gaining of funds from the commoners through the collecting of indulgences. In order for the people to justify their sins and ask for forgiveness, they were supposed to make donations to the Church, which was how Alexander VI was able to chiefly fund the military campaigns that he undertook throughout his reign as Pope. (Machiavelli, 31) The overall nature of the Catholic Church at this time was one that was highly involved in the political landscape and significantly powerful enough to maintain authority throughout all of Italy. As Machiavelli noted, the Pope was heavily involved in all political affairs during this time and were also subject to the worldly ambitions of maintaining dominance and controlling the means of production through Italy.

(Machiavelli, 31) There is a certain level of irony and sarcasm in Machiavelli's statements that he cannot discuss a state that is ordained by the Lord.

In this moment, Machiavelli makes aware the nature of his critique of the strength of the Papacy and the Catholic Church in itself. The Church largely controlled the elections and shifts of power in each region of Italy, as they controlled a large portion of the economy and the influence that cardinals were able to hold over the citizens in these regions. As Machiavelli notes, they were adept at militaristic maneuvers and were able to capture the regions held by their opponents by enforcing the authority of God over the citizens there. (Machiavelli, 32) The popes always had some level of privilege

and authority over what occurred in the Italian continent but Machiavelli notes that the true authority of the Church grew during this time because of their aggressive campaigns and the actions of individuals such as Alexander VI who were able to lay waste to the countryside, under the guise of the promotion and indoctrination of religion. (Machiavelli, 32) Machiavelli understood the power of religion as a device for instilling servitude and it was evident in the capacity that the Popes had to collect money from the people.

According to Machiavelli, the Catholic Church was heavily influential in politics throughout the 15th and 16 centuries. While it can be said that these entities did not have a significant level of influence at first, due to factors such as the short lives of the Pope and the authority of the Roman barons presiding over each faction and region, the Popes were able to gain a significant level of authority and dominion over the commoners of Rome due to actions of individuals such as Alexander VI and Julius II. These men were capable of utilizing the ideological ammunition of the Church to help propagate ideas of war and the collection of indulgences to a degree that easily facilitated the military campaigns that they were interested in undertaking at the time. Through a careful dominion and an ideological type of control, the Papal states were able to catalyze the control over the region and in turn, took dominion over the different barons and leaders that were present in Italy at the time. Through managing resources and the forces of the Italian army, the Pope moved up in terms of the overall authority that he had and the level of control that was asserted throughout the country. Eventually, the authority of the barons and other officials was drastically

limited as well, largely due to the Pope's presence and in turn, the Catholic Church became the most dominant institution in the country in regards to politics and the overall nature through which they were managed and the country itself was maintained.