

Ancient Ideas as the Inspiration for the Humanist Movement

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Legendary historian, Jacob Burckhardt channeled the thematic axioms of the Renaissance when he declared humanity was “recovering consciousness ... self-determination, recognizing the beauty of the outer world and ... the body through art, liberating ... reason in science and the conscience in religion, restoring culture to the intelligence, and establishing the principle of political freedom.”¹ Modern historians have revisited those claims, with more skepticism,² and countered Burckhardt’s sentimental and nostalgic claims.³ The debate over this narrative has led some universities to replace the term Renaissance with ‘Early Modern Period’.⁴ Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus that the humanist movement that swept across Europe was a revolution in ideas⁵. Without taking a stance on conflicting historians' conclusions⁶, this paper attempted to explore the thematic ideas that were being discussed in the humanist movement. In addition, this project aimed to discover what extent the intellectual and cultural changes of the humanist movement, were the result of the revival of ancient ideas.

The analysis outlined in this paper attempted to consider the ideas themselves that

¹ Jacob Burckhardt. S. G. C. Middlemore, and Irene Gordon. 1961. *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy: an essay*.

²Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks. “Do Women Need the Renaissance?” *Gender & History* 20.3 (2008).

³Daniel Chirot, "The Rise of the West." 192

⁴ Wiesner-Hanks. 541

⁵ Herbert Weisinger. "Ideas of History During the Renaissance." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 4 (1945). 420

⁶ Joan Kelly. 1984. *Women, History & Theory: the Essays of Joan Kelly*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 19

inspired the humanist movement," that forever changed the university.⁷ This required a majority of the sources used to be primary in nature to corroborate writings by those designated as humanists with ancient sources that they referenced. The research outlined in this endeavor examined the role that Greco-Roman sources along with biblical scriptures played in the plethora of changes in thought expressed by the humanist movement's writing during the Renaissance. This project employed qualitative methods to reach the conclusions detailed below.

The conclusions drawn are not meant to dispense with the socioeconomic and political factors that also gave rise to the Renaissance and the humanist movement, but the contention of this paper presupposed that the humanist ideas could not be explained by contextualizing material factors alone. Restated more succinctly, this research was concerned with the connection between the ideas exposed in ancient texts, and the themes discussed by philosophers and thinkers of the time under investigation.

Many historians have investigated and explicitly inferred that the return to ancient sources at least in part contributed to the Renaissance. However, less work has been done in regard to the parallel themes and cohesive conceptual framework that drove the philosophical discourse. The commentary included in this paper was organized into two separate sections. The paper was structured to discuss the ideas that influenced the Northern Renaissance and the ideas that influenced the Italian Renaissance. The Italian Renaissance and the Northern Renaissance were similar in they changed the substrate of Europe, however, there are distinctions that had different consequences on the institutions that they impacted. The North viewed much of their ideas through the lens of Christianity while the Italian thinkers were also willing to contemplate

⁷Charles G Nauert. "Humanist Infiltration into the Academic World: Some Studies of Northern Universities." *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1990). 803

on the likes of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greco-Roman sources. This lofty endeavor as already stated will have two separate sections for the Northern and Italian Humanist movement while laying out the context for each. Antecedent to discussing the connection between ancient sources as a contributor to the humanist movement, the genesis of this intellectual movement is contextualized below for both the Northern and the Italian Renaissance.

As already stated, the time period under investigation has been discussed at great length by social scientists from all different fields. Many historians have also investigated and explicitly inferred that the return to ancient sources at least in part contributed to the Renaissance. However, less work has been done in regard to the parallel themes and cohesive conceptual framework that drove the philosophical discourse. Historian Anthony Grafton discussed how historians have had a consensus on the fact that the humanist was inspired by ancient text.⁸ Grafton in "Renaissance Readers and Ancient Texts," wrote that many historians including,

“Sabbadini and Nolhac almost a century ago, Ullman, Weiss, Billanovich, Timpanaro and Rizzo more recently have shown that humanists did indeed create a new mode of experiencing old texts. They saw the ancients as inhabiting a world different from theirs and devised what we would now call the methods of historical philology in order to bring themselves closer to it”⁹

Historians have understood that the humanist clearly saw values in the ancient texts they

⁸ Anthony Grafton. "Renaissance Readers and Ancient Texts: Comments on Some Commentaries." *Renaissance Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1985).

⁹ Grafton. 620

consumed which could transcend time and be adapted to their present situation. Historians have understood that the humanist clearly saw values in the ancient texts they consumed which could transcend time and be adapted to their present situation. Historian B.L Ullman went as far as listing “Petrarch’s Favorite books,” under that exact title.¹⁰ Even with such a thorough list and descriptive summary of how many times, Petrarch cited the ancients, there are almost no parallels drawn between the messages that were exposed by Petrarch in his works and the sources he cited. This paper was designed to contribute to the already large volume of literature on the humanist but focusing on a less studied area giving greater attention to the ideas being espoused by the humanists themselves. Lastly, it would be remiss not to recognize that the humanist writers were not only formulating their ideas by extrapolating from ancient sources but they were also molding their worldview based on writings from their contemporaries. Fellow thinkers who were also abstracting their ideas from ancient sources. In addition, the axioms that they contended with and perhaps even disagreed with shaped their intellectual framework. Past psychological literature has done great work detailing how ideas are shaped not just by presentation to similar beliefs, but also exposure to foreign impressions. Friedrich Nietzsche’s “On the Genealogy of Morals,” described how what is deemed good and bad is developed in the presence of what is perceived to be a contentious or even detestable force.¹¹

Even the casual purveyor of humanist literature created during the Renaissance will find it hard to evade the perpetual mention of ancient sources. Especially the writings coming out of

¹⁰ B. L. Ullman. "Petrarch's Favorite Books." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 54 (1923): 21-38.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the genealogy of morals*. Wilhelm, Walter Kaufmann, R. J. Hollingdale, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. 1989.

what was later called the “Italian Renaissance.” The humanist writers were so evidently immersed in Greco Roman and biblical literature. Texts that were centuries old were being sought out not only by these great thinkers but also by the patrons that funded such philanthropy. In Italy, the Medici family supported thinkers such as Marsilio Ficino who wrote, “my patron, often spoke these words of Plato: that in undertaking important affairs, nothing is more profitable than the good-will of prudent and learned men.”¹² This admiration for ancient sources began in part because of wealthy patrons but also because of Italy's strategic location.

The humanist movement began in Italy for many reasons including its geographic position in the Mediterranean made it valuable for trading and an important center of economic activity. Merchants had easy access to the Byzantine Empire, The North coast of Africa and coastal Western Europe. The increased wealth in the Peninsula's cities led to wealthy patrons supporting cultural and academic endeavors. This included artists, sculptors, musicians, philosophers and scientists being funded by wealthy families such as the Medici. The fall of Constantinople in the East also brought many of the ancient texts that inspired philosophers. This return to ancient ideas was made possible by the above mentioned political and economic context of Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries. Relative prosperous economic conditions enabled by geography and political consequences of the fall of Constantinople married with the desire of wealthy nobles to support a return to ancient ideas largely explains why the humanist movement began in Italy perhaps why the focus of Italy was more secular than the rest of Europe. This in part explains why Italian humanists did not solely focus on spiritual matters although it was still

¹² Marsilio Ficino. *Meditations on the soul: selected letters of Marsilio Ficino*. (2002). letter addressed to the magnanimous Giuliano de' Medici

of importance¹³. Italian humanist also focused on secular issues like civic humanism,¹⁴ and contemplated ethics.¹⁵ In addition to spiritual, and political ideas, the humanist of the Italian Renaissance discussed complex philosophical ideas about human beings. This included meditation and contemplation on human's innate potential as individuals. At the heart of these metaphysical discussions was the use of reason and logic married together to understand the substrate of the human condition.

Petrarch has been called the founder and the father of Humanism.¹⁶ Petrarch has also been given the title of Christian Humanist,¹⁷ which demonstrates the above-stated point that Italian humanism was also concerned with spiritual and religious matters. Petrarch was seized with a desire to read ancient sources including Cicero, Augustine and Virgil.¹⁸ Petrarch also read the Bible in the ancient Hebrew and Greek but he did not limit himself to scripture. Petrarch aimed to reconcile pagan works which were from Ancient Greece and Rome to have a better understanding of the world around him which he saw as compatible with his Christian faith.¹⁹ Many of his writings and poetry reflected a merge between Greco-Roman and biblical themes.

¹³ Carol Quillen. "A Tradition Invented: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 2 (1992): 179.

¹⁴ Alfred Neumeyer. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 3 (1957): 366-67

¹⁵ Gray, Hanna H. "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 4 (1963): 498.

¹⁶ Rocco Montano. "Italian Humanism: Dante and Petrarch." *Italica* 50, no. 2 (1973): 213

¹⁷ Ronald Witt. "Petrarch, Creator of the Christian Humanist." In *Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-Modern World*, edited by Candido Igor. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018). 65

¹⁸ Ullman. 25

¹⁹ Wilt. 66

Petrarch wrote,

“My soul always nourished on grief and pain,
 (how great the power of a settled habit!)
 was so weakened by this double pleasure”²⁰

This poem by Petrarch embodied a moral tradition from both ancient Pagan sources and Judeo-Christian sources that Petrarch was reading. Virgil’s phrase on adversity *Sic itur ad Astra* which he then elaborated with *Per Ardua ad Astra*²¹ meant "through struggles to the stars." The moral message parallels the message from scripture Petrarch read including,

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be
 that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.
 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not
 worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in
 us.”²²

This message of overcoming adversity to reach a better state is just one of a plethora of places that Petrarch was combining Greco-Roman sources with scripture to articulate his worldview. Whether or not one finds agreement with this contention, it is apodictically true that Petrarch cited these ancient sources as his influence and used them to discuss the human condition and human nature. This is true for other prominent Italian humanists including Giovanni Pico and Marsilio Ficino who came after Petrarch.

Italian Humanist thinkers Giovanni Pico and Marsilio Ficino stated very clearly and

²⁰ Francesco Petrarca. *Vive Faville Uscian De’ Duo Bei Lumi*

²¹ Virgil. *Aeneid* book IX, (Circa 19 B.C) line 641.

²² Romans 8:17-18. Book of Romans. King James Version (KJV)

perpetually that they were reading many of the same ancient texts as Petrarch. Like Petrarch, they were guided by the ancients and discussing human beings' condition and nature. Pico Della Mirandola who studied biblical scriptures and wrote on Genesis and Psalms was an important thinker of the humanist movement. In the "Oration on the Dignity of Man," Pico described humans as, "the most fortunate of living things and, consequently, deserving of all admiration".²³ It is not difficult to see how this idea could of been abstracted from "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."²⁴ Both ideas exposing the profound innate value within each individual human being and Pico's oration was a treatise on the sovereignty of human beings.²⁵

Pico like other humanist philosophers believed that humans were given free will and have the ability to rise up and become god-like or descend like beast indulging in the desires of the body. It was up to each individual to decide their future. This idea of individualism was very important to the Renaissance but also important to the idea that through reason one can obtain knowledge. Humanists acted as a catalyst to the reformation. Humanists had a desire to question everything and wanted to attain as much knowledge as possible which led to some questioning the power of the church. You can also see that Pico took away ideas from Plato who believed that you can leave behind ignorance and ascend to becoming a higher being. The ancients served as the foundational substrate for the intellectual framework of the humanist thinkers. The complex ideas about human beings and their innate potential as individuals

²³ Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola. Oration on the Dignity of Man. (1489).

²⁴ King James Version, Holy Bible. Genesis 1:27

²⁵ Ernst Cassirer. "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, no. 3 (1942). 320

reflected many of the ideas discussed by the philosophers of the humanist movement²⁶

Marsilio Ficino was another prominent humanist of the Renaissance who sought deep questions about the human condition and informed his conclusions from the ancients²⁷. Ficino like Pico believed that man has the greatest potential to be almost like a God through abstaining from temporal things. Ficino believed by eluding fleshly desires of the material world the soul would be in a better position to perceive truth. This concept reflected the Socratic idea that truth is the highest form of good. Historians have even argued that for Ficino, Plato was his “only guide in all questions that concern spiritual being.”²⁸ This is obviously hyperbolic because Ficino a devout Christian also cited scripture to support his claims. Ficino discerned that the soul could make one rise through knowledge or fail to desire. Ficino further explained that this yearning for complete truth cannot be fulfilled in this life. This is because the connection between God and Man, between the secular world and the spiritual world.

Ficino further embodied the biblical doctrine that humans have a dualistic nature divided between the secular world and the divine. While the soul is in the human body, man lives a terrible life because all of his desires cannot be quenched. “In fact we all thirst for good and then the true, yet all drink dreams”²⁹. The temporary material world according to Ficino world was abundant with faulty desires. Ficino explained that only after death, will the soul achieve happiness. However, by leading a life in moderation and resisting temporal desires

²⁶ Paul Oskar Kristeller. "The Classics and Renaissance Thought' Oberlin College, (1955)

²⁷ Christopher Celenza. "Pythagoras in the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino." *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1999): 667

²⁸ Cassirer. 327

²⁹ Ficino. *Meditations on the soul*.

humans could be closer to understanding and in likeness to the divine. There was clearly a struggle for the humanist thinkers as they were grappling with ancient Greco-Roman sources (pagan) and Canonical books (holy scripture).

While continuing to read Homer and Plato, Petrarch tried to understand the nature of man and his relationship with the divine. When grappling with some of the ancient sources he read, Petrarch found areas of disagreement in terms of priority, but nevertheless still shaped his worldview in relation to them. Petrarch expressed this when he stated, “it appears, can love both sides at the same time, even though, I know very well whom to prefer when it is a question of expression and whom when it is a question of substance”³⁰ In many ways this describes Christian Humanism as Petrarch was defining it, the ability of reason and logic guided by revelation. For Petrarch, the most important matter was his soul³¹, and that was a matter solely left for God.³² The Italian humanist did not only consult the ancients on spiritual matters but they also read Cicero and politicians from the past to inform what became known as civic humanism.

Machiavelli also represented the Italian Renaissance and focused on civic humanism and more secular matters. Machiavelli who served in Florence as well as serving as a diplomat to France and Germany. He wrote *The Prince*, where he pondered different questions on how to rule. He is considered one of the founders of political science because of his groundbreaking work. He also coined the famous line “It is better to be feared than loved.” Machiavelli, however, said that a combination of fear and love was the best way to rule. Machiavelli, however, knew

³⁰ Petrarca: *Rerum fam.* XXII, 10. In: *Petrarca: Le familiari*. Edited by Vittorio Rossi (vols 1–3) and by Vittorio Rossi and Umberto Bosco (vol. 4). Firenze: Sansoni (1942).127

³¹ Wilt. 66

³² Quillen. 180

that this was hard to achieve and that it was better to be stern and to appear fair, kind and compassionate. “In this way, he can avoid being hated as much a desideratum as being feared. But the operative word is of course “appear”.³³ Thinking about citizen’s reactions to a king’s decision was a new way of thinking about politics. Machiavelli also talked about war and came to the conclusion that citizen militaries are more effective than paid mercenaries because of their drive to protect their homeland. Machiavelli thought about the way people behaved in order to successfully rule a state, and this is why he said as a ruler, you can break rules because people have a beastly side.

Another Italian humanist who contributed to civic humanism was Baldassare Castiglione who focused on a separate matter involving human behavior. Although many historians have begrudged the differences between Castiglione and Erasmus a humanist of the North, other historians have stated that Castiglione enjoyed Erasmus' work especially “Praise of Folly.” Regardless, Castiglione being an Italian humanist focused on secular affairs. Castiglione wrote about how to act and behave in his work, the *Book of the Courtier*. Lorenzo Valla was another Italian humanist who was interesting because he attacked many of his contemporaries and also the Catholic Church.

Marsilio Ficino also discussed at length ideas about justice, morality, civic duty and truth. He wrote that “the duty of the Magistrate is to remember that he is not the master but the servant of the law and the public guardian of the state furthermore that while he is judging men he's being judged by God.”³⁴ The French humanist Jean Bodin was one another one of these

³³ William Kerrigan. and Gordon Braden. *The Idea of the Renaissance*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1989). Page 57.

³⁴ Ficino. *Meditations*. 191

humanists who questioned how to rule. These types of inquiries were previously not questioned during much of the middle ages. Jean Bodin wrote the six books of the republic which discussed how the state is like a household and posed the question whether it is justifiable to go against the king. These types of questions were not pondered prior to the humanist movement. Many of these humanists even participated in government like Machiavelli who served in Florence as well as serving as a diplomat to France and Germany. He wrote *The Prince*, where he pondered different questions on how to rule. He is considered one of the founders of political science because of his groundbreaking work. The political questions posed by these humanist thinkers were derived from ancient sources which led to the Glorious Revolution which Edmund Burke described as “[preserving] our ancient indisputable laws and liberties, and that ancient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty.”³⁵ This European ideal of liberty³⁶ sprang from the civic humanists who derived their ideas from ancient sources.

The thinkers of the humanist movement shared many similarities but had distinct perspectives because of the lens in which they viewed issues and which axioms they focused on. Nevertheless, the humanist of the North was equally inspired by ancient writings that informed their writings. Innovations such as Gutenberg’s printing press which enabled ancient sources to be disseminated like never before,³⁷ also played a role for the humanist movement in the North.

³⁵ Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Vol. XXIV, Part 3. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, (1914).

³⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay. *The Project Gutenberg EBook of The History of England from the Accession of James II*. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, n.d. The Project Gutenberg EBook #2439. Produced by Martin Adamson and David Widger. (2018).

³⁷ Anthony T Grafton. "The Importance of Being Printed." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 2 (1980). p.267

The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440's also led to the mass printing of texts. Information was able to be spread at a rate that was previously unfeasible and seemed impossible. This included the pagan Greco-Roman sources as well which helped formulate their Christian views³⁸, although the humanist of the North was much more concerned with scripture which led to sola scriptura dominating their discussion some Northern thinkers discussed civic humanism such as Thomas More. These humanists like their Italian counterparts were also very steeped in Augustine and the ideas expressed by the early Church fathers.

Some historians have painted the disagreements and disputes in the largest Christian institution as an example of regression during this time period. However much of the schism was based on doctrinal disagreements and show the intellectual fervor that was creeping into all areas of academia, including theology. Sola Scriptura, the notion that the scripture could be interpreted using reason to understand the biblical message can be abstracted to reflect the return to ancient Greek ideas in regard to reason. Even the questioning of hierarchical institutions shows a change in thought at the very least in the nobility and those who were inclined to vocalize such opposition.

Radical reformer Zwingli had a humanist education, being taught in Bern, then going to the University of Vienna only to be expelled and later received his degree at the University of Basel. Shortly after Zwingli was ordained he became involved in papal politics but became disillusioned with the warfare that he saw the papal states involved in.³⁹ As Zwingli continued to pastor, he was heavily influenced by humanist writers, especially Erasmus. Radical reformation

³⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller. "Erasmus from an Italian Perspective." *Renaissance Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1970). 2.

³⁹ Norman Birnbaum. "The Zwinglian Reformation in Zurich." *Past & Present*, no. 15 (1959): 30

leader Zwingli wrote, “with intense zeal day and night, even at the cost of harm to my body, I study the Greek and Latin philosophers and theologians.”⁴⁰ This rejuvenation in Greek and Latin, as well as ancient scripture, shows how the ideas formulated by the humanists did not just stay concentrated in those with academic pursuits nor just the elites in Italy. It awakened and shaped the minds of Zwingli and other European reformers offering Christianity a way to use reason to understand the Bible and likely inspired Sola Scriptura, the idea that the Bible alone can reveal God’s message. These ideas that profoundly shaped Europeans worldview and identity can be strongly linked to ancient sources which gave rise to the movement and the thought revolution it birthed.

Erasmus embodied the Northern Renaissance because he was in favor of viewing humanism strictly through a Christian lens. Specifically, he viewed humanism through a Catholic lens, which is ironic because he laid the groundwork for many of the other Northern Humanists who wanted to abdicate the Catholic Church and create a new vessel for Christianity. Erasmus did not want to leave the church but wanted to reform the Catholic Church. Erasmus wanted people to interpret the Bible themselves by reading it in their own language. Erasmus was not only influenced by the ancients but he was also influenced by Italian humanist some which he praised like Lorenzo Valla for giving him “Annotations on the New Testament.”⁴¹

By translating the Bible from its original text, Erasmus pointed out errors within the St. Jerome’s Bible. The church condemned Erasmus’ statements saying that any errors that St.

⁴⁰ Denis Janz-Sherry Jordon. “A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions” (W. Ross Macdonald School Resource Services Library - 2009) letter to utinger December 1518. 186

⁴¹ Kristeller. 3

Jerome made was divinely inspired. Even though the church told Erasmus to stop talking he went against the church and advocated that the Bible be for everyone to read. Erasmus criticized the church calling for simplicity and morality within the church as well as a return to the scriptures. He wrote the praise of Folly mocking the church. He was given the title “The prince of Humanist!” He also critiqued the Church because he believed it should not be so wealthy. He believed priests should only care for Christians and shun wealth to be more like Jesus and the first Christians. Erasmus who was arguing his claims biblically,⁴² demonstrates the weight ancient text had on humanist thought. Unlike Martin Luther however, he was not willing to separate from the church.⁴³ Erasmus was much more careful to not offend the Catholic Church but ameliorate the problems he saw un, like Martin Luther⁴⁴

Martin Luther began like Erasmus with the intention of having a message to influence the Catholic Church to reform itself, however, others took it upon themselves to bring Luther’s message to the press and have it translated in numerous languages.⁴⁵ Luther was confident that his message resonated with those who held power and were able to influence Pope Leo X because he was using scripture to support his claims. Shortly after, this optimism held by Luther was deflated and he responded again in the resolutions concerning the 95 theses, which included biblical support on the act of penance. Matthew 4:17 states, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”⁴⁶ Luther said that the

⁴² Ibid. 6

⁴³ Maurice Wilkinson. "Erasmus." *The Catholic Historical Review* 9, no. 2 (1923). 190

⁴⁴ Martin Luther: Letter to the Archbishop of Mainz, 1517

⁴⁵ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand. A Life of Martin Luther*. 83

⁴⁶ Matthew 4:17

interpretation that this passage meant to do penance was incorrect, and the text was actually saying that to repent was to have your mind changed and your heart would want to abstain from sin because of the transformation by Jesus.⁴⁷ Martin Luther was directly stating that the church had falsely preached the scriptures. This act of questioning institutions of power using reason was very much in line with what other humanists both of the North and Italy were doing. After Martin Luther was excommunicated, he began to speak out even more. Luther stated that the Pope did not have the power to excommunicate him because it was not stated in scripture. Luther attacked the “works” and the sacraments of the Church including Indulgences that were being sold under the pretense that a monetary payment could give one grace, therefore stating humans had the ability to buy their way into heaven or help pay for a loved one to get out of purgatory⁴⁸. Indulgences also suggested that it was human actions that provide grace, which contradicts Luther’s assertion in his letter that only God provides grace⁴⁹ through who he chose to give faith in his son Jesus Christ. Luther stated that no creature can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ It is important to understand that Luther was guided by sola scriptura⁵¹, just like Zwingli. This is evident as Luther constantly cited biblical scripture to argue against the teachings of the Catholic Church. Sola Scriptura is the concept that the scripture could be

⁴⁷ Bainton. 88

⁴⁸ Ibid. 79

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Fudge "Incest and Lust in Luther's Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 2 (2003): 335

⁵⁰ Bainton. 89

⁵¹ Peter J. Thuesen. *Church History* 74, no. 2 (2005). 378

interpreted by individuals using reason to understand the messages within scripture. Luther also denied that the Pope was above scripture and the only one who could interpret scripture. This led Luther to question all Catholic practices, including the ceremonial sacraments if they were not supported by scripture.⁵²

Interesting enough Luther also echoed Pico, Ficino and Plato before them when he described how mans' dualistic nature was comprised of spirit and flesh. He described how the carnal man always succumbs to sin because of his fallen nature and is never capable of fulfilling the law of God. This is supported by the book of Mark and Psalms that states, "for from within one that has a heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,"⁵³ and Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."⁵⁴ Luther described this mortal and sinful nature of man to demonstrate the point that no matter what human beings do, they cannot live up the perfect moral standard of God. No 'works', no penance could forgive humans in the court of a just God because of man's sinful nature.⁵⁵ Luther argued from scripture that the human heart is perpetually pursuing its fleshly desires therein accommodating sin and the only way to obtain salvation comes from the word of God. He cited numerous examples from scripture that it is faith given because of God's Grace alone that grants salvation. Just one example from numerous biblical excerpts he used to support his claim was

⁵² W. J. McGlothlin. "Luther's Doctrine of Good Works." *The American Journal of Theology* 21, no. 4 (1917): 530

⁵³ Book of Mark 7:21. King James Version (KJV)

⁵⁴ Book of Psalms 51:5. King James Version (KJV)

⁵⁵ Luther. *Freedom of a Christian*.

“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”⁵⁶ Luther used all of these to justify “faith alone,” and explains how the moral law of God from revelation showed humans what they are to do and how it was also written on their hearts.⁵⁷ However, because of man’s sinful human nature always they will always fail to adhere to those moral laws.⁵⁸ He again used scripture to essentially explain the nature of God is one of a perfect judge who will judge all those who die. All humans are guilty and should incur the wrath of God because no one keeps the law of God. It is through Jesus Christ's sacrifice that he paid the legal fine that humans should pay when they face God, but because of God’s grace, if man believes in and has trust in Jesus. These claims had profound implications because in many ways it goes against all of the human ceremonial practices of the church, even sacred Church sacraments if they are not biblically based. What is also interesting is that in Luther’s letter to the Pope that spelled out the problems he saw in the Church he used the same approach as Socrates “Apology.” The letter has the same sincere tone while accusing the Church of their wrongdoings. While Luther exclusively used ancient text to support his crusade against the church, ancient sources were not limited to religious reform by other northern humanists.

Thomas More who was an English humanist very much reflected the Italian Renaissance. He wrote *Utopia*, as a satire to express his ideas on human potential and to make readers think critically on many topics. Thomas More describes *Utopia* as a place that is void of classes and

⁵⁶ Book of Romans 10:9. King James Version (KJV)

⁵⁷ Luther. *Freedom of a Christian*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

hatred; however, his society is one of no individuality and no real freedom. Thomas More believed as did many other humanists that individuality was an essential principle to the Renaissance. Thomas More stated that he wrote *Utopia* as a joke and in no way intended for people to use it as a blueprint for society. His *Utopia* (No Place) showed the flaws of limiting individuality and that the best of people stems from this individuality. Historians stated that he was arguing, “that without consciousness human existence has no meaning or value, whereas to the machines humans are nothing but cogs in a mechanical universe.”⁵⁹

Thomas More wrote of this *Utopia* which was forced upon this civilization and their free will was stripped away from them. The free will that Pico glorified and claimed makes man, God’s greatest creation did not exist in *Utopia*. A close reading of *Utopia* demonstrates that only through individualism and trying to surpass these hardships will humans reach their full potential.

Many of the humanist writers of both Italy and the North reflected similar themes that were based on ancient text. They discussed ideas on the human condition and the nature of man. They meditated the innate potential of human beings and their indispensable characteristics and especially in relation to the divine. This led them to question epistemology and how they obtained their information inspiring the important concept of *Sola Scriptura*. This revival of ancient sources also led the humanist to have conversations about individuality and metaphysical discussions on truth. These conversations and rebirth of ancient ideas also had political consequences as they formulated civic humanism

⁵⁹ Robert Bee. R.A. Lafferty, Sir Thomas More, and the Problems of *Utopia*. (2008).

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