THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND HER DESTRUCTIVE ENEMIES: THE RENAISSANCE, THE REFORMATION, AND THE ABSOLUTE MONARCHS

KATOLİK KİLİSESİ VE YIKICI DÜŞMANLARI: RÖNESANS, REFORMASYON VE MUTLAK MONARŞİLER

Volkan ERTİT

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Aksaray Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü

Asst. Prof., Aksaray University, Sociology Department

E-posta: volkanertit@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6114-2606

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Abstract

Before the modernization process, the Church had been shaping the daily life of ordinary people, intervening in important political decisions made by empires and dominating the subjects of the medieval intelligentsia, all at the same time. This article is about the transformation of this supposed "invariable" social power of the Catholic Church at the very beginning of the European modernization process. The article aims to present the transformative and staggering effects of the emergence of Renaissance, Reformation and Absolute Monarchies on the power of the Church. The qualitative approach was adopted and the data obtained through accessing primary and secondary sources were subjected to descriptive analysis. The article reveals the followings: In the process beginning with the Renaissance, the fields of thought and culture began to distance themselves from the Church. The Church was not regarded as the sole institution for salvation and eternal happiness anymore and the concept of an intermediary institution between God and individuals became defunct for almost half of the continent. Over a period of approximately 200 years, the kings previously enthroned by the Pope either formed their own churches or declared their independence from the Papacy.

Keywords:

Sociology of Religion, The Catholic Church, Renaissance, Reform Movement, Absolute Monarchies.

Öz

Modernleşme sürecinden önce Katolik Kilisesi Avrupa'da gündelik yaşamı şekillendiriyor, imparatorlukların aldıkları önemli siyasi kararlara müdahil oluyor, dönemin entelektüel dünyasının konularını belirliyor ve krallara tacını giydiriyordu. Bu makale, Katolik Kilisesi'nin değişmez sanılacak kadar görkemli olan bu toplumsal gücünün Avrupa modernleşme sürecinin başlarında yaşadığı dönüşümü konu ediniyor. Makalenin amacı ise, özellikle Rönesans, Reform ve Mutlak Monarşilerin ortaya çıkış sürecinin, Kilise'nin gücünü nasıl sarstığını okuyucuya sunmaktır. Çalışma nitel araştırma yaklaşımını benimsenmiş olup, birincil ve ikincil kaynaklara ulaşarak yapılan literatür taraması ile elde edilen veriler betimsel analize tabii tutulmuştur. Makale şu bilgileri ortaya koymaktadır: Rönesans ile başlayan süreçte düşünce ve kültür alanı yavaşça kendisini Kilise'den ayırmıştır. Kilise artık ruhun kurtuluşu ve sonsuz mutluluk konularında bireylerin sığınacağı tek kurum olmaktan çıkmıştır ve dinden değil ama dinî özgürlük Avrupa halklarının sahip olduğu bir ilke haline gelmiştir. Yaklaşık 200 senelik bir süre zarfında, daha önce papa tarafından taç giydirilen krallar ya kendi kiliselerini kurmuşlardır ya da papadan bağımsızlıklarını ilan etmişlerdir. Kilise üyeleri krallar tarafından yargılanmaya başlanmışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Din Sosyolojisi, Katolik Kilisesi, Rönesans, Reform Hareketi, Mutlak Monarşiler.

Introduction

Various areas of history (including politics, economics, education and geography) show that few things are "absolute" apart from the process of "change" itself. Great empires that ruled over vast lands, mountains that were thought to have remained unchanged for thousands of years, economic or educational models that were considered inimitable and unchangeable, and religions based on claims of absoluteness can all be given as clear examples. The social power of the Catholic Church was also affected by the aforementioned process of change. Had we lived in a village in Europe in the 10th century, we would most likely think that the Catholic Church, an institution that claims to receive its authority from God, would never lose its splendor. That is because:

• The church was considered to be above royalty as it had the authority to enthrone and dethrone kings.[1]

• The fields of thought and culture were shaped by Catholic doctrines.[2]

• The Church was able to declare kings excommunicated.[3]

• The Papacy was able to influence daily political matters through letters sent to monarchs in Europe.[4]

• The Church was regarded as the sole institution providing spiritual salvation and eternal happiness.[5]

• Disobedience to the Church was regarded as disobedience to the creator.[6]

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[1] Richard A. Jackson, "Who Wrote Hincmar's Ordines?", *Viator* 25 (1994), 31-32.

[2] M. Perry, et al. *Western Civilization* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 224-29. ; John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy 480-1150: An Introduction* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002).

[3] Wendy Dackson, "Anglicanism and Social Theology", *Anglican theological review* 94/4 (2012), 622. ; Joseph Henry Dahmus, *The Middle Ages, A Popular History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

[4] Neil Sharkey, *Saint Gregory the Great's Concept of Papal Power,* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, PhD dissertation, 1950), 32. ; C. R. Cheney – Mary G. Cheney (Eds), *The Letters of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) concerning England and Wales* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[5] Daniel McGarry, *Medieval History & Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1976), 316.

[6] C.F.J. Martin, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press,

• Peasants paid homage to the clergy for increased agricultural products or a productive harvest period.[7]

• Freedom of religion or freedom from religion was out of the question, and criticism of the things considered sacred by the Church resulted in severe punishment.[8]

In other words, the Church shaped the daily life of ordinary Europeans, intervened in important political decisions made by monarchs, and dominated the subject-matter of the medieval intelligentsia, and all at the same time. It is understandable that a peasant living in the medieval period would think that an institution claiming to have its mandate from God has unquestionable authority. However, as stated above, history does not present many "absolute" phenomena apart from "change" itself. The present article discusses the striking transformation in the social power of the Catholic Church, which at the time was magnificent enough to have been considered everlasting. The article aims to present the transformative and stifling effects of the emergence of the Renaissance, Reformation and Absolute Monarchies which underlie the process of modernization in Europe. A qualitative study approach was adopted and the data obtained from primary and secondary sources were subjected to a descriptive analysis. However, before moving on to the discussion section, it should be emphasized that how these three dynamics limited the social power of the Catholic Church or lowered its prestige is too broad to be explained in detail in the present article. Each subject is broad enough to require lengthy articles or even books. Therefore, instead of dealing with every minor detail, the present article aims to reveal the distinct changes caused by these three historical dynamics, which are considered by some to be the foundations of the modernization process. This limit enables the present

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1996), 26.

[7] McGarry, *Medieval History & Civilization*, 250.

[8] Brian A. Pavlac, "Excommunication and Territorial Politics in High Medieval Trier", *Church History* 60/1 (1991): 20. ; William Chester Jordan, "Christian Excommunication of the Jews in the Middle Ages: A Restatement of the Issues", *Jewish History* 1 (1986), 31.

article to serve as an introductory text for those who wish to engage further with the subject.

1. Renaissance And The Catholic Church

Throughout history, the word "modern" has been used to define things that are "new" while "modernization" has been used to reflect a state of breakaway and transition from "old" to "new". The word "modern" is derived from the late Latin "modernus", which in turn is derived from the Latin "modo", meaning "just now". The concept, which was first used in the 5th century to emphasize the difference of the Christian world from its Roman and Pagan past[9], is used to reflect a deviation from feudal-traditional society. The concept denotes a distinction between two different times (traditional/modern). The fact that the root of the word is "today" or "related to today" indicates a temporal difference regarding the past of today. With this in mind, it might be claimed that the modern age begins in Florence, Italy. Although such a clear statement is not convenient for an academic article, it would hardly be an exaggeration due to the cultural movement that flourished in Florence in the 14th century: the Renaissance.

The Renaissance began in Italy and then took up a larger area in the north and west of Europe such as England, Germany, Spain and France during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Coates et al. defined it as "the period when man rediscovered the world and his own creative capacities for what they really were and fashioned a new civilization with nature as its basis and humanity as its source, center, and end."[10] The new outlook that came along with the Renaissance represented a transitional period for Europeans and laid the foundation for a new era, the so-called modern times. While particular components of the medieval era attracted less and less attention, classic cultural forms were being revived as the fundamental elements of the new era. From the 14th to 17th century, the main political

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[9] Krishan Kumar, *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society New Theories of the Contemporary World,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 91.

[10] Willson Havelock Coates et al., *The Emergence of Liberal Humanism: An Intellectual History of Western Europe* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1966), 3.

and social aspects of the Mediaeval Ages were exposed to drastic changes, and the roots of the medieval world views were gradually undermined.

When the Renaissance first flourished in Florence, new thoughts and new ways of life were being introduced to its citizens. The Renaissance was the period in which an intellectual revolution (known as the Revival of Learning), new thoughts about religion, new methods for science, new outlook for the nature of human beings, new architectural style, to mention but a few, all came into being. It was a phase of exploration and a period of political and social transition. Ancient Greece and Rome came into being as the main sources for the inspiration, and their works became part of the educational and cultural curriculum. In a gradual manner, antiquity became a reference point for a lively and productive life at the expense of religious doctrines.

Being a cultural movement, the Renaissance heralded the birth of modern times especially with its method of learning: humanism. Humanism, in contrast to medieval philosophy or learning, was based on the ancient texts in their original rather than the ecclesiastical laws of Christianity. While medieval times had been glorifying theology as the patron of knowledge, and faith had been regarded as the main method for understanding the mysteries, the revival of antiquity and reasoning were the main elements of knowledge in humanism.

Humanism is that concern with the legacy of Antiquity - and in particular, but not exclusively, with its literary legacy - which characterizes the work of scholars from at least the ninth century onwards. It involves above all the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the restoration and interpretation of them and the assimilation of ideas and values that they contain. It ranges from an archaeological interest in the remains of the past to a highly focused philosophical attention to the details of all manner of written records.[11]

Therefore, the intellectuals who first systematized and disseminated the Renaissance values and created the artistic works were called humanists. Before humanists, medieval scholars aimed to conciliate Christian doctri-

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[11] Nicholas Mann, "The Origins of Humanism", *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism,* ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

nes and classical learning. However, humanists did not seek to fit ancient Greek and Roman literature into the dogmas or doctrines of Christianity. Humanists explored ancient writings as an educational and cultural programme for the sake of those ancient writings or their understanding of human nature. The cultural superiority of ancient Greece and Rome was the lighthouse for the works of the Renaissance. The reference point for a dynamic and productive life was not the Bible anymore but antiquity. Being bewitched with the cultural forms of antiquity, artists and writers followed the classical style as a model, and they were naturally influenced by the worldly spirit of those times. While scholastic thinkers were using the classics to find proof for the Christian teachings and doctrines, humanists educated themselves by learning the classics to provide the means of support for their interest in this world. According to Coates et al., the people of the Renaissance were not convinced that religion could be the only way to solve the problems of humanity. Humanists did not go reject Christianity per se or harbored suspicions as to the validity of the Bible, but they applied a non-religious perspective to ethical problems, education, politics and other social issues. Recovering an ancient intellectual culture and putting a new theory of civilization based on an integrated and continual program of reform, humanists made it less likely for the old tradition to survive. The idealized civilization of humanists, which has remained part of Europe ever since, was anthropocentric at the expense of a theocentric order.[12]

It should be emphasized that humanist worldviews were disseminated from Italy to other parts of Europe. The rejection of the medieval worldviews and focus on the earthly man, as Coates et al. argue, were easier in Italy than elsewhere in Europe. For socio-political reasons, it is not surprising that Italy was the first place wherein citizens raised criticisms against the Church and rejected it as a key moral guide or primary intellectual source. First of all, for the Italians, the Church had not only been a religious institution throughout the centuries but a political entity as well. Disapproval of its doctrines or teachings did not have to be related to "only" spiritual authority or divine nature of the Church. Secondly, there had still been

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[12] Coates *et al., The Emergence of Liberal Humanism,* 4.

cultural remnants of the ancient Romans in the physical landscape. Since they had existed for more than a millennium, Italians saw the possibility of a new culture that would be built on the basis of ancient Rome. Thirdly, due to the influence of Byzantines and Muslims in the course of the Medieval Ages, Italy had become a place where different cultural traditions had clashed throughout the history. New ideas and religious cultures had penetrated the Italian cultural setup, and this reality paved the way for other powerful civilizations based on other belief systems. Finally, since Italy had been at the center of trading activities and constant incursions from non-Catholic powers, the Italian social and political establishments were capable of much more flexibility. At the end, Italy became the first in Europe where criticisms, expostulations, protests were seen against the social and moral power of the Church.[13]

In parallel with the developments in the cultural field, there was another drastic change related to city states in the Renaissance period. With the expansion of trade, growing non-religious attitudes in societies became observable. Wealthy merchants gradually increased their roles in the cultural and economic spheres. People who had money because of commercial activities started to enjoy an active/lively city life, and since they were intrigued by worldly pleasures, they devoted less and less time to their religious salvation. "They were", as Schevill says, "glad to be alive, they frankly enjoyed the sensuous and colored garment of the earth, and they delighted in the improved material position resulting from their increased resources."[14] Therefore, these new nameless merchants, enriched by trade, disturbed the feudal values, privileges and power of religious men considered their birthright. But it should be emphasized that these merchants should not be called heretics or non-believers but individuals that religion or religious institutions could not draw their attention amid worldly concerns. As a result, occupied with trade, these individuals started to pay less attention to celestial issues and did not want religious rules or norms to be involved

13 Ibid.
14 Ferdinand Schevill, *A History of Europe, From the Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 30.

in every detail of their lives. The worldly pleasures that they could afford were most likely more exciting and desirable than the things religion had to offer. Consequently, intellectuals at the time and the merchants' life freed from religion and religious institutions seem to have influenced each other reciprocally.[15]

Another striking result of the Renaissance was the freedom of the individual at the expense of the religious structure. In the Middle Ages, class loyalty and a strict adherence to class rules or customs were one of the main features of the social structure. There were particular courts, dress codes, marriage rules and entertainment activities for each class. Detailed instructions had governed and confined people in their daily lives. However, merchants began to raise their voice against the restrictions on trade, while humanists wanted to abolish the intellectual and moral restrictions imposed by the Church. With the Renaissance and "through the operation of forces (…) the stout barriers of custom began to give way and men were prompted to modify their group allegiance" at the expense of feudal structure.[16] Individuals were trying to free themselves from the chain of the past, and knowledge became an entity which was reachable by means of learning and experience rather revelation or tradition. In the course of time, individual efforts and success started to play a more decisive role in the dignity of people, and social "promotion" of individuals was upgraded in a way that did not comply with former social class hierarchy. At this point, having been born into a poor family, Giovanni di Bicci de Medici (1360-1429), i.e. founder of the Medici Bank and Medici fortunes, might be given as an example of this new structure.[17]

This-worldly and individualistic culture of the Renaissance had led to the emergence of works of art different from those of art produced in the Middle Ages. While individual talent or worldly issues were not emphasized in the art of medieval times, artists and intellectuals of the Renaissance changed or shifted the field of interest in intellectual productions from otherworld

[15] Perry et al. *Western Civilization*, 264-66.
[16] Schevill, *A History of Europe*, 49.
[17] Eugen Weber, *A Modern History of Europe* (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1971), 38.

and supernatural beings to this world due to a new understanding of art and nature of human beings. Italian city states succeeded in freeing themselves from the restrictions of the Church by dedicating themselves to worldly aspirations. Gothic style of the pre-Renaissance period was gradually left behind while new artistic works were seen in the streets of the city states. Contemporary artists started adjusting the fundamental forms of the ancient monuments to the need of society. It is true that town halls, cathedrals and other religious places were built and painted with religious figures during the Renaissance period as well. However, in addition to those, private places of worship, large residences and palaces were also built due to the increasing wealth of these individuals. Besides, as Schevill stresses, sculptors and painters did not sustain the medieval idea of seeing nature as the realm of Satan. On the other hand, they used individuals and freshness or awakening of nature as the new objects of the art, and they mainly "served the interest and outlook of energetic groups which had risen to influence through the opportunities of trade and industry"[18] instead of the clergy and the Church. God-centricity was gradually abandoned and refused for the sake of human-centricity.

Consequently, the revival of antiquity, glorifying individualism, being relatively free from religious issues and doctrines as well as moral principles might be counted as some characteristic features of the Renaissance spirit. Freeing individuals from a predetermined destiny like a packaged program, the Renaissance was heralding modern times. Destiny turned into something that is shaped by individuals' own insights, with respect to their experience of the past or the present.[19] Individuals started to conceive that their own insights and experience of the past and present, i.e. history itself, produce and shape their destiny rather than religion or manifestations of divine authorities.

2. The Reformation And The Catholich Church
By the middle of the fifteenth century, the uniqueness and power of the

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[18] Schevill, *A History of Europe,* 38.
[19] Samuel Dresden, *Humanism in the Renaissance,* trans. Margaret King, (London: World University Library, 1968), 220.

Church over Europe had transcended geographic boundaries, ethnic and linguistic barriers. The Church was deeply involved in European politics and paying attention to worldly affairs as much as spiritual and ethical issues. Since it had enormous power and capacity to influence most parts of Europe, this power gave it temporal supremacy along with spiritual ones. It could overthrow kings, make their subjects free from their commitments, and hand their lands over to another kingdom. "For example," writes Thomas Lindsay,

George Podiebrod, the King of Bohemia, offended the bishop of Rome by insisting that the Roman should keep the bargain made with his Hussite subjects at the Council of Basel. He was summoned to Rome to be tried as a heretic by Pope Pius II and later by Pope Paul II. After all, he was declared to be deposed. His subjects were released from their allegiance, and his kingdoms was offered to Matthias Corvinus, the King of Hungary.[20]

On the other hand, genuine Christians were feeling the absence of intimate devout acts. The functions of the Church and its whole structure had to face severe criticisms which were outspokenly expressed inside or outside of the Church. Denunciation and criticisms, expressed by radical reformers, became major threats to the prestige of the papacy and the general system of the Catholic Christendom. By emphasizing personal connection between God and the individual based on passages from the Bible, they raised their voices and opposed the church and the idea that it was the only way to salvation. Besides, the level of prosperity of the clergy was criticized publicly, and the clergy were asked to value material poverty and spiritual purity instead of property and vanity. The first followers of Jesus Christ and their teachings were being highlighted against the structure of the Church as well as the excessive pride and arrogance/vanity of the clergy. Devout Christians argued for the expropriation of Church properties for public use. For example, John Wycliffe, a theologian at Oxford University, strongly defended the idea that divine authority could only be found in

[20] Thomas M Lindsay, *A History of The Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 6.

Sacred Scripture.[21] Becoming the leader of a reform movement named Lollard, he argued that true theology and the most required reforms could be achieved primarily by looking at Scripture. The Bible was translated into English by Lollards, and Wycliffe's ideas were disseminated across different regions. One of those attracted by Wycliffian ideas was a scholar and rector at the University of Prague named Jan Huss who was burned at the stake because of his passionate hatred against the anti-scriptural Church. He did not "accept the denotation of the Church as a totality made up of the rival popes, officious cardinals, proud and ambitious bishops, selfish and lazy monks, worldly and avaricious friars, ignorant and carnal priests. . . "[22]

Reformers were becoming more courageous so long as the new ideas were becoming widespread. While people in towns and cities were gaining in confidence helped by their economic achievements, local languages and indigenous cultures were become more prominent at the expense of Latin. By the late fifteenth century, there were enough social and economic reasons for systematic attempts to destroy Latin Christendom. Both intellectual Christians and common people were ready and minded to attack the Church because of the sale of indulgences, normalization of corruption, nepotism and other similar reasons.[23] There was a striking paradox between the wealth of the Church and Christian teachings on salvation. With respect to the wealth of the Church, Edward Peters says that the Church itself should be counted as a remarkably sophisticated economic organization. Needing to control, protect and regulate its distant institutions to sustain its own wellbeing all over Europe, it rooted itself in almost every aspect of the continent's economic life. Even in remote and small regions, churches were supposed to be the specific centers where local communities enjoyed economic activities as much as social ones.[24] Most of the clergy were chasing only their own interests, and they even intervened in national

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[21] F. W. C. Meyer, "The Formal Principle of The Reformation", *The Old and New Testament Student* 15/ 1/2 (1892): 32.

[22] R. R. Betts, "The Influence of Realist Philosophy on Jan Hus and His Predecessors in Bohemia", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 29/73 (1951), 411.

[23] Perry, et al. *Western Civilization,* 285-86.

[24] Edward Peters, *Europe, The World of the Middle Ages* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1977), 443.

and international politics although it was clearly incompatible with their commitment and creed. With the increased restlessness and fragmentation of society, the Church and the higher-up clergy were outspokenly questioned and systematically attacked at the beginning of the sixteenth century. A German monk, Martin Luther (1483 -1546), triggered the Reformation movement by posting his well-known ninety-five theses in 1517. According to Luther, the indulgences were detrimental to the ethical and spiritual life of individuals, and the claims of clergy, written or verbal, and the sermons of the indulgence-sellers were humiliating the true religion.[25] Luther harshly criticized the excessive power of the pope and the idea that the Church's teachings and prescriptions are the only ways towards salvation. In his 95 theses, Luther stresses that the pope has no right to forgive individuals' sins. He accused all preachers who claim that an individual's salvation is possible with the pope's indulgences. For instance, in the theses 32 and 36, he says: "They, with their teachers, will be damned eternally, who believe they have certainty of their salvation through letters of indulgence" and "Every Christian who has true sorrow has full remission from penalty and guilt, even without owning letters of indulgence".[26]

The Renaissance brought liveliness and new ideas into the European intellectual life which had been dominated by mainly scholastic theology. In a similar manner, the process of the Reformation was another watershed, and it drastically changed almost all aspects of life in Europe. The enormous impact of the Reformation is not only related with the power of progressive ideas but also the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in 1447. Books, leaflets, brochures made Reformation ideas extensively accessible for the laymen. Although the consequences of the Reformation need much more attention and space, I would like to focus in particular on three of them which were crucial in terms of the decline of religious power: its impact on the unity of Western Christendom, individualism, and the emergence of nation states.

José Casanova emphasizes the destructive role of the Reformation with

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[25] Lindsay, *A History of The Reformation*, 214.
[26] Carl S. Meyer, *Luther's and Zwingli's Propositions for Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 9.

regard to the unity of Western Christendom.[27] By removing the foundation of harmony, apostolicity, sacredness and catholicity of the Church, the Reformation damaged the integral nature of medieval society. The political power of the Church and its local agencies were also shattered. By ruining the wellbeing system of Western Christendom, the reform movement led to the emergence of new dynamics. Luther promoted the idea of personal faith against obedience to the teachings or doctrines of the Catholic Church. Reformers were wishing to re-establish the pure spirit of Christianity, which was supposed to have existed centuries ago. This idea of the "romantic times" of Christianity assumes that there had been times when Christian religious men had been more respected, the belief system was free of immorality, and the clergy had not been corrupted by property or power. In longing for this "romantic times" of Christianity, the Church was forced to be exposed to reforms.[28]

The other remarkable consequence of the Reformation with regard to religious life was its appreciation of religious individualism. For a long time, the Catholic Church had been accepted as the only mediator between believers and God. This understanding was broken down since Protestants preferred very personal and straight relationship with God. Luther explicitly asserted that the only religious authority for believers was the Bible, not the Church. With respect to being cursed or saved, reformers engaged the idea that what would be decisive is not the Catholic Church or the clergy but their own connections with God. Thus, it would not be a coincidence that the religious individualism of the Reformation came into being just after the intellectual individualism of the Renaissance. In addition, it might be argued that (as Weber did) the making strenuous effort – individually - to increase economic wealth has its roots in the Reformation process as well. Although this subject should be discussed in detail under the title of Capitalism and Reformation, it is still worth mentioning its connection with individualism. The inner faith and self-discipline which came into being

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[27] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 21.

[28] Perry, et al. *Western Civilization,* 285.

as the new way of salvation were also able to nourish the individualistic spirituality that emerged with the Reformation. In modern times, where individuals are responsible for their own lives in a highly competitive atmosphere, these two forces are the main facilitators for the production of wealth. Meanwhile, the authority of the monarchs was also challenged and resisted by Reformers during the religious wars, as it was thought that the law of God was refused or treated with contempt by monarchs.[29]

Last but not least, the Reformation was praised affectionately by the secular rulers since the ideas of the reformers had made them stronger over religious institutions. Protestant monarchies rejected the authority of the papacy and claimed their supremacy over the Protestant churches under their hegemony. As Casanova neatly elucidates, while the Reformation shattered the traditional organic system, the secular powers found a way to liberate themselves from the Church's control. In this regard, Casanova says:

At a higher level, Protestantism may be viewed not only as the corrosive solvent which made room for the new but also as the religious superstructure of the new order, as the religion of bourgeois modernity, as a religious ideology which, at a time when ideological and class struggles were still fought in religious garb, served to legitimate the rise of the modern sovereign state against the universal Christian monarchy, and the triumph of the new science against Catholic scholasticism.[30]

For example, in the name of the Reformation, Henry VIII invalidated all the claims of the Pope over the English church. The German princes declared their religious sovereignty in their own territories.

However, since religious agencies continued to be considered as essential entities for daily life and political affairs, it is not easy to claim that all these social upheavals experienced with the Reformation gave rise to modern secular states. While the medieval system in which the state was under religious authority had been seriously damaged, the foundations of

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[29] Perry, et al. *Western Civilization*, 304-06.
[30] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 22.

the modern political system could be seen in some parts of the continent. In addition, Europeans started to become members of local congregations, and national churches were established while the Catholic Church was losing its power, prestige and wealth in a gradual manner.

3. Absolute Monarchies And The Catholic Church

The emergence of absolute monarchies had serious consequences with regard to the Church's influence on commoners. In the earlier period of the Medieval Ages, it was only the clergy who defended the idea that the Church had universal supremacy. However, by the thirteenth century, not only the ecclesiastical jurists but also very influential philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, emphasized that every human being and worldly powers must be subject to the Church under the Bible. This meant that if kings (or worldly leaders) disobey fundamental tenets of the Christian Church, then "the Bishop of Rome was entitled to deprive them of all kingly authority by releasing subjects from their ordinary obedience."[31] Because of its ecclesiastical supremacy over worldly powers, the papacy was regarded as the universal bishop, and all other rulers were supposed to accept its unrestricted authority. The church had the power to infiltrate various aspects of daily life. According to Lindsay, individuals, fields, fences, houses, even byres were seen as spiritual goods if they took orders from the papacy or if they belonged to the Church. This enormous worldly power was dispersed through diocesan lands or other regions where the members of Catholic Church lived. Being exempted from worldly legislation and taxation imposed by terrestrial "temporal" powers, the Church was also totally against the allegiance of its subjects to the monarchs or princes.[32]

However, this supreme power of the Church was diminished by the new absolute monarchies. A new political organization appeared and changed the old feudal structure in which the Church had been exempted due to the fear of intervention of secular rulers and states which were not regarded as a political entity because of exchangeable lands of heritage. By

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[31] Lindsay, *A History of The Reformation*, 4.
[32] Lindsay, *A History of The Reformation*, 8.

the sixteenth century, apart from a few countries like France and England, the self-ruling powers in local feudal areas and religious princes prevented the establishment of an effective central authority. However, at the end of the seventeenth century, absolute monarchies raised their power and declared their unquestionable authority in their territories which led to drastic changes in the political structure of Europe. David Maland says that the revival of Roman law, the extended scope of warfare after 1500 and philosophical justification might be counted as the sources of absolutism.[33] In particular, the expansion of larger scale operations, the increasing number of men under arms, and the longer duration of campaigns had motivated princes to carry out a comprehensive reform of their military structure. The problems associated with the recruitment and finance of armies were believed to be resolved by increasing the power of princes. The decisions taken by the princes could not be questioned. To suppress the regional franchises and eliminate class privileges, a well-organized and faithful bureaucracy was created at the dawn of the age of absolute monarchs. Maland adds that factionalism and religious oppositions were regarded as obstacles to assembling troops and their equipment in a secure manner.[34] Therefore, by the end of the seventeenth century, to compensate for a successful war, "central direction, administrative uniformity and efficiency" became an integral feature of Europe. What is more, the new understanding of the political philosophy such as the secular concept of "reason of state" was glorified by influential thinkers at the time. To Machiavelli (1469-1527), the father of modern political theory, the end justifies the means, and on the ground of this principle, all means must be employed to establish and preserve the authority of the prince. The most terrible, disloyal and hazardous acts of the prince should be defensible for the sake of sovereignty. It is not surprising to learn that the prince was condemned by the Church. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), another prominent defender of authoritarian ruling, believes that without government men will become part of a war of all aga-

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[33] David Maland, *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*. 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1986), 18.

[34] Maland, *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*, 19-20.

inst all. To escape such an extremely hopeless situation, Hobbes asserted a social contract based on an absolute state called Leviathan.

In times of social and political crisis[35], coercion itself became a forceful means in the hands of monarchs. The term "absolute" refers to the governing system of the new monarchs, i.e. government monopoly of power, centralization, the bullying of domestic factionists, coercion of foreign opponents, the emergence of central institutions such as a royal bureaucracy, the court and the army.[36] Enjoying ultimate authority over its people, monarchs came into being as dominant rulers. However, it should be noted that although they had enormous power over each entity in their territories, there were many political groups that tried to counterbalance the total power of monarchs such as the aristocracy, the clergy, and the new class of merchants and even peasants. It is true that the struggles between them triggered many conflicts but they did not have enough influential power to prevent monarchs like Louis XIV of France from regarding himself as the state itself.

The emergence of absolute monarchies in early modern times created severe problems for the traditional ecclesiastical system mentioned above. Casanova asserts that although the churches tried to re-establish the old model of Christendom in the territories of their own lands, they were not successful because of the caesaropapist control of the absolutist states.[37]

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[35] From the fifteenth to seventeenth century, Europe witnessed many severe and rigorous conflicts. Among others, Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) in England, Catalonian Civil War (1462-1472), Ottoman-Venetian Wars (1422-1430, 1463-1479, 1499-1503, 1537-1540, 1570-73, 1645-1669), Bohemian War (1468-1478), War of the Castilian Succession (1475-79) in Iberian Peninsula, The Mad War (1485-88) in France, Italian Wars (1494-98, 1499-1504, 1521-26, 1536-38, 1542-46, 1551-59), Swedish War of Liberation (1521-23), Ottoman-Hapsburg wars (more than two hundred years from sixteenth century to eighteenth century), German Peasants' War (1524-25), Rough Wooing (1543-1550) between England and Scotland, French Wars of Religion (1562-1598), Nordic Seven Years' War (1563-70) in Scandinavia, Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) between the Spain and the Dutch provinces, Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604), Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) between many European states were the remarkable ones. In addition, local rebellions and feuds were part of the crisis as well.

[36] Jeremy Black, "Warfare, Crisis, and Absolutism", *Early Modern Europe,* ed Euan Cameron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 219-20.

[37] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World,* 22.

Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox churches became subjects to the state and lost their ability to protect themselves from the power/pressure of absolutist monarchies. In the course of time, rulers did not need the established churches anymore to legitimate their majestic policies or to consult on any issues that were either internal or external. This structural differentiation was of vital importance with regard to the retreat of religion to a great extent since the church had always had the right to interfere in many social areas such as health, public administration, education, and diplomacy during the medieval period right up to the emergence of absolute states. In many territories, the power of the papacy as a state within a state declined in the course of time and thus its prestige and authority had been damaged drastically. The monarchs' political power helped them realize their own objectives within their realms without taking into account the suggestions/reservations from the Church. It would be necessary to mention two striking examples that indicate how the Church had lost its position in parallel to the rise of absolute monarchies throughout the thirteenth century. Edward I of England (1272-1307) and Philip IV of France (1285-1314) were the first two sovereigns who taxed the Church in their lands to obtain more revenue for the wars. Since it signified that the Church was no longer superior to these kings, this was symbolically meaningful and a very critical point in the history of the Church. The other symbolic incident was the imprisonment of a French bishop by King Philip IV. It carries a symbolic meaning on the grounds that passing judgement on a clergyman had been the prerogative of the Church rather than a non-religious authority for centuries. In trying to send a bishop to jail, Philip IV implicitly exerted his power over the Church.[38] In the seventeenth century, many cases that had been reserved for the ecclesiastical courts were already reassigned to non-ecclesiastical courts in France and England. By starting to rule on marriage and inheritance cases, the royal courts implicitly declared their supremacy over the ecclesiastical courts.[39]

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[38] Perry, et al. *Western Civilization,* 247.

[39] T. W. Riker, *A Short History of Modern Europe.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 51-52.

All these transformations related to the emergence of absolute mo-
narchs inevitably created problems for the future of religion. However, this
does not mean that absolute monarchs had the same secular culture as that
of modern states. As Geoffrey Parker explains, many political crises that
occurred at the very beginning of modern times were the result of religious
disagreement.[40] According to the resolution of the religious peace treaty of
Augsburg in 1555, the church of the people should be the same as that of
their monarch. This formula increased the tension due to the conversion
of masses and investigation of individuals who were not eager to change
churches. Throughout the seventeenth century, 1494 special inquisitions
were held in Venice to punish those with heterodox religious views. In
Spain, there was a religious office called "Holy", which was composed of
22 tribunals from Europe to South America. Broadly speaking, 150,000
cases were handled between 1550 and 1700 by these tribunals. To say that
most of these cases were handled on account of information provided by
very ordinary people such as neighbors might help give us an idea of how
religion was still influential in public life even under these absolute mo-
narchies. Jewish practices, witchcraft, Protestantism, bigamy, sodomy and
adultery were the religious or moral deviances that were handled by the
Inquisitions. "(...) the Inquisition", Parker adds,

> created great unease among a large number of people. Arrest was ar-
> bitrary, usually the consequence of an anonymous denunciation; trial usu-
> ally proved unpleasant, and sometimes fatal; and any discovery of guilt
> was punished by confiscation of goods, public humiliation and perpetual
> infamy.[41]

Therefore, although the rise of absolute monarchies strictly constrained
the Church's area of influence just as the Renaissance and the Reformation
had done, European societies still held on to their religious susceptibility
by the end of the seventeenth century. However, another powerful social
dynamics, of which the consequences were troublesome for the teachings

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[40] Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis 1598–1648* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), 49.
[41] Parker, *Europe in Crisis 1598–1648*, 49-50.

and doctrines of religion, came on the scene during the seventeenth and eighteenth century as well: the Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment Age, and Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

This article does not claim that the three dynamics mentioned above, The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Absolute Monarchs, are solely responsible for the decrease in the political power and prestige of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, it is certain that various historical dynamics also played a role in the process. However, it can be said that these three dynamics were at the forefront in terms of undermining the monumental power possessed by the Church. Over a period of approximately 200 years, the kings previously enthroned by the Pope either formed their own churches or declared their independence from the Papacy. The internal political matters of kingdoms were put beyond the reach of the Papacy. Kings took upon themselves the authority to put members of the Church on trial, let alone being declared heretics. In the process, beginning with the Renaissance, the fields of thought and culture began to distance themselves from the Church. The Church was not regarded as the sole institution for salvation and eternal happiness anymore, and the concept of an intermediary institution between God and men became defunct for almost half of the continent. The teachings of the Church were now questionable, and the Church could be openly opposed by anyone. The influence of the Church in economic matters also diminished as a result of particularly geographical recalculations. Although freedom from religion persisted, religious freedom became a right for all European peoples.

The outcomes of these historical dynamics, which can be considered as the initiators of the social-economic-political modernization of Europe, were undoubtedly beyond the Catholic Church. However, for the sake of the article, the effects of these three dynamics on the Church were evaluated only in general in the present study.

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