

WHICH PRINCE?

by Dr. John Battle,
President of Western Reformed Seminary

Machiavelli's Prince

Five hundred years ago, in 1513, a famous treatise was written—*The Prince*, by Niccolò Machiavelli. This little book became famous and still is studied as a classic guide in politics and government.



Machiavelli served as a high official in Florence, when Italy was divided into several warring city states. He observed several rulers up close, and drew his conclusions based on their successes or failures. He admired the actions and careers of several important leaders, including Cesare Borgia, ruler over Florence, Pope Julius II, and Lorenzo de' Medici, a later ruler over Florence.

Many ancient Romans and medieval and Renaissance Catholics had written books advising secular rulers. They all extolled strength and virtue, saying that moral actions were the best actions—"honesty is the best policy." Machiavelli changed all that. The best policy was not always the moral policy; sometimes, he said, the moral policy is disastrous. According to Machiavelli, lying, cheating, and murdering are the best policies, if the situation calls for it.

The ultimate goal for the prince is to obtain wealth, power, and glory, he said. Machiavelli was amazed and greatly admired Cesare Borgia when he called his rivals to a conference and then had all of them murdered. When Pope Julius II later broke all his promises to Borgia and instead had him arrested, this also impressed Machiavelli. Both these treacherous actions were brutally effective, and thereby were good—the types of actions that a prince should copy.

When *The Prince* was published, there was a public outcry against it. "Machiavellianism" became a term of derision. However, pragmatic leaders still follow its advice, and the book is considered a classic today.



Machiavelli

Our Prince

We Christians follow the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. As our Messiah he rules from heaven over his church. He will return to the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, and every knee will bow to him.

What kind of Prince will he be? Will he be unscrupulous, treacherous, lying, murdering, pragmatically doing what "works"? No, he is perfect in holiness; he is holy, true, dependable, kind, and just.



Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.... A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isa. 42:1-4 ESV).

Which Prince?

The Bible talks about a future evil world leader: "the prince that will come," "the little horn," "the beast," "the Antichrist," "the man of sin." Jesus told us, "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him" (John 5:43).

Machiavelli's prince succeeds in this world, at least for a short time, because this world lies in sin, still serving the devil, "the prince of the power of the air." But our Prince, the Lord Jesus, is sovereign over all, and his kingdom will defeat that of the devil.

People feared Machiavelli's prince, but they could not trust him or love him. On the other hand, we fear displeasing Jesus because we trust and love him. We are his willing and cheerful subjects, being saved and standing before him by faith. We know he will always love us, he will always be faithful to his promises, he will always protect us and provide for us.

Machiavelli admired treacherous, murderous rulers. We love and worship the true Prince, the holy, righteous, and kind Son of God!

WESTERN REFORMED SEMINARY

5 South G Street Tacoma, WA 98405
253-272-0417 • www.wrs.edu

"in spirit and in truth"

Serving the Bible Presbyterian Church since 1983