Political Philosophy of the European Renaissance

Renaissance= Rebirth / Re-awakening / Revival

Revival= Starting to be stronger again more than before = Becoming more active or popular again

The European Renaissance

* (The mid-15th century to the early 17th century).
* It denotes the revival of ancient Greek and Roman cultures, in addition to the Arab thought, all aspects of the European society has been affected.
* The revival of Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, art, learning, law), they have been translated into Latin which is an “Italic language spoken in ancient Rome and used as the official language of the Roman Empire.

**N.B:** References to be mentioned below

All the material used, is for Educational purposes and learning objectives

The Theme of the Pre-Renaissance Era ( the middle ages):

The domination of two institutions:

The Catholic Church + The Feudal System

The socio-cultural life has been affected by the two dimensions represented by them: the religious faith + the social structure

Underpayment – Overwork –Exploitation

Feudalism= the system of obligations, is characterized by:

* The working on the lands by the serfs;
* Being bound to the land and the Lord; he can be transferred with the land;
* The serf is incapable to reform his life or to choose another social class.
* The king is the owner of most of the land, it is given to the Lords who are loyal and ready for providing military service.
* The nobles are those who belong to high social rank and have or show high moral qualities.

The power of the Church

* Indirect connection with God;
* All aspects of the European life has been based on a system of exploitation;
* Humiliation of human beings;
* Widespread of ignorance and underdevelopment;
* Lack of knowledge and scientific advancement;
* The priority of religious matters:
* Sadness and miserable life

The Theme of the Renaissance Era:

**Moral Responsibity**

**Political Requirements**

**The human virtue**

VS

**The ruler’s behavior**

VS

* Humanism and Scientific Development ( Astronomy, medicine, Physics, Mathematics;
* The study of history, Grammar, Poetry, rhetoric, Moral philosophy;
* Reformation Movement; Protestant reform
* Martin Luther and John Calvin
* Niccola Machiavelli and Jean Bodin;
* Discussion about human nature and sovereignty

“Humanism is an attitude of thought which gives primary importance to human beings.

The Renaissance Humanism developed from the rediscovery by European scholars of classical Latin and Greek texts.

It is a reaction against the religious authoritarianism of Medieval Catholicism”

« It emphasized human dignity, beauty, and potential, and affected every aspect of culture in Europe, including philosophy, music, and the arts.

This humanist emphasis on the value and importance of the individual influenced the Protestant Reformation, and brought about social and political change in Europe”





Humanism is an intellectual movement; cultural and educational reform.

According to *Humanism*, the human mind is capable of thinking for itself without relying on divine authority and traditional institutions.

The primacy of human values over the feudal and ecclesiastical institutions.

“Humanism is not a rejection of religion; it is a rejection of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is about the ability of every individual to stand directly before God.

Humanism focused on the value and dignity of every individual regardless of social economic status.”



It is much more secure to be feared than to be loved

So far as he is able, a prince should stick to the path of good but, if the necessity arises, he should know how to follow evil

The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.



The political thought of Nicola Machiavelli

***Niccola Machiavelli’s Ideas***:

* Human beings are political animals not social animals;
* Human nature is characterized by fear, selfishness, aggression, the love for power;
* Control and supremacy over others are the main objectives of men;
* Strong relationship between politics and power which is the main element of success.
* The state is not for ethical purpose; being good and virtuous does not ensure obedience and power.
* No relationship between politics and religion and morality;
* The acquisition and maintenance of power are the only real concern of any political ruler;
* Religious sentiments are political tools;
* The double standards of morality: the morality of the ruler and the morality of the citizens. The ruler can use immoral ways to ensure the survival of the state, the ruler’s success to defend the state, ensure the wellbeing of the citizens, is the basis upon which he must be judged, not upon moral criterion, because he is working in a harsh reality where everyone is motivated by the lust for power.
* The state’s functions are high and special and dangerous (protection of the state, maintaining law and order, wellbeing of citizens…ext.), that’s why the state must have special means at its disposal, *end justify means*.
* All the means used by the state are justified because all its actions and policies aim at ensuring its survival, security and preservation: *The Doctrine of Raison d’Etat.*

Political philosophy according to Jean Bodin and the idea of sovereignty

Sovereignty is the ultimate right to exercise power



***Jean Bodin’s about Sovereignty***:

“Sovereignty is the absolute and perpetual power of the state;

Sovereignty is he supreme power over citizens;

The sovereign must be holy independent of any higher law-giver;

Sovereignty implies being subject to the laws of God, the law of nature, the law of the nation”

The Reformation movement of Martin Luther and John Calvin

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| **Middle Ages** | **Later Middle Ages** |
| 1. Feudalism-society based on birthright and functional duties.
2. Medieval Church participated in feudal organization as a result of struggle between church and state.
3. Church accumulated wealth and power. Church and church property were exempt from state taxes.
4. Clergy renounced property but gained a higher social standing.
5. Pope and clergy exercised great power over governments and people. Church sovereignty was temporal and spiritual. Hierarchy and monks had virtual monopoly on information.
6. Christians lived as though they could earn salvation by following external practices.
7. Intellectual climate was under church control.
 | 1. Society based on pattern of income and property. Rise of capitalism. Decline of feudal structure and dominance of medieval nobility.
2. Accumulated church wealth became a source of scandal.
3. The church was divided between capitalism in its higher ranks, and the call to renunciation and poverty among priests and monks.
4. Best practices of clergy and laity led to religious reforms. Religious orders boosted papal authority (Dominicans), asserted Christian ideal of renunciation (Franciscans).
5. Countries with centralized governments began to counter the power of pope and clergy. Germany, with smaller territorial governments was still open to influence from charismatic individuals.
6. Hierarchy and monks had virtual monopoly on information.
7. Christians lived as though they could earn salvation by following external practices.
8. Rise of humanism and new ideas created a looser intellectual climate that was critical of church.
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**Reference**: <https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/4c6645c8f237ff28693e1c9e5782c064f534221a3c1bacb52b27b3321bf18284/10138185/OA_Woods_2003_Martin_Luther_interpreter_of_the_Christian.pdf>

Martin Luther

***Luther’s doctrine of justification***

“Before, and according to the theologians, an individual could perform an action which would place God under an obligation to reward him with justification. This action was a genuine possibility for sinners, who were thus able to affect their jus justification by doing morally good actions. These actions are, in effect, the precondition for justification: no morally good actions, no justification.

However, the central feature of Luther’s doctrine of justification is a totally unmerited gift of God, bestowed as an act of grace upon sinners. The idea that an individual can, in any sense, be said to merit his justification is unequivocally rejected. Justification is totally a gracious work of God. “Justification by faith”, for Luther, does not mean that a sinner is justified on account of his faith, as if faith was a human work. It means that faith is a gift of God. Justification does indeed come about through fait- but that faith itself is a gracious gift of God, not a human action. If faith is the precondition of justification, God himself meets that precondition.

For Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith alone totally excludes good works as a cause of justification: it affirms, however, that good works are the natural consequence of justification. Just as a good tree brings forth good fruit, so the justified sinner will naturally and spontaneously perform good works. Good works express and presuppose justification-but do not cause it to in the first place. Justification remains an act of God, something which is done to us, rather than something which we can do for ourselves”.

*Reference:* <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/evangel/07-1_016.pdf>

***Ultimate authority for Christians not for the pope***

“Luther attacks the theory that the clergy (pope, bishops, priests, and monks) comprise the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers comprise the temporal estate. He believed that all Christians are truly of spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Luther in no way suggested that the Church is a metaphysical entity in the Platonic sense. The Luther’s true church is not an idea of the church, existing somewhere beyond the phenomenal world, but is here on earth, only we are unable to determine its boundaries because none of us can recognize with certainty the faith of others”.

.*Reference:* <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1140&context=auss>

***All people with faith are equal:***

“Luther insisted that the teaching office of the church served sacred Scripture and that if it were not subject to the norm of Scripture then it ran the risk of falling into error. He maintained that clear reason was an essential accompaniment to an authentic interpretation of Scripture. This clear reason was not understood by Luther to be a philosophical notion but rather reason grounded in the knowledge and commonsense that comes from human experience. He insisted that one could rely only on a conscience that was informed by Scripture and the kind of clear reason that can stand the test of everyday human experience”.

*Reference:* <https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/4c6645c8f237ff28693e1c9e5782c064f534221a3c1bacb52b27b3321bf18284/10138185/OA_Woods_2003_Martin_Luther_interpreter_of_the_Christian.pdf>

Jean Calvin

***Separation of Church and State***

“Outside of the hybrid structure of the Consistory, however, Calvin insisted on a basic separation of church and state. “There is a great difference and unlikeness between the ecclesiastical and civil power” of the church and state, said Calvin. “A distinction should always be observed between these two clearly distinct areas of responsibility, the civil and the ecclesiastical.” The church has no authority to punish crime, to remedy civil wrongs, to collect taxes, to make war, or to meddle in the internal affairs of the state. The state, in turn, has no authority to preach the Word, to administer the sacraments, to enforce spiritual discipline, to collect tithes, to interfere with church property, to appoint or remove clergy, to obstruct bans or excommunications, or to meddle in the internal affairs of a congregation. When church officials operate as members of civil society, they must submit to the civil and criminal law of the state; they cannot claim civil immunities, tax exemptions, or privileges of forum. When state officials operate as members of the church, they must submit to the constitution and discipline of the church: they cannot insist on political prerogatives or sovereign immunities. To permit any such interference or immunity between church and state, said Calvin, would “unwisely mingle these two [institutions] which have a completely different nature”

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***State and Church in a Godly Republic***

 Calvin also based his theory of church and state in part on the three uses of the law. The church and the state are separate legal entities, he argued. Each institution has its own forms of organization and order, its own norms of discipline and rule. Each must issue positive human laws on the basis of God’s natural law and in protection of the people’s natural rights and liberties. Each must play a distinct role in enforcing godly government and discipline in the community, and in fostering the uses of God’s law. The state must focus on the civil use of the law — using coercive measures as needed to achieve a basic level of civil righteousness or public morality. The church must cater to all three uses of the law — using spiritual, non-coercive means alone to achieve not only civil but also spiritual righteousness or private morality

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***Predestination***

According to John Calvin, predestination is God’s unchangeable decree from before the creation of the world that he would freely save some people (the elect), foreordaining them to eternal life, while the others (the reprobate) would be “barred from access to” salvation and sentenced to “eternal death. ” Calvin was careful to distinguish the predestination of individuals from the corporate election of nations such as Israel. He argued that an explanation of predestination is only complete when it includes the election of individuals.

Calvin described the basis of predestination in several ways. In general he affirmed that there is no basis for election outside of God. Calvin noted that God purposed election “in Him,” basing his decree of predestination on “nothing outside Himself.” Calvin attributed the salvation of the elect to God’s free decision to favor them. He variously described this as God’s “mere generosity,” his “freely given mercy,” and the “good pleasure of His will.” Moreover, Calvin based the damnation of the reprobate solely in God’s decision”

<https://www.theologian-theology.com/theologians/john-calvin-predestination/>

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