MACHIAVELLI'S ROMAN NOSTALGIA AND HIS CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY

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You, gods, are destructive...
Homer, *Illiad*, Book 24

It takes a wise man to recognize a wise man
Xenophanes

I can do no other than marvel and grieve
Machiavelli, Preface to *Discourses on Livy*

1. What's in a Name?

The name of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) has been long accepted by the grand historic pantheon of the recognized names-metaphors. These names, despite their status in the collective memory bank of our shared cultural history and being the driving force in the intellectual advancement, carry such a plethora of multiple meanings, that they still confuse with their allusions and mythology-based conceptions. And, Machiavelli, as one of such iconic figures in the intellectual history, still stands in world historiography as a giant sphinx, a person-enigma, posing an exciting intellectual challenge and being worthy of the scholarly scrutiny even in the "all-knowing" 21st century. This Florentine author who had inspired Cromwell, Hobbes, Bacon, Ferdinando Galiani, Giambattista Vico and Adam Smith, also interested Herder, Leibnitz, Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Nietzsche. He used to fascinate Russian Count Peter Tolstoy (1645-1742), Karl Marx, and revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Chicerin, and later, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, and the post-modern Chicago and Frankfurt schools representatives. Eventually, Machiavelli would acquire such a universal acclaim that his chameleon-type image enter history, art, politics, philosophy and even world literature. Moreover, the name-sign Machiavelli has invaded the popular American culture and mass media to such an extent that it is quite frequently used, in a rather cavalier fashion, by people who are totally removed from philosophy per se and Machiavelli himself. Citing Machiavelli's *Il principe* has become a matter of prestige among all post-modern political commentators and journalists.

But, according to Giuseppe Prezzolini, one of the leading historians of Italian culture and Machiavelli's biographer, Machiavelli still remains "one of the most misinterpreted thinkers of the world," who had been, "save for the few exceptions, universally hated" as well (1967:4;194). The 20th-century Anglo-American political science, where Machiavelli is a familiar household name and a phenomenon, maintains his passionately misconstrued historic portrait, spreading the established ambiguous misinterpretations and myths.

The thus created fundamental "Machiavelli- problem" stems from the fact that there is the major and minor Machivelli. The latter is the over-read and the over- quoted author of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*; while the major Machiavelli— the tragic mourner of the glorious antiquity, the admirer of Homer, Ausonius, Apuleus, Plutarch and the thoughtful poet of the pagan Rome — still seriously challenges a intellectual and cultural European and world history. The major one is a gap in our knowledge of European cultural history and geopolitics, it the Machiavelli who dared to condemn Christianity and view the one thousand and four hundred years of Italian and European history as a regrettable detour- cycle in the development of the Western civilization. This Machiavelli remains rather obscure. To him, the less known and rather obscure Machiavelli, the present discursive gesture is devoted. The main goal of this paper lies not so much in explaining the reasons for his universally misconstrued negative portrait or even hatred of Machiavelli since 1527, nor on dwelling on his nearly satanic image of numerous treatises throughout history, but in revealing the Machiavellian forgotten wisdom and his profound insights into European history and civilization.. His views on religion, society and state politics, deeply rooted in the knowledge of ancient history — the Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Greek, Hebrew and Roman — and philosophy, deeply erudite and penetrating, are surprisingly relevant and illuminating for the post-modern Zeitgeist, mired in the religious battles of the past. The wisdom the Renaissance sage Machiavelli is particularly needed at a time when darkness and abyss of ignorance are lifting their ugly heads, threatening to destroy the very foundation of the entire human civilization

2. The Myth of Machiavelli and Machiavellianism

In Prezzolini's view, the legend of Machiavelli was first construed by Giovio (1483-1552), one of his first biographers, whom Benedetto Croce labeled as a "collector of the classical lore."

His rather flawed rendition had survived unchallenged up until the 19th century. While outside Florence and Italy, as far as the international image of Machiavelli is concerned, the English translations and criticism were most instrumental in spreading the harmful myth of Machiavelli as "an evil master of political intrigues." The first public English translation of *Il principe*, read as *Maxims of the State*, was executed by Edward Dacresni in 1640, while another edition, attributed to Raleigh, appeared in 1658, under the title of *The Cabinet Council* (M. Drabble, 1985:602).

Since then, the English would develop a rather negative and quite hostile attitude to the famous Florentine, tying him to the French Huguenot Gentillet, whose selective translations from *Il Principe*, had allegedly spread Machiavelli's seditious thought all over Europe. Later, Christopher Marlowe's (1564-93) notorious play, *The Jew of Malta*, would expose the presumably evil nature and mean spiritedness of Machiavelli. In the 20th century, Herbert Wells revived the same trope in his novel, *The New Machiavelli* (1911). The English traditionally imagined and presented Machiavelli as the master of statecraft, "the earthly fallen brother," scheming his ambitious state-building and obsessed with the acquisition of power and control. The English version of *Il principe* is largely responsible for the contemporary post-modern myth of Machiavelli— the master of political machinations, conniving strategies and manoeuvring— the model politician, as well as for the vulgar "machiavellism" cultural phenomenon.

The 1987- Canadian edition of Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary provides the standard meaning of the word "machiavellism" :

> "the view that politics is amoral and that any means, however
> unscrupulous, can justifiably be used in achieving political power,"
> while the term "Maciavellian," in the same dictionary, suggests
> "the principles of conduct laid down by Machiavelli, specifically
> characterized by cunning, duplicity, or bad faith" (1987:713).

The origin of these entries could be traced to 1626 and, perhaps, to the later popular reaction to the first English translation of *Il principe*. Since then, the Anglo- American cultural tradition has failed to restore the author's authentic intellectual persona and his true character. The Machiavelli misleading myth has invaded the public domain in the form of the hackneyed and universally misconstrued verbal icon, reaching the level of a cliche. But even a perfunctory

interpretation of the standard meaning of the term debunks the mythical and made- banal Machiavelli, as well as the pervasive stereotype that has been ruling over the scholarly and public imagination for more than four centuries.

3. Machiavellian Actual Crusade

Despite the myth, the demonic image and misconceptions about this remarkable Florentine diplomat and Renaissance thinker, Machiavelli actually possessed the most uniquely exciting and a rather non-chameleon like personality, a very honest and courageous one. A very original thinker and a visionary, with clearly articulated thoughts, Machiavelli dared to carve his own way and take the "path yet untrodden by anyone" (1996:5). Very few scholars today are aware of the fact that Machiavelli's open critique of Christianity and public condemnation superceded Galileo's letter about the irrelevance of the Biblical passages to scientific discovery (1614) and his trial by Inquisition (1633), having anticipated Giordano Bruno's infamous execution on Feb.17, 1600! Giuseppe Prezzolini claims that Algarotti likened Machiavelli even to the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), so revolutionary was his reputation in history of ideas and European civilization (Prezzolini, 1967:7). It is only today, in the world, torn by the religious conflicts and facing the possible destruction of our advanced civilizations, it is possible to appreciate fully the genius of Machiavelli and the true value of his stand on religion and Christianity. Prezzolini acknowledges that

> there "have been many thinkers who have combated
> Christianity because of its dogma, or its political activity
> [and yet]. Except for Machiavelli, no one until Nietzsche
> in the 19th century opposed it for its ethics (1967:26).

Deeply dissatisfied with the atmosphere of hypocrisy and intellectual passivity of his day, Machiavelli blamed Christianity for all the cultural, political and social decline. In his preface to *On the Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli outlined the main purpose of his analytical and historical recourse into the pagan Roman past— to condemn Christianity as the stifling force, which had, in his view, brought about "weakness to the world" and intellectual stagnation, having deprived it from the past energy and achievement, and having, instead, plunged the world "into a state of ambitious idleness" (1996). Machiavelli diagnosed the etiology of malignity of the cultural

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climate of his day, stemming, in his view, from the monotheistic tyranny, the domination of the Christian religion and the all-pervasive control of the Catholic church. From the start, he alerted his readers about his intentions to expose the harmful impact of the Christian religion on society. According to him, the triumphant Christianity essentially discouraged reading, learning, the acquisition of knowledge about the ancient Roman history, having brought about the general atmosphere of the greatest unfreedom, censorship and obscurantism. In the 15th century, Machiavelli reminded his Renaissance contemporaries about the freedom of thought and creativity that used to reign in the ancient Rome, having gradually disappeared with the adoption of Christianity.

In his section 12 of the Book One of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli sets to explain or pass his judgement on the Christian Church that had allegedly ruined the Italian civilization By Italy, Machiavelli meant the pre-Christian Roman Empire or the proto-cultural layer of Western civilization. In his view, the productive non-interfering ancient pagan religion was the fluid polydeistic system of beliefs, founded on "the responses of the oracles, and on the sect of the diviners and augurs" or on the cumulative wisdom of the wise pagans — the Egyptians, the Etruscans, the Phoenicians, and the Greeks. Machiavelli argued: had the Christian Republic been more respectful of the founding pagan religions, the "Christian states and republics would be more united, much happier than" than they were in his day (1996:37). He regarded Christian rulers as inept and unwise spiritual dictators, who had ignored the essence and cultural foundation of the converted, having brought ruin to them and even to themselves. Machiavelli also exposed the hypocrisy of the church fathers, who seemed to have "had less religion than even the ordinary citizens."

Centuries before the Enlightenment and the conception of the religion-negating Marxism, Machiavelli had pointed out to the spirit-weakening impact of Christianity as the ideology of passivity, passive obedience, submission, stupor, and existential resignation, castrating the energy of the able-bodied and action- minded men:

> This mode of life thus seems to have rendered the world
> weak and given it in prey to criminal men, who can manage
> it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men could go to
> paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than
> of avenging them (1996, II, 2:131).

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Looking back at the Roman past and appraising it, Machiavelli vehemently, boldly, and courageously attacked Christianity, as the most oppressive sect, which had "persecuted all the ancient memories, burning the works of the poets and historians, having ruined many visual images and spoiled every other thing that might convey some sign of antiquity (1996: D, II, 5.1). Thus, as it appears from Machiavelli's message, the major crime, committed against culture by Christianity, was in the destruction of the rich cultural artifacts of antiquity and tempering with the collective memory of the advanced civilization.

It is of interest that Machiavelli juxtaposes Christians and Gentiles in the non-traditional manner. By "gentiles" he actually means pagans, and by "pagans" he implies the descendants of the Hebrews. This new signification enables him to restore the historical context of the Roman Empire, which had been ruined by the descendants of the very people, colonized by the Romans. He never mentions Judea, but Christians, in his parlance, are the despised former slaves of the Romans, who had eventually ruined Rome with their rituals and   powerful sect ideology. Machiavelli could not comprehend how could the urban and highly civilized Rome have ultimately   adopted the religion of the rural, semi-nomadic and backward tribe, formerly ruled by and attempted to be assimilated by the Roman Empire. The ferocity with which, Christians, the descendants of the ancient Hebrews, would later destroy the art, poetry, memory and culture of the pagan antiquity, far surpassing the Roman atrocities against the Etruscans. Following Livy, Machiavelli believed that the Etruscans, just as so many others before them, were creatively assimilated into the Roman Empire, their artistic heritage and technical skills had been acknowledged by the Romans (1996 :n.139).

Having preserved Latin in the church liturgy and having given it the status of the new sacred tongue, in lieu of the Aramaic and Hebrew, the fathers of the Church used it as the instrument of cultural manipulation. Machiavelli mourned the sad day when Christianity was made a single state religion. In his view, the major cultural crime of Christianity against civilization was not in the creation of the "effeminate race" of the inactive people, as Nietzsche would imply in the 19th century, but in erasing the long cultural collective memory of the "undaunted" Romans and their cultural forefathers— the Etruscans, Phoenicians, and Greeks. In the mid 15th century, before the trials of Galileo and Giordano Bruno, Machiavelli had ruthlessly

tore off the mask of propriety from the priests, monks, cardinals, and their secular allies. The roots of his intellectual rebellion lie in antiquity itself. Giuseppe Prezzolini holds that "Machiavelli resembles Polybius (204?-122 B.C.) more than any other writer of antiquity" who is known to have defined religion as deception (1967: 93-94).

Earlier, the same idea came to Dante, who articulated it metaphorically in his *The Divine Comedy,* while Machiavelli, much fond of Dante, produced his own, a much bolder critique of Christianity and monotheism, having anticipated the anti-clericalism of European Enlightenment by several centuries. Later, he would give courage to Voltaire, inspire Montesquieu, intrigue Rousseau, Spinoza, Bacon and Nietzsche. The power of Machiavelli's thought, condemning Christianity and its danger for the church-ruled society was understood very early on. The Catholic cardinals were the first to denounce him publicly. Upon having read *The Prince*, Cardinal Rinald Pole (1500- 1558) had allegedly labeled the work a "Satanic opus", likening Machiavelli to Satan's son: "if Satan himself had had a son for a successor, I do not know what other maxims he could pass on to him"(1967:199). Later on, the Jesuits, who ironically would be called "Machiavellian", had placed Machiavelli's works on the **Index Librorum Prohibitorum** or the list of prohibited books**.**

4. Mourning the Ancient Gods

O felici romani! O felici tempi! (O, happy Romans! O, felici tempi!), wrote Machiavelli in his *I capitoli*, having summarized there his perpetual state of nostalgia, cultural and spiritual longing for the glorious Roman past, inspiring his followers, centuries later, to chart the future secular Europe. Machiavelli's gaze was habitually and fondly drawn towards the pagan antiquity. Macrizio Viroli, who has recently authored *Niccolo's Smile, A Biography of Machiavelli* (2000), informs that Machiavelli's thinking, his artistic taste and cultural sensibility had been shaped by the cultural taste of his educated parents: his father was a lawyer; his mother had a poetic gift. The works of Tiberius, Tacitus, Caligula, Nero, Cicero, Plutarch, Nero, and Lucretius were in his father's library, and, having mastered Latin at the age of seven, he read them all (2000:9). Incidentally, Livy's *History of Rome*, the book his father had obtained for his home library, would become Machiavelli's traveling companion in his entire adulthood.

Machiavelli lived in the constant comparative cultural universe, juxtaposing his constant admiring gaze into antiquity and a daring critical look at his own contemporary reality, regularly drawing parallels between the ancient polydivine free age and the tyrannical monotheism. Later, in the poem *De Romiti*/ The hermits, he would compare, what he saw as the van romori/ empty stories of the Bible, and the rich pagan literary legacy of the Greeks and Romans. He rejected the main line of what had become the sacred European narrative, having returned the archetypal Christian hell and heaven to the simple and clear Aristotelian natural universe — the sky, air, water, and earth. Machiavelli mocked the powers of the overrated new modern deity, inviting the naive followers of Christ to climb his own spiritual mountain, just to see the logical natural Aristotelian universe, without the sinners and devils, without the sacrifice of the earthly pleasures. The Florentine thinker mourned the destruction of the old pre-Christian divine pantheon, the death of the ancient Graeco-Roman authentic deities, the products of free artistic imagination, a collage of the Phoenician, Egyptian and Etruscan mythological legacy.

His *Capitoli Pastorale* eulogizes antiquity and its rich artistic legacy. Machiavelli's sacred Apollo, a clone of the good Apollo from Dante's "The Paradise," is the negation of the most political and tyrannical god-Christ and his act of empowering the Renaissance poet and thinker. It is a Renaissance hymn to the ancient wisdom, beauty, and the unsurpassable and inexhaustible creativity of the forgotten civilization. His *Capitoli Pastorale* parodies the expected genre— instead of the bucolic beauty of the countryside- worship, Machiavelli invites into the rich world of the far removed antiquity and into his reinvented universe of the Roman mythology. He sings his panegyric to the Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter, to Vulcan, the Roman god of fire, Hephastus, to Gammele, the beautiful cupbearer and satellite of Jupiter, Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture and a Roman equivalent of the Greek Artemise. Blessed by the omnipotent ancient muses, he sings the song of praise, honoring the ancient gods and goddesses, who had been, in his view, undeservingly displaced by the monotheistic deity of the Judean shepherds. With great ingenuity, Machiavelli exploits the mythological universe of various cultures, alluding to the ancient Mediterranean and European history, to different times, places, and people. His pseudo- pastoral song is the antithesis to the Biblical narrative, the reincarnated voice of the urban Roman poet, who juxtaposes the ancient urban pagan mythology and the rural

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tale of the ultimate spiritual colonizers.

His Iacinto/Hyacinthus, a youth, accidentally killed by Apollo, subtly embodies the rich mythological world of the Greeks and Romans, which had been destroyed by the new divine system of the Judeo-Christian origin:

> *O sacro Apollo, e da tue forze, io voglio spenderlo*
> *in far al tuo Iacinto honore. Iacinto, il nome tuo celebrar*
> *soglio e per farne memoria a chiunque vive lo scrive in*
> *ogni tronco, in ogni scoglio;*
> *Dipoi le tue bellezze egregie e dive e le tua opre atte ad*
> *Honorare qualunque di te parla o di te scrive.*
>
> (O, sacred Apollo, if I am helped with your force,
> Hyacinthus I wish to honor in my hymn.
> Hyacinthus, your name I've always sing and
> To make it remember all the time,
> Let it be written on every rock and each trunk)

Machiavelli sings his requiem to the forgotten splendor, the lost harmony, the destroyed beauty, and spoiled enchantment of the ancient world, displaced by the gloomy grey universe of the ritual-minded priests, in charge of the taste, shape, color, melody and rhythms of culture, controlling every aspect of public and private life. In contrast, the pagan gods, who used to be versatile and varied, with multiple functions and roles to play, accorded to them by men, did not interfere with the human existential drama of society. Their Olympus was an aesthetic addendum to the secular societal structure, celebrating human imagination and creativity, empowering human Reason and will to act. Machiavelli writes a nearly musical oratorio to the Greek and Roman deities, who were likened to Caesar in their talents

> *Marte feroce onde tu piu viluci,*
> *Nel neneroso petto un core incluse,*
> *Simile a Cesar,duca alli altri duci.*
>
> (O, Ferocious Mars, you came from
> Those whose heart is valiant, shining
> As much as Caesar, the emperor among
> emperors.)

One may hear the echo of Dante's *Monarchia*, as well as the wisdom of Livy, Tacitus,

Herodotus, or Cicero, enriched by the respect and knowledge of Aristotle, Euripides, Polybius, Plutarch, and many other intellectual luminaries of the ancient past. Contrary to the myth and the hackneyed Machiavellianism phenomenon, one cannot hear a single false note in his divine poetic symphony to his glorious and beloved Rome. Machiavelli "never dogmatically claimed to possess the truth," as his biographer M. Viroli states. But he, indeed, possessed it when it came to the analysis of the long-term impact of Christianity upon art, history, and politics. Placing Machiavelli in today's context of the global affairs and the multiple conflicts, mired in religion, belief, myth, and cultural and ethical dissonance, one may claim that he had actually unwittingly acquired truth about the future of humanity, while gazing nostalgically onto the Roman past.

After all, Machiavelli, this little-known, wise and courageous seer and poet, is more real and important than the archetypal, banal and vulgarized political scientist-machinator, the product of the English-speaking cultural universe. He implicitly reserved the right of every state to invent one's own system of governance, and the right of every tribe to have one's own set of sacred places in order to enjoy the existential theatre. The alleged hated "son of Satan," Machiavelli smiles at us with his all-seeing smile of Mona Lisa, mocking our lack of understanding of the Past and of the old pre-Christian poetic wisdom. He could not fathom why we had to abandon "even man's names of Caesar and Pompey for Peter, John, Matthew," or why the new divine pantheon had even to invade the domain of the most private, affecting even naming of one's children? (1910:12-13). In his *History of Florence*(1525), Machiavelli openly stated that, by having become a Christian, Emperor Constantine "had actually set the course of the destruction of the Roman Empire. Moreover, Machiavelli poetically and succinctly diagnosed how the inferior Other could ruin even the most powerful via meddling with the Divine.

Antonio Possevino (1534-1611) warned us to "beware of the works of Machiavelli as well of those writers against him by an anti-Machiavelli, without signing them"(1967:206). Paraphrasing him, one may conclude: "Beware of Machiavelli, he may have been simply telling the unpleasant and undesired Truth." For centuries, the Judeo-Christian discourse, contained in a single sacred treatise, has been keeping the tyrannical hold on the artistic expression of the entire European continent — literatures, music, visual art, philosophy, architecture, sculpture

and architecture. Machiavelli's nostalgia over the pagan pre-Christian Graeco-Roman past fits the ethos and developments in the pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment Europe, anticipating it by two centuries. He possessed and articulated his vision of another European cultural phase. Machiavelli may be the cultural antecedent of another European rebirth. His chorus of Zeus, Athena, Venus, Jupiter and Mars... is the beautiful poetic aria in his revived existential opera of the enlightened and wise ancients, unlike the monotonous tyranny of the Judaic, Christian or later Islamic worship.

5. The Roots of Machiavelli's Anti- Christian Stance

The roots of Machiavellian attitude towards monotheism and religion in general have to be sought in the ancient pre-Christian debates on belief, rituals, and values. Polybius (?210- 128 BC), the Achaean statesman whose thought Machiavelli greatly admired, already held very strong and skeptical views on religion. He regarded religion as a necessary form of mass delusion, albeit helping to "check upon the common people"   Or an instrument of societal control:

> Seeing that every multitude is fickle, and full of lawless desires,
> Unreasoning anger, and violent passion, the only resource is to keep
> them in check by mysterious terrors and scenic effects of the sort
> (E.Bevan, ed.,1927:77).

Having anticipated Gustav Le Bon and Karl Marx by nearly 2000 years, Polybius endorsed the Roman condescending attitude to the religious rituals and their recognition of the need to display belief or pseudo-belief publicly and festively.   Polybius, a Machiavellian intellectual idol, quite admired   the Roman carnival traditions and their respect for the homo ludens or the playful man, enjoying the public spectacle and his spontaneous participatory theatricality. It is not in vain that the bread-and-circus principle was widely employed by the Romans to glue their multiracial, multicultural and multireligious empire together.

With the spread of Christianity, the debate on God, belief and the religious intensified. As reported by Clitomachus of Carthage (180-110 BC), Sextus Empiricus, the disciple of Academic Carneadis (?- 129 BC), unequivocally stated :

> We [sceptics] speak of the gods as existing and offer worship

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> to the gods and say that they exercise providence, but in saying
> this we express belief, and avoid the rashness (propeteia) of the
> dogmatizers (E.Bevan, ed., 1927:52)

Thus, it was clear to this ancient thinker that the spreading idea of dogmatic theology and monotheism, coming from Asia, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Tarsus— was nothing but unsubstantiated dogma. Empiricus argued that "nobody could think of a horse, if he did not know by previous acquaintance what a horse looked like" (ibid). And, yet, the deity whom nobody had actually seen is being offered for worship in a human form. He demolished the dogmatics for their inability to even try to prove the existence of god, nor his perfection for, " if they say God controls everything, they make him the author of evil things as well." And God who could be the master of evil cannot be the symbol of the ideal and perfect. The omnipotent God, if any, in his view, would have been able to control evil and be the creator of the paradise on Earth, in Here and Now.

A little later, one of the admired Roman poets-philosophers, Titus Lucretius (?99- 55 BC), openly lamented the loss of the free-spirited polytheism and Hellenistic, essentially marginal, Olympus. Lucretius worshiped the Greek man who had installed the Law, Order and Morality and had elevated Human Mind/NOUS. Lucretius sings his hymn to the homo sapiens in the image of the Greek man-thinker when he writes the following:

> When Man's life upon the Earth in base dismay,
> Crushed by the burden of Religion, lay,
> Whose face ....
> Hung...
> One Greek man...
> His spirit's valiance, till he longed the Gate
> To burst of this low prison of man's fate
> And thus the living ardour of his mind
> Conquered..
> ......
> Consequently, he returned to make man see
> At last what can, what cannot come to be;
> By what law to each Thing its power hath been
> Assigned, and what deep boundary set between;
> Till underfoot is tamed Religion trod,
> And, by His victory, Man ascends to God
> (E.Bevan, ed.,1927:52).

Lucretius, as if anticipating the centuries of Christian cultural censorship and domination, appeals here to Human Reason. It is only nous/ mind, capable of making man divine due to one's power to think, analyze, imagine and create, could have improved human life. Man's code of civilized behavior, worked out in the process of the painful ascendance from the primitive natural stage, via the millennia of trial and error, finally brought the optimal conduct and societal dynamics, securing one's individual and collective needs and development in harmony with the common Good. The ardour and power of human mind have developed Law and Value, aimed at perfecting and balancing both humans and their other biological neighbor species in a harmonious habitat. It is only man, says Lucretius, unburdened by Religion and having tamed its underlying tyranny and prejudice, could be empowered to see, to act and to live in a truly perfect or divine manner. Freedom lies in the universe of human mind and unrestricted analysis, and man may overturn one's fate, somewhat modify one's biological imperative through Thought, Reflection, Wisdom and Willed Action for the sake of the Good. It is this Roman humanistic philosophy that had given strength to Machiavelli who dared, like Lucretius, to sing again his own hymn to Man and Human Mind.

He could find inspiration and solace even in the post-Christian Greek man of letters, such as Lucian (?120-200 AD), a native of Samosata on the Euphrates, who had been regarded a kindred spirit of Voltaire (E.Bevan, ed., 1927:162). With his ardent passion, did he dismiss the religiosity of the Christian era and that of the previous ages, having labeled it   the "endless confusion. "While enumerating beliefs, as numerous as believers in history of the world, Lucian found them nothing but "ridiculous." Lucian labeled Christianity a "queer creed" of worshiping "the crucified sage" and, what was more serious— the collective betrayal of the Graeco-Roman cultural legacy. Earlier than anybody else, Lucian exposed the hypocrisy of the new state religion, preaching poverty and humility and communal sharing of wealth while unscrupulously accumulating one's own institutional wealth. Machiavelli who had been living in 15th-century Florence personally witnessed the contradictions between the dogma and the life of the dogmatics, as well as observed the grave cultural consequences of the tyrannical faith, which Lucian perceptively sensed twelve centuries prior.

Machiavelli was convinced that the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations have always stood and would continue to stand in   European collective cultural memory   and in the world cultural history as the cultural progenitors of the Western civilization. To him, they simultaneously represented all that the perfect and unsurpassed in culture, i.e. art, sculpture, architecture, advanced elaborate philosophy and sophisticated proto-science, as well as the **ideal secular societies** where gods were never above men, peacefully co-existing with all human beings, both powerful and powerless.   Machiavelli   perceived the ancient pagans self-assured enough in their wisdom to govern themselves in a civilized manner, while keeping religion and deities on the margins and at bay from politics, law and economics. The adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire by Emperor Constantine in the mid 4th century AD marked what Machiavelli would later define as the beginning decline of the Roman and entire European civilization. What was viewed by Constantine as a useful political compromise of the moment would turn out to be the endorsement of a permanent and all-encompassing control over the entire European cultural expression. From then on, the European culture had been evolving in the presence of the most powerful **counter-cultural force**, embodied in the Church and religious doctrine, acting as a **censor** of all cultural and societal processes. The easygoing flippant pagan deities of the pre-Christian era, who used to live on the margins, acting as carnivalesque characters, dominating the feasts, celebrations and sensuous pleasures, had been later replaced by the tyrannical and most political single deity-Christ- and the most powerful and oppressive institution of the Christian Church, the offshoot of the Judaic sects in the remote areas of the Roman Empire. Since the 4th century the new edifice of the Judeo-Christian doctrine not only molded the rich ancient spirituality into the most regimented monotheism, but   had the most profound impact on the future cultural development, later marked by the centuries of the double tyranny and the **digressed cultural pathway**. Centuries before the persecution of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1648) by the Inquisition, Machiavelli apprehended the **cultural detour**, caused by the adoption of Christianity, and the one of the very few, dared to articulate it openly.

Machiavelli though drew his inspiration and courage also from Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) who had poetically revised the entire continental history in his *Divine Comedy*. (This is also another blasphemous proposition for mainstream historians.) Dante, a sacrificial lamb of the Florentine and

Roman politics, a refugee from the war between the Blacks and the Whites, a victim of political reprisals, dared to ponder about the "world without Christian faith", without the state within the state and its tyranny, placing his very subtle critique of Christianity into the **subtext** of what would later become the Italian national analogue of the Iliad.

For centuries, up until the Enlightenment, the discourse about religion, faith and spirituality was an anathema, and most cultural critics and philosophers never considered the analysis of the anti-clerical motifs in the early Medieval literature, particularly in Dante. Today, it is possible to suggest another postmodern reading of some parts in Dante's masterpiece as a comedy of European **cultural errors** and an embedded nostalgic dream over the idyllic mythical Ausonia, the shared home of the ancient Etruscans, the descendants of the Troyans and the Tyrians/Sidonians, whose imagination freely reigned in the polydeistic universe. Dante's *The Divine Comedy,* in this respect, offers numerous exciting possibilities which may have been obvious to Machiavelli despite the cultural and ecclesiastical constrains of his time.

Emancipated from the watchful supervision of the Church, a postmodern secular reader may revisit the Dantean universe of the Divine Comedy, viewing it literally as another comedy, a well-crafted entertaining plot from the Graeco-Roman past, tied together to the imaginary Phoenician, Etruscan, Greek and Roman histories with the Hebraic intrusion into the Roman and European cultural development. Machiavelli may have understood the purpose of his voyage through Hell and Paradise as an attempt to connect many worlds into one— the distant Troy, Rome, Carthage, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Rome of Augustus and Constantine, and Christian Rome, overseen by the Pope and known to Dante's contemporaries in Florence and Venice, Genoa and Naples, Pisa, and Milan.

Dante, born into the family of Guelphs, the Florentine faction of church supporters, produced some intriguing passages in his *Divine Comedy* that paradoxically reveal his critique of the Church and her negative role in European public and private life, her culture, politics and economics. It is not incidental that Dante's a guide through the Inferno was not a religious prophet, but a poet, not Christ, but Virgil (70 BC-19 BC), a native of Mantua, a descendant of the glamorous and mysterious Etruscans and the author of the legendary *Aeneid*. Dante makes him confess the following:

> *Non uomo gia fui,*
> *e li parenti miei furon lombardi,*

Mantovani per patria ambedui
Nacqui sub Julio, ancor che fosse tardi,
e vissi a Roma sotto buono Augosto,
nel tempo de lui di'ei falsi e bugliardi
Poeta fui e cantai di quel giusto
figlinol d'Anchese che venne di Troya
(Dante, Canto 1,1980:6).

The imaginary Virgil, Dante's guide, the child of Lombardian parents with ties to Troy, Rome of Julius and Rome of Augustus, was a wise pagan. This chosen guide, a poet, assists Dante in forging the poetic historical link, between the mythical Troy, the Troyan exiles to Mantua and the Augustian Rome, as a bridge between the pre-Christian glorious Roman past and the Christian Florentine present of Dante and his contemporaries.

At the gates of the imagined Christian hell, the pagan poet Virgil, like the Christian God, asks a rightful question:

Ma tue perche ritorni a tante noia? (Canto I)

Dante fantasized about the 1180 BC, the alleged time of the Trojan war, in order to reconnect his Christian present with the pagan ancient past, the past, when Poetry, Art, Love, Song and Dance, and free creativity had not been censored by the "most political" god — Christ. The Dantean recourse to Virgil may be viewed as nostalgia over the abandoned cultural pathway, the lost freedom to sing, think, rejoice in the abandon of Now, and simple Today:

Nel mezzo del camina di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva osccura
(Dante, Canto I:2, 1980)

The "middle of passage through life" could be interpreted differently, not the archetypal existential universal, nor the alleged image of the lost post-Judeo-Christian European community, in the mire of petty conflicts and astray from the moral pathway. The Dantean metaphor could be treated as an image of European civilization, after the centuries of a meek **submission to monotheism.** The allegory of "selva osccura" may be understood as the lost tribe of the Europeans, the descendants of the Graeco-Romans, who had the misfortune of plunging into the dark abyss of the mythological

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mire upon their submission to Belief and Single God of the less advanced nomads. "Selva osccura" could have been the image of the tyrannical Church that had caused the enlightened and creative Graeco-Romans to have lost their "il ben de intelletto"/ the good of intellect in the name of blind Faith. The Dantean subtext and allegorical messages may have projected the essence of the cultural detour in Europe when the monotheistic dogma and her guardians had imposed an atavistic **cultural compass** upon a much more advanced civilization, when the colonizers had paradoxically embraced the inferior mythical code of the colonized. Dante's subtext of his comedy argues that, at the moment of adopting Christianity, the time clock of the European civilization had been actually set back by the mythological offshoot of the relatively young Hebraic mythology. It had replaced the quite marginal deistic family of Athena and Europa, Zeus and Jupiter, Diana and Prometheus, Apollo and Dionysus, Saturn and Mars by the single figure of the tyrannical God at the centre of the public and private life, dictating, supervising and censoring the spiritual, ethical, political, social, and economic discourse, the cultural expression of the entire continent. Having reversed the seat of the Roman Empire from Rome to the Byzantium and having surrendered its might to the single omnipotent Deity, Emperor Constantine had imposed censorship on human intellect of the entire Europe for centuries to come. According to Dante, the eleven centuries since the adoption of Christianity constituted a regrettable gap in the cultural development for the descendants of Troy and Athens, Tyre and Carthage, Naples and Mantua, Rome and Alexandria. This was the period when the "wings of intellect," Dante puts it, became short (corte l'ali) and blind Faith curtailed or totally replaced Human Reasoning.

Dante's observations echo the Aristotelian message in his "Letter to Alexander" where the ancient Greek philosopher had already explained the origin of religion as a system of signs, pointing to Belief rather than Knowledge, the desired escape from Reasoning. The free rational pagans of antiquity had, apparently, already   possessed the notions of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, justice and injustice. Later, they would ultimately surrender their cultural authority to the dogmatic myth of the desperate nomads, yet deprived of the cultural achievements of their proselytized brethren. The Dantean "Paradiso" contains descriptions of the lost secular world without Christ, Christian Church, her followers and spiritual enemies. Apparently, the debate between the followers of Christ and the spiritually free and relatively unattached pagan Graeco-Romans was quite

suppressed in Dantean time, perceived as a heresy, allowed only to be imagined and skillfully hidden in the subtext of a major fictional work. The discussion about the role of priests and poets is not incidental in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The author (himself a religious refugee during the Florentine war (between the pro-Church Guelphs and pro-secular Ghibellines) relives his experience of the real conflict in his imaginary world.

In 1936, several centuries later, Alfonso de Salvio wrote a book *Dante and Heresy* in which he argued that "The Church's conception of the State was absolutely rejected by Dante," for whom "the Romans were God's chosen people"(1936:48). According to A. De Salvio, the entire "Inferno" contained Dante's condemnation of the Church, Popes, Vicars, Cardinals, and monks (1936:53). He also argued that, despite the prohibitions of the Church and contrary to its central dogma of poverty and humility, unashamed materialism flourished in the 13th -century Florence, as well as in Venice and Naples. At a close reading, Dante's placing many pagans in Heaven (Rhipeus, a Tryan hero, Marcus Cato and Trajan) would not have been approved by the Church. According to A.De Salvio, Foscolo and Rossetti, Boissard, Delff, Piper and Graul "saw in Dante a reformer of the Church, a heretic, a socialist, and a precursor of Luther" (A. De Salvio, 1936:125). Many Dante scholars would later overlook these valid and interesting arguments.

A post-modern secular reader may detect in Dante's *The Divine Comedy* even more than subtle condemnation of monotheism, Christianity and Christian Church as a precursor of the anti-clerical stand of the Enlightenment, expressed more vigorously in the rest of Europe than in Italy. The Dantean Paradise daringly constructs the possible world of the secular — "il paradiso senza fede"/ paradise without faith, a universe, void of the tyrannical god, with resurrected Reason, Creativity and educated Imagination of forgotten antiquity. On the eve of the European Renaissance, Dante wondered about the reasons for the educated **Homo sapiens'** entering into the world of blind Belief, Fear and passivity. This led to the spiritual and mythological tyranny and the Reason-suppressing theology when Christian dogmatism had left behind all the poets and sages of antiquity — after Homer and Virgil, Plato and Aristotle, Pythagoras and Cicero, Ennius and Aristophanus, Thales and Zeno and many others. The Dantean "selva oscura" could be seen as an interesting allegorical image of the monotheistic darkness and tyranny of blind Belief, sustained and imposed by the powerful and culture-stifling Church, a secondary institutional layer after the State.

If, in the pagan Roman Empire, gods, the multiple copies of the Greek Olympus, merely prayed for the laymen and simply offered comport, solace and therapeutic enjoyment with occasional feasts, festivals and carnivals, serving as a digression to the otherwise boring daily monotony of existence, the new **umbrella of monotheism** rejected the passive, non-interfering apolitical and marginal status of its predecessors. With the adoption of Christianity, the freedom to govern, think and judge the social and political activity had been taken away from the pagan Romans. Moreover, the political god, Christ, brought into the centre of society, secured the future competition between the other most powerful religious mythologies, such as Judaism and Islam.

To Dante, the guardians of the new tyrannical and most political god, were nothing more than "the ferocious wolves"/fieri lupi, the barbaric forces, keeping intellect, imagination, art and creativity in check. Dante dreamt about the imaginary birthplace of free **Homo sapiens,** allegedly born somewhere in imagined India where

> *un uom nasce a la riva*
> *de 'indo e quevi none chi ragion,*
> *de Christo ne chi legga ne chi scriva*
> *e tutti suoi voleri umana vede,*
> *sanza peccato in vita o in sermoni,*
> *muore non battezzato e sanza fede:*
> *ov'e questa giustizia che'l condanna*
> *ov'e la colpa sua, se ei non crede?*
> (Dante, Paradiso, Canto XIX,:212, 1980)

His imagined birth place of the Christ- free man, placed somewhere, away from Europe, in India, may be viewed as a censorial device and a fictionally-coated image of the possible human history without Christianity, Christian sermon, faith in Christ and punishment for non-belief. Given the fact that the last witch-burning in Italy occurred in 1715, this stanza alone is quite blasphemous for the 12-13th -century Florence and Christian Europe. It poetically records the non-official discourse of the disenchanted descendants of the Roman Empire, forced to sacrifice their freedom to think for the duty to believe, having digressed from their original **cultural pathway,** charted for them by the colonized population of the originally subjugated backward province.

A couple centuries later, in the midst of the European Renaissance, Machiavelli contributed

to the revival of the once glorious and advanced civilization of antiquity by bringing forward the Dantean timid poetic metaphors and cryptic condemnations of Christianized Romans and of the entire Europe. Moreover, Machiavelli turned the Dantean allegories, buried in the subtext, into the unequivocal critique of Christianity, the Hebraic legacy, and a merciless sophisticated postmortem of the Roman decay — another European tragedy. In his famous *History of Florence* (1525), Machiavelli developed Dante's arguments, timidly stated in the subtext, and mourned not only the destruction of the Roman Empire as a political entity, but the consequences of her cultural demise, whose magnitude would be revealed centuries later. The **cultural detour** in the post-Christian Europe, orchestrated by the victorious monotheism and the erection of the secondary powerful political institution of the Church, would last for the next long fourteen centuries.

Having turned priests into tyrants, Christianity and Church would act as cultural and political censor, posing a formidable barrier to free expression and restraining the collective artistic imagination of entire Europe. The "miseri lassi"/wretched creatures, on guard of the religious myth, Christian priests and monks used to control the daily existence of individuals, groups, communities and national states of the entire continent, having paralyzed their vitality, creativity and reasoning. The descendants of Homer and Virgil, Pindar and Aristophanes, the worshipers of Venus and Apollo, Saturn and Jupiter, who had been coerced to embrace the dogma of the hungry and destitute shepherds of the once Rome-ruled Judea, would eventually be taken hostage by the gray and depressing myth of passivity, depriving humans from the enjoyment of the real Now for the sake of the fictional Tomorrow.

Machiavelli brought afore the ideological conflict between the urban settlers of the Adriatic, Ligurian and Tyrrhenian Seas and the rural nomads from the Red Sea region. He firmly believed that the descendants of Pythagoras and Plato, Homer and Virgil, Aristotle and Thales did not need the primitive narrative of Christ. The Hebrew sect outcast had nothing to offer in the realm of human intellect, as the Victorian writer Edward Bulwer Lytton would mention several centuries later. Machiavelli carried the Dantean torch of condemnation of the Judeo-Christian mythology, characterizing the time between 66AD (the destruction of the Judean temple) and the 333AD (the erection of the first Christian basilica in Rome) as a regrettable surrender to the less advanced and yet shaping influential civilization of the Christianized. Much like Dante, two centuries prior,

Machiavelli questioned the usefulness of this cultural leap and the value for the most sophisticated Roman Empire of such sacred Hebrew heroes as Moses, the law giver, Abraham, the model patriarch or David, the king of the prophets. What could they offer to the most advanced urban Roman Empire, which possessed civil, criminal, marine and family laws, unsurpassed by any later modern civilization? The Roman Empire had already established the most advanced and ideal laws and systems of governing and possessed the most complex and advanced cultural expression, far superior to the naive dogmatism of the shaping rural Hebraic society. So, consequently, Machiavelli goes as far as declaring that "instead of Caesar and Pompey we have Peter, Matthew, John etc. (1901:7). This frank emotional one-line pronouncement recorded the profound shift in the heroic pantheon and collective memory of the descendants of the Roman Empire. The historical tables had been changed around- the less advanced civilization of the previously colonized managed not only to displace the old heroes of the colonizers, but change the course of their cultural history. In retrospect, one may witness the steady pattern of displacement throughout history when the mythological worlds of the rural settlers could profoundly alter the course of the more advanced urban established civilizations. Today, the popular global imagination hardly remembers Caesar, Pompey, or even Constantine, Homer, Aristophanus, Aeschiless, Eurepedes or Virgil, Lucretius, for that matter, while the characters of the Bible, the biblical allusions and messages permeate the World literatures and cultures in Europe, Asia, Latin America and even Africa. The younger oral tradition has displaced the earlier written and more advanced civilization. The Judeo-Christian discourse, contained in a single treatise, has been keeping the tyrannical hold of the artistic expression of the entire Europe for centuries — literatures, music, philosophy, architecture and science. Machiavelli's nostalgia over the pagan pre-Christian Graeco-Roman past fits the ethos and developments in the pre-Renaissance Europe, anticipating the Enlightenment and its reasonableness by two centuries. He possesses and articulates his vision of another European cultural phase. Machiavelli is the cultural antecedent of another European rebirth.

6. Montesqueiu's Voice of Reason, Reviving Machiavelli

Machiavelli's belief in the cultural advantages of the Roman Empire and her cultural expansion had the most profound impact on the later thinkers of the European Enlightenment. In

Italy, Machiavelli's concept of cycles would later influence such influential Neapolitan thinker as Giambattista Vico, and in France, Montesquieu, who would also view the world not as a map of the divided separate states, nations and people, but rather as a "society of societies." Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) perceived the entire European continent as a federation of cultural rather political entities. His idea of the United Europe and ultimately of united humanity, originating in the Graeco-Roman antiquity, is very visibly akin to Machiavelli's syncretized image of the world. If Machiavelli regarded city and urbanization within the Roman Empire as an engine of civilization and progress, Montesquieu took his thesis and image of the Imperial unity one step further, having conceived the idea of the intercontinental unity. However, this unity was cemented by the known historic achievements of the Romans.

His treatise *L'esprit des lois* brings into the discourse of the Enlightenment the ancient formulations of law, order, ethics and morality, articulated in the Roman laws of the pre-Christian era, which later served as the foundational base for the European continental civilization. Montesquieu reminded that already in pagan Athens "there were guardians of the public morals, as well as of the laws." Similarly, the Roman censors were the defenders of Virtue and Order, and that the "Roman laws required to make the accusations of adultery public "(1900: 48, vol. I). According to Montesquieu, morality and civility of society could be judged by its marriage and family laws. In the post-modern imagination, such values are mistakenly associated with the Judeo-Christian codes and the Biblical dictum. But Montesquieu informed his 18th-century readers that ancient Greece and Rome already had quite advanced family laws, in fact, protecting the rights of women far better than any later post-Christian societies and post-Enlightenment Europe would ever do. For instance, Montesquieu was mesmerized by the Pappian Law, added on by Tiberius, aimed at protecting the rights of older women. The norms of ancient Roman civility, encoded in this particular law, excluded marriage of a male in his sixties to a female under fifty, protecting thus the disadvantaged older women, who could no longer compete with the younger females, securing some civilizing order in sexual politics of the Empire. None of the later Judeo-Christian codes of civility would ever protect the sexual unions of the older female gender, never mind the prescriptive ethics and adequate family laws, defending their rights. The Judeo-Christian code, with its repeated focus on sin, sinfulness and corrupt nature of a woman, her innate capacity for adultery and transgression,

throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, profoundly affected the civil codes of Europe and the value systems in secular societies. For centuries, the Biblical narrative had actually been holding back the entire secular Europe in the realm of women's rights and their participation in public life. In contrast, as Montesquieu reminded, the ancient Romans had already had in place the far more advantageous prescriptive sexual politics, endorsing not only Desire and Pleasure both for the old and young, but equally distributing it, punishing excess and unfairness, and having developed an existential model for the oldest and most important human institution— the Family.

Montesquieu's Virtue is a collectively produced sign of human civility, whose meanings had been unfolding through the ages. He placed enormous trust in the rational choices of the enlightened, in the creativity of the educated imagination which, even prior to the Judeo-Christian ethics, had already known Love, Duty, Compassion, and willingness to help the needy and misfortunate, and ,what is the most important, had the awareness of the **dangerous excess.** Having removed the trust in Reason and reasoning, the **Homo sapiens** had surrendered one's **collective sapienza** (ability to think) to blind and naive Belief, plunging into the abyss of the sheepish reliance on a single most tyrannical god, stifling human imagination and creativity, and controlling human expression in all realms. Was it useful to waste centuries of European cultural development on such a cruel **detour** in the name of a single most political and not the wisest deity? This is the question, consistently articulated by the outstanding thinkers throughout the centuries— very carefully posed by the ancient and later pre-Christian Greek and Roman thinkers, such as Polybius, Lucian, Porphyry, and Plotinus, by Dante in the 13th, repeated by Machiavelli in the 16th and by Montesquieu in the 18th centuries.

If one recalls the centuries of cultural censorship in Europe, the Inquisition Tribunal, the Crusades, the persecution of Copernicus and punishment of Galileo and Giordano Bruno, the exile of Dante, Machiavelli, Voltaire and witch hunts all over Europe, the Holocaust and the resurrected Judea in the modern Middle East, the grand finale in the name of god and belief, one may lament again and again over the triumph of Faith, both Judaic and Christian and loss of ancient paganism. The last two centuries in the two thousand year-history have surpassed the worst expectations of Dante and Machiavelli

7. The Eco of Machiavelli in Nietzsche and His Anti-Christ

The thought of Machiavelli which inspired many post-Renaissance, post-Enlightenment and modern thinkers would also fascinate Freidrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who became a devout worshiper of the controversial Florentine. In his view, no German thinker could ever imitate Machiavellian free-spirited reasoning and, in the state of absolute awe, Nietzsche wrote the following in his *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> How could the German language, even in the prose of Lessing,
> imitate the tempo of Machiavelli, who in his *Il Principe* lets
> us breathe the subtle dry air of Florence and cannot help presenting
> the most serious affairs in a boisterous aleggrissimo.. (1984:42).

Nietzsche, a Romantic, passionately idolized Machiavelli, while Nietzsche, a modernist and nihilist, incapable of matching the depth and wisdom of the Renaissance intellect, retreated into the banal praise of his language or the superficial form and technique. Yet, one senses even there the mentorship of Machiavelli in Nietzsche's denunciation of religion, condemnation of faith and the construction of his notorious concept of the Nietzschean Will. When Nietzsche utters that "in every act of the Will there is a commanding thought" he faithfully follows Machiavelli and his paying tribute to the Graeco-Roman intellectual legacy. Yet, when Nietzsche claimed that the same Will was " the complex condition of the pleasure of the commander," he articulated the infamous ideology of the triumph of the malicious Will that would drown 20th-century Germany and Europe in blood and shameful barbarism (1984:31).

Despite claiming independent authorship, the Nietzschean anti-Christian much-revered modern bravado has been substantially borrowed from the same Machiavelli whose style he praised. In his *Beyond Good and Evil*,Nietzsche, within the span of 15 pages, transforms his own accolades to Machiavelli's allegedly "southern" discursive grace into his own, obviously imitative, denunciation of Christianity, inspired by Machiavelli's courageous stand. Having not acknowledged the Italian mentor, Nietzsche states:

> The Christian faith is from the beginning sacrifice:
> sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence
> of the spirit, at the same time enslavement and self-mockery,
> self-mutilation. There is cruelty and religious Phoenicianism

in this faith, exacted of an overripe manifold and much
indulged conscience: its presupposition is that the
subjection of the spirit is indescribably painful (1984:57).

Later, in the discourse on the Good and Evil, Nietzsche goes as far as labeling Christianity "the infection of the north" (1984:59). This epithet would later attract the German Fascists who would be quite fascinated by battling the spiritual "infection" in Europe and asserting the triumph of their Heroic Will.

Nietzsche brings into his condemnation of religion the bourgeois sensibility of the post-industrial capitalist Europe when most people had no time for religious expression while accumulating wealth and enjoying it. Nonetheless, he had a rather low opinion of his contemporaries-Europeans who, in his view, much echoing Machiavelli, had been harmed by Christianity, the spiritual therapy that had turned them into weak and passive. Consequently, Christianized Europeans would not be able to handle difference, competition, the battle for success and advancement, having found solace in the idea of "being equal before God" (1984:71). His Superman, the antithesis to Amilcar, Jahweh, Christ, Zeus and Buddha, became a composite image, bearing the features of the Greek Dionysus, the wisdom of the skeptics, Epicurus and Plotinus, among many other cultural mentors.

Witnessing the resurrection of the religious in the postmodern world, one may again nostalgically look at the pagan pre-Christian past and lament the rich mosaic of modest deities, living side by side with the people and not interfering with their public and personal lives. The chorus of Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Venus, Hermes, Demetra, Jupiter, Ceres, Mars or Penates and many others is still the most beautiful poetic aria in the existential opera of the enlightened pagans, unlike the dull and tyrannical monotony and oppression of the Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

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