

Jeffrey Scott Pearson

Mr. Palmer - ab actu ad posse valet illatio

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A.M.D.G.

DBQ #1 Late Medieval Age Religious Criticism

For more than a thousand years up through the late Medieval Age, Christ had been inspiring millions of devoted followers on earth. But at the conclusion of the 14th Century it would be Christ's pilgrim Church on earth that needed inspiring. After countless generations in Medieval Europe of Church-dominated society, education, and faith; the rock upon which Jesus built his Church was beginning to crack. When the three Sacraments of Initiation and the four others could no longer appease the masses, Europeans looked to alternative forms of faith and discovery. Due to a return in the importance of classical Greek and Roman culture and the thirst for more than just one hour of Latin each Sunday, the Humanist movement would arise. Many outspoken Humanists would catalyze the disintegration of the Church's dominance amongst Europe's pious populous. Adamant critics from outside and inside the Roman Catholic Church in the late Middle Ages held a very significant weight over the attitudes towards religion during the early Renaissance.

The late Middle Ages would be stage for more bold and fervent criticism of the Church's policies, practices, and leaders than ever before. While the crux of Medieval society was focused on attaining heaven through the implementation of the Sacraments, a prominent Italian Rector at the University of Paris contends that the very people proclaiming the Good News of Salvation were actually too concentrated on temporal goods. Marsilius of Padua

insinuates in his work, *Defensor Pacis*, that the Pope, who is supposed to be the messenger of God, is too caught up in his material possessions and blatantly disobeying civil law to follow the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. According to the powerful and well connected Marsilius, the Roman Bishops were not rendering unto Caesar's what was Caesar's (1). Furthermore, amidst all of this turmoil another schism was occurring within the Papacy. Two different Popes backed by separate political factions were threatening to tear apart a thousand years of unity. In the past when the Roman Catholic Church faced serious divide amongst the faithful, as they did with the issue of Christ being divine or mortal in the 4th Century and the calling of the First Council of Nicaea, they once again convened a council to help solve The Great Schism. The intent of the Council of Pisa was to be show of strength and unity within the Church leaders, excluding the now disenfranchised Popes. However, it was ultimately just another indication to Europeans and the Humanist movement that the College of Cardinals and all in top-level leadership were only interested in their power struggle and not in the foundation of their faith: the teachings of Christ and his followers outlined more than a thousand years before(2).

With the influx of the early Renaissance it is apparent that religious criticisms in the late Middle Ages have sparked a rampant display of an unequivocally different philosophy towards the Roman Catholic Church and faith in general. The *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, proclaimed by Pico Mirandola, elucidates the position of the Humanist movement all around Europe. At age twenty-three, Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola outlined his arguments against the rituals of the Church as part of his nine hundred theses. He envisages that any man, even without Sacraments or Church blessings, who was intellectual and self-reflective, could find himself in the company of God (3). Later in 1509 the Dutch Humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, would conclude in his satirical work, *In Praise of Folly*, that such criticisms presented even as blatantly as the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* went upon the deaf ears of Church leaders. Using his Greek and Latin pen name of Desiderius Erasmus, meaning beloved desire, the resident of Rotterdam was an interesting point of view on the attitudes towards religion in the early

Renaissance. For not only did he borrow his pen name from the Humanist cornerstone of Greco-Roman traditions, but he also was a devout Catholic until his death, even going so far as to anger reformers like Martin Luther. Since he was Catholic and a Humanist he represents the old religious stability of the Medieval Age and the new criticism of the early Renaissance. Proving the latter of the two ideas he represented, he shows in his writings of 1509 that deeming an individual as a heretic still survived as a primary method of Church control (4). However, in 1518 Raphael Santi instigates intrigue into who exactly should be deemed a heretic. Santi, similar to the Latin for holy, is exactly how Raphael's portrait of Pope Leo X and two Cardinals would be described at first glance. However, the minute details of the painting were really echoing the displeasures put forth by Marsilius and Mirandola. The conspicuous temporal and worldly possessions in this depiction of Pope Leo X vindicate these previous complaints from the outspoken Humanists and the abundant amount of Europeans that they spoke for (5).

Unambiguously, the fiery attitudes towards religion during the early Renaissance were ignited by the spark of religious criticisms in the late Middle Ages. Even through the violent infernos of the new changed outlook on faith, the Roman Catholic Church would only see its foundation of rock singed. The descendants of Peter and the Apostles would grow from the ashes and begin the process of evolving in sync with the new European world of Humanism. The old focus on heaven and emphasis on the Sacraments could now never be revived to its previous Medieval heights; the early Renaissance attitudes on religion were severely impacted.