

12-31-1964

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Recommended Citation

Romualdez, Antonio V. (1964) "The Renaissance Ideal of Civic Humanism," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*: Vol. 12: No. 4, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.2686>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies/vol12/iss4/2>

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philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 12, no. 4 (1964): 591–604

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

The Renaissance Ideal of Civic Humanism

ANTONIO V. ROMUÁLDEZ

WITH the fundamental orientation of human existence towards participation in God's own wisdom, the legacy of the Middle Ages to the Renaissance included a continually broadening and deepening consciousness on the part of the laity of their proper dignity in the Church and of the role of secular activity in the economy of salvation.¹ Amidst the quarrels between the papacy and the princes which, before the Reformation, had reached their climax towards the close of the thirteenth century, several Christian moral and political philosophies began to evolve, mostly drawn from the scholastic synthesis of Aristotle and Christian belief.² Some, and those the more realistic, of these moral and political theories encouraged the distinction between the temporal and the eternal ends of man, and the formal distinction between the com-

¹ See for example "*Antequam essent clerici*" in Pierre Dupuy, *Histoire des desmeslez d' entre Boniface VIII et Philippe le Bel, roi de France* (Paris, 1655), pp. 21-22: "Sancta mater ecclesia non solum est ex clericis, sed etiam ex laicis."

² See for example St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super sententiis*, II; John of Paris, *De potestate regia et papali*; James of Viterbo, *De regimine christiano*; Dante Alighieri, *De monarchia*; William of Ockham, *Dialogus de potestate papae et imperatoris*; and also Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*.

petence of ecclesiastical and political powers;³ all somehow justified secular pursuits in a Christian community.⁴ As society developed from feudalism to urbanism and ultimately to nationalism, this nascent Christian secularism found fruition in what Hans Baron has called the Renaissance ideal of *civic humanism*.⁵ This paper is an attempt to indicate the fundamental Christian orientation of civic humanism, to show that the civic humanists were advocating not the rejection of Christian values in favor of pagan ideals, but the appreciation of man's natural end as a genuinely Christian preoccupation. Civic humanism, the humanists will be shown as having claimed, is an ideal based on the exigencies of Nature and Christian charity.

To a period whose cultural atmosphere was characterized by a rapidly spreading secularism and by impatience over the disputations and speculations of the later schoolmen (because they had failed to "move" mankind towards moral living),⁶ it was inevitable that the morally and politically oriented education of Hellenism should prove attractive. "It was the distinctive tendency of the Hellenistic mind," H. I. Marrou writes in *A History of Education in Antiquity*, "to make man the supreme value—the free man, of course, the wealthy, cultured man whom education had developed to his full stature

³ For a study of the political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas concerning the competence of the two powers, see I. T. Eschmann, O.P., "St. Thomas on the Two Powers," *Medieval Studies*, XX (1958), pp. 177-205. On John of Paris, see Dom Jean Leclercq, *Jean de Paris et l'Écclésiologie du XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1942).

⁴ For a comprehensive study of the secular movement during the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, see Georges de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïque* (Louvain, 1958, nouvelle édition refondue), 5 vols., especially vols. I and II.

⁵ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1955), 2 vols. See also "Secularization of Wisdom and Political Humanism in the Renaissance," *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXI (1960), 131-150.

⁶ Francesco Petrarca, for example, did not hesitate to express his vehement antagonism towards the later schoolmen in his *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*. See also his *Epistolarum de rebus familiaribus*, I, vi; *Epistolarum de rebus senilibus*, V, 3.

and *paideia* had brought to *humanitas*.”⁷ Marrou further notes that “free, utterly free, faced by the crumbling walls of his city and abandoned by his gods, faced with a world with no end to it and an empty heaven, Hellenistic man looked vainly for something to belong to, some star to guide his life—and his only solution was to turn in upon himself and look there for the principle of all his actions.” He continues with the observation that “this can be regarded—and rightly, as a narrowing of perspective, and dangerous.” But Marrou adds later that “this classical education supplied the *materia prima* for a higher human type than had hitherto been known, a type capable of anything—if only it could have discovered something, or someone, to devote itself to.” He remarks that in antiquity classical education did find something, the State of Rome, and later someone, the Christian God, to devote itself to, and thus produced both the “grandeur that was Rome,” and the glorious age of the Church Fathers.

During the Renaissance, it seems, Hellenistic Man once again succeeded in transcending himself by the very act of turning in “upon himself for the principle of all his actions,” but not without help from the Aristotelianism of the medieval schoolmen. In the depths of his being, the classically formed man discovered something and indeed someone, which his Hellenistic predecessors could not fathom without somehow falling into error. As Pierre Charron (1541-1603) wrote in his treatise *On Wisdom* (1601), “by the knowledge of himself man arrives sooner and better to the knowledge of God than by any other means, both because he finds in himself better helps, more marks and footsteps of the divine nature, than in whatsoever besides he can any way know, and because he can better understand and know that which is in himself than another thing.”⁸ Rather than a “narrowing of perspective”, therefore, the Renaissance witnessed a renewal of the panoramic vision of the Fathers. The period’s changed social and political milieu, moreover, provided an opportunity for the pro-

⁷ H. I. Marrou. *A History of Education in Antiquity*, tr. George Lamb (New York, 1956), p. 226.

⁸ Pierre Charron, *De la sagesse* (Paris, 1604), p. 25.

fitable use of Hellenistic Man's experience in the Roman state. At this time certainly humanism supplied the *materia prima* for the high type of man known today as the Renaissance Man, devoted to God and country. There were no fears whatsoever in most lest a fundamental opposition existed between these two ends. The scholastics had prepared the way for the humanists' harmonizing of these ends by their development of a metaphysical study of man and nature. It was recognized that the human duty to society and the state had been impressed in the heart of man by God himself. Indeed man's fulfillment was ordinarily accomplished in this world through the state, and always ultimately in God.⁹

Several phenomena therefore in the development of western culture between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries—the rediscovery of Aristotle, the fierce clashes between the princes and the papacy, the collapse of the feudal political and economic structures in the wake of a rapidly advancing urbanism, the crumbling of the scholastic system, and the resurgence of the rhetoric-oriented education of Hellenism whose best known spokesman had been Cicero—all these, it seems, had contributed to the quick rise of civic humanism. That the Italian peninsula should be the cradle of civic humanism in the West is not surprising; its continued traffic with the East and consequently more rapid urbanization, enhanced also by its commercially strategic position in the geography of the known world, made the problem of the adjustment of attitudes and mores considerably more urgent in its cities than in northern Europe. There were, moreover, among the Italians some who still dreamt of a re-established Roman empire distinct from the Church though composed of all Christendom.¹⁰ As a result, it was not unusual for moralists and even theologians of the Renaissance to speak of the two ends of man. Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), for example, in his *Com-*

⁹ As will be noted (see notes 26, 27, 28 and 29), the Renaissance authors always wrote of the contemplative life as either superhuman and divine or sub-human and beastly. Participation in civil service was therefore looked upon as necessary to a genuinely human existence.

¹⁰ See for example Dante's views on the subject in the second book of the *De monarchia*.

ment. in *Platonis de regno*, tried to explain why human life can be said to have a twofold end by referring to divine providence and to the Pauline teaching that God gives different talents or gifts to different men.¹¹ Concerning the two ends of man Lodowick Bryskett¹² wrote in *A Discourse on Civil Life* that "one is called civil, and the other contemplative."¹³

The Renaissance writers consequently emphasized the social obligations of man. Almost every moral treatise of the period repeated Cicero's (and Plato's before him) statement that *non nobis nati sumus, partem patria, partem parentes, partem amici sibi vendicant*.¹⁴ Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, wishing to stress man's social nature, wrote in his *De laicis* that any man who lived alone did so because he was either sub-human or superhuman (*vivat aut esse bestiam, aut Deum, id est, aut minus, aut majus homine*).¹⁵ Erasmus, in his *Enchiridion*, advised the Christian not to "think himself to have been born for himself. . . [not to] wish to live for himself."¹⁶ Coluccio Salutati,¹⁷ in a letter of reproach to Andrea di ser Conte who had refused to help the city of Buggiano in its hour of need, reminded him of his debts to society—to his parents, his children, brothers and sisters, acquaintances and friends, to the prelates, to his wife, to his companions and to himself. "She [society] created us," Salutati continued, "she

¹¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera quae extant omnia* . . . (Basle, 1576), I, 1294.

¹² Lodowick Bryskett is best remembered in English literary history for his account of the discussion on Moral Philosophy, in which Edmund Spenser refers to *The Faerie Queene* as a moral allegory. He is also known to have accompanied Sir Philip Sidney on the latter's journey through Italy as a young man.

¹³ Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civil Life* (London, 1606), p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19. See also Francesco Novati, *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati* (Rome, 1891-1905), 5 vols., I, 20-21.

¹⁵ Robert Cardinal Bellarmine "De laicis," in *Opera omnia* (Naples, 1857), II, 316.

¹⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *Opera omnia* (Leyden, 1704), V, col. 44-F.

¹⁷ Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Chancellor of Florence. For a bibliography on his life and works, see G. M. Sciacca, *La Visione della Vita Nell' Umanesimo di Coluccio Salutati* (Palumbo, 1954), pp. 207-209.

has nourished us; from her we have derived our origin; wherefore our care for her should be above all things."¹⁸

In his essay on education which he had addressed to Queen Elizabeth I, Richard Mulcaster wrote that "the end of our being here is to serve God and our country, in obedience to persons, and performance of duties."¹⁹ Consequently, according to Mulcaster, we must learn "to discern that which is well from ill, good from bad, religious from prophane, honest from dishonest, commendable from blameworthy, seemely from unseemely, that... [we] may honour God, serve... [our] country, comfort... [our] friends, and aide one another, as good countrymen are bound to do."²⁰ Some of the Renaissance authors, Cristoforo Landino in the *Camaldulensian Disputations* for example, in order to confirm their emphasis on man's social obligations, appealed to Christ's precept that we love our neighbors,²¹ and offered the active life of St. Paul the Apostle as an example for us.²²

The inevitable consequence of these attempts to stress the social responsibilities of man was the debate concerning the two ways of life: the active and the contemplative. From these discussions evolved the Christian rationale for civic humanism. The question about the two ways of life did not concern their relative merits. On these there seemed to have been general agreement during the Renaissance, though there did appear a few who condemned the contemplative life as a selfish one.²³ Rather, the period discussed whether the con-

¹⁸ *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, I, 26-27.

¹⁹ Richard Mulcaster, *Positions*, reprint of the 1581 edition (London, 1888), p. 127.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²¹ Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (Venice, ca. 1500), b-v'. See also *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, II, 88.

²² *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, b-v'.

²³ One of the main points of the first part of Bishop Orosius' *Five Bookes of Nobility* is that the contemplative life is not as noble as the active life. It must be noted, however, that Orosius' first part deals with the nobility of non-Christians. The point is made by the speaker named Laurentius in the *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (b-iii')—but only in passing. Laurentius' main arguments in favor of civil life are based on the positive merits of participation in secular affairs.

and *paideia* had brought to *humanitas*.”⁷ Marrou further notes that “free, utterly free, faced by the crumbling walls of his city and abandoned by his gods, faced with a world with no end to it and an empty heaven, Hellenistic man looked vainly for something to belong to, some star to guide his life—and his only solution was to turn in upon himself and look there for the principle of all his actions.” He continues with the observation that “this can be regarded—and rightly, as a narrowing of perspective, and dangerous.” But Marrou adds later that “this classical education supplied the *materia prima* for a higher human type than had hitherto been known, a type capable of anything—if only it could have discovered something, or someone, to devote itself to.” He remarks that in antiquity classical education did find something, the State of Rome, and later someone, the Christian God, to devote itself to, and thus produced both the “grandeur that was Rome,” and the glorious age of the Church Fathers.

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¹⁰ See for example Dante's views on the subject in the second book of the *De monarchia*.

templative or the active way of life should be presented as the ideal toward which all men were to strive.²⁴ The fact that most moralists then admitted that the contemplative way of life was more divine and consequently rarer left no doubt as to the outcome of the debates. For men in general the active life was considered more suitable.²⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, though he had lived two centuries before the high Renaissance, had offered the briefest and simplest explanation for this view: *simpliciter* the way of contemplation is indeed higher, but *secundum quid*, the Angelic Doctor wrote, *magis est eligenda vita activa propter necessitatem praesentis vitae.*"²⁶ In another place Aquinas wrote:

*Ad primum ergo dicendum quod vita contemplativa non ordinatur ad qualemcumque Dei dilectionem, sed ad perfectam. Sed vita activa necessaria est ad dilectionem proximi qualemcumque. Unde Gregorius dicit, in III Homil. Ez. (1c. nt. 13): Sine contemplativa vita intrare, possunt ad caelestem patriam qui bona quae possunt, operari non negligunt: sine activa autem intrare non possunt, si negligunt bona operari quae possunt. Ex quo etiam patet quod vita activa praecedat contemplativam, sicut id quod est commune omnium praecedat in via generationis id quod est proprium perfectorum.*²⁷

The same ideas can be found in Renaissance moral treatises and in the disputations of the time concerning the two ways of life. Thomas Starkey²⁸ wrote in *A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset* (1535):

For ever that which is best is not of all men nor at all times to be pursued. It is meet for a man, being sick, rather to procure his health than to study about the procuring of the Common wealth. It is better, as Aristotle saith, for a man being in great poverty rather to procure some riches than high philosophy; and yet philosophy of itself, as all men know, is far to be preferred above all wordly [sic] riches. And so likewise, albeit that high philosophy and contemplation of nature be of itself a greater perfection of man's mind, as it which is the end of the active life, to the which all men's deeds should ever be referred, yet the meddling with the causes of the common wealth is

²⁴ See below, notes 26, 27 and 29.

²⁵ *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, b-iii^r.

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II^a-II^a, 182, 1c.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 182. 4 ad 1.

²⁸ Thomas Starkey, (1499-1538), one of the most liberal-minded of the younger Tudor humanists.

more necessary and ever rather and first to be chosen as the principal mean whereby we may attain to the other.²⁹

In the *Camaldulensian Disputations*, Landino reminded his readers that Martha and Mary, who respectively symbolized the active and the contemplative lives, were sisters living under the same roof. Both were pleasing to God; both were good. We have Martha to look up to in order that we might not abandon our duties of humanity; and Mary we have that our minds might be nourished and refreshed by divine ambrosia and nectar.³⁰

It was not difficult for the Renaissance authors to take the next logical step and advance the thesis that the active life, especially service to the state, is in a real sense meritorious of heaven. When in an exchange of letters between Salutati and Peregrino Zambechario, the latter gave as an excuse for a scandalous love affair that anyway no one but contemplatives will be received in Abraham's bosom, Salutati replied: "Believe me, since we have been born for eternal glory, as we rightly believe, in order to replace the fallen angels in heaven, Nature would not have made us political, that is social, if social intercourse were not conducive to salvation."³¹ The way of the contemplative is not the only way to heaven. In advising a friend not to refuse well-deserved honors, Salutati observed that he knew God could be approached by different ways: "some choose the secret and the lonely life, such as hermits and anchorites and cenobites; others have followed the commercial and social life—and even these have come to the glory of God."³² After all, the humanist wrote in another letter to Zambechario, St. Augustine himself had noted that among the citizens of the City of God were probably many who were magistrates on earth, ediles, proconsuls, emperors, people who administered the earthly city even as they kept their hearts lifted up to heaven.³³ Thomas Aquinas had made the same

²⁹ Thomas Starkey, *A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset* (London, 1535), pp. 25-26.

³⁰ *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, c-iii^v.

³¹ *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, III, 50-51.

³² *Ibid.*, II, 453.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, 303-304.

distinctions regarding secularism in his treatment of the question whether or not religious should participate in the active life.³⁴ The Renaissance succeeded in circulating these ideas more widely; the appearance of the printing press at this time of course speeded up what the social, political and economic environment of the West was sooner or later going to accomplish.

The civic humanism of the Renaissance, therefore, cannot be separated from its origins as a laic movement within Christianity. Again and again not only the moralists but even the political writers of the period reminded their readers of the usefulness of civil service towards the attainment of heaven. Matteo Palmieri³⁵ devoted a section of his tract *Della vita civile* to a discussion of what state that soul would be which, while on earth, had sought the good of the state by leading the life described in his treatise. The rewards of a good citizen are, as God Himself has said, to be found in heaven, the eternal enjoyment of glory in the company of the saints.³⁶ The reason is obvious; Palmieri explained that nothing is more pleasing to God on earth than that one should govern society with justice. God rewards the just governor of a city and the preserver of the fatherland with a definite place in heaven where he may live blessed eternally in the company of the saints.³⁷ That one who has served his country well should be rewarded in heaven was a commonplace in the panegyric literature of the Renaissance. Spenser,³⁸ for example, lauded Sir Philip Sidney in *The Ruines of Time* in terms of civic humanism. Sidney, according to the poet, had been the "noble Patrone

³⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II^a-II^{ae}, 188, 2 and 3.

³⁵ Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475) a leading citizen of Florence in one of its most difficult moments in its history, and, according to one of his editors, a "modello vero di vive virtu domestiche."

³⁶ Matteo Palmieri, *Della vita civile*, in Felice Battaglia, ed., *Della vita civile di Matteo Palmieri—De optimo cive di Bartolomeo Sacchi detto Il Platina* (Bologna, 1944), p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁸ Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), English poet, best known for his long allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene*.

of weake povertie;/Whose great good deeds in countrey and in towne/Have purchast him in heaven an happie crowne."³⁹

The ecclesiastical and political developments in Renaissance England stamped a more definitely Christian character on the civic humanism of the English. The constant danger of invasion from a power espousing both a non-English and a Roman Catholic cause, coupled with the continued threat of sedition and even tyrannicide, encouraged though not always explicitly by Jesuit and Calvinist teachings, consolidated the English as a nation ecclesiastically as well as politically. It could be said, and rightly from the English point of view, that England's cause was also the cause of true Christianity. This identity of causes resulted in the ultimate triumph in England of those who regarded the king as the holder of all power in the realm. The clergy were as much citizens as the laity, and were thus subjects of the king. Though the ministry of the Church was not within the royal jurisdiction, its administration—the enforcement of discipline and order—undoubtedly was. What was universal in the Church, according to English thought, was its doctrine and its sacraments; juridical authority was solely and properly a royal right. The laity, the king included, were, to be sure, to look to the clergy for all instructions in the Christian faith and for the ministering of the sacraments. Without succumbing to Erastianism, therefore, the English succeeded in uniting the Church and the state, and this for political and ecclesiastical reasons in the face of real dangers. The kingships of David and Solomon, of course, provided the scriptural precedent so important to the protestant temper of Renaissance England.⁴⁰ A situation such as this could not but affect the fundamental features of English civic humanism.

³⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Complete Poems of Edmund Spenser*, eds. E. de Selincourt and J. G. Smith (Oxford, 1912), p. 474.

⁴⁰ For an excellent account of the political and ecclesiastical developments in Tudor England, see Charles Howard McIlwain, ed., *The Political Works of James I* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), esp. pp. xv-xxxiv. See also Thomas Bilson, *The True Difference Betweene Christian Subjection and Un-Christian Rebellion* (Oxford, 1585), p. 124; Richard Hooker, *On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, VIII, ii, 3; William Perkins, *The Workes* (London, 1612-1613), I, 194; III, 536, 538; III, 149.

While on the continent the humanists were hard-pressed by conservative thinkers to relate lay activity and civic service to the ultimate goal of human salvation, in Tudor England no such apologies were necessary. The *de facto* identity of church and state interests, realized in the juridical sovereignty of the king in ecclesiastical and political matters, left the English with the clear principle that service to the king who is God's anointed is also service to God Himself. Secular activity, in other words, was also religious activity; civil obedience constituted a religious duty. For, as William Perkins⁴¹ wrote, "The Magistrate is the minister of God for . . . procuring the welfare of soule and bodie: which standeth in two things: first, true Religion: secondly, civil justice, both which are by Magistracie maintained."⁴² The assumption, of course, was, as stated by Archbishop Whitgift (1530?-1604), that there was no difference between a Christian commonwealth and the Church of Christ.⁴³ Indeed, therefore, according to Bishop John Jewel (1522-1571), "every soul, of what calling soever it be, be he monk, be he preacher, be he prophet, be he apostle, ought to be subject to kings and magistrates. . . . Our common teaching also is that we ought so to obey princes, as men sent of God: and that whoso withstandeth them, withstandeth God's ordinance."⁴⁴ Or, as the same Bishop wrote elsewhere, each subject "must thus think with himself; I owe obedience to my sovereign; I must be subject, not because of wrath only, but also for conscience sake. If I resist, I resist the ordinance of God, and shall receive to myself damnation."⁴⁵

⁴¹ William Perkins (1558-1602), a Cambridge preacher in Elizabethan England, best known today for his 'Case Divinity', especially for his three books of *Cases of Conscience*. He has been referred to as the "first English casuist."

⁴² William Perkins, *The Workes* (1612-1613), III, 536; see also Thomas Bilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 127 and 129-134.

⁴³ John Whitgift, *Works*, ed. John Ayre, Parker Society (London, 1851-1853), 3 vols., III, 313; I, 22.

⁴⁴ John Jewel, *The Works of John Jewel, D.D.*, ed. Richard William Jeff (Oxford, 1848), 8 vols., VIII, 312-322.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 831 and 862

From a belief in the identity of the visible Church and the Christian commonwealth, a theory concerning the religious character of all human activity within the realm inevitably follows and with it a doctrine on vocations or callings. So it was with the English Renaissance. By stressing the organic nature of the Christian commonwealth, which is co-terminous with the visible Church of Christ, Archbishop Sandys (1516-1588), for example, involved himself in a discussion on the salutary character of all vocations in a Christian body politic.⁴⁶ William Perkins, who had written an entire treatise explaining Christian vocation, defined it as a "certaine kind of life ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good."⁴⁷ According to him, "every man may certainly know himselfe to be called of God, to this or that calling" if he has "two things: gifts for the calling from God, and allowance from men."⁴⁸ These utterances betray an emphasis on social responsibility and service. Indeed, Perkins wrote, "he abuseth his calling, whosoever he be that against the end thereof, employes it for himselfe, seeking wholly his owne and not the common good. And that common saying, *Every man for himselfe, and God for us all*, is wicked, and is directed against the end of every calling, or honest kinde of life."⁴⁹ Donne echoed these thoughts when he advised that all should "direct the labours of . . . [their] calling to the good of the public," and when he observed that "a man will no more get to heaven without discharging his duties to other men, than without doing them to God Himself."⁵⁰ More explicitly, William Perkins asserted that "if we compare worke to worke, there is a difference betwixt washing of dishes, and preaching the word of God: but as touching to please God none at all. . . whatsoever is done within the laws of God though it bee wrought by the body, as

⁴⁶ Edwin Sandys, *Sermons* (London, 1585), p. 85; pp. 215-216; p. 246.

⁴⁷ William Perkins, *op. cit.*, I, 750; see also John Donne, *The Works*, ed. Henry Alford (London, 1839), 6 vols., IV, 507.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 760.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 751.

⁵⁰ John Donne, *op. cit.*, III, 253; IV, 507.

the wipings of shoes and such like, howsoever grosse they appeare outwardly, yet are they sanctified."⁵¹

The doctrine concerning the religious nature of all vocations in a Christian body politic did not distract the English divines from emphasizing the responsibilities of political or social occupations directly involved in magistracy or the royal service. Archbishop Sandys, for instance, reminded judges of the assize that "If an Eclipse fall amongst you, the rest of England will be darkened with it. Ye are seene and watched of men and Angels. The world hath many eies, eares, and tongues. London, Westminster, the Innes of Court and Chancerie, from whence the best and most of you doe flow, are as a fountaine from whence should spring all true religion, all pietie, vertue and godlie conversation. If this spring bee corrupted, the rivers that flowe from it must needs bee polluted."⁵² Joining his voice with those of most of the English clergy, Sandys noted that "It appertaineth to Princes, to Magistrates, to them which are nowe assembled in this honourable Court of Parliament, by all good meanes and Lawes to see Gods house made cleane."⁵³

There were no doubts, therefore, in the English mind that civic humanism was a Christian ideal. It has been written of Protestants that they "did not retreat from society into the artificial purity of the monastic community; rather they smashed the old partitions and claimed for God the whole society of man."⁵⁴ It would be more accurate to say, I think, that this was rather a Renaissance accomplishment than merely Protestant. It resides at the very heart of civic humanism. The achievement of the English church and commonwealth, however, consisted in that it was one of the very first to recognize the problem that had, by the time of the high Renaissance, been plaguing Christian consciences for at least two centuries: how far below the strictest ideal of monastic per-

⁵¹ William Perkins, *op. cit.*, I, 391.

⁵² Edwin Sandys, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Charles H. George and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640* (Princeton, 1961), p. 183.

fection could a man go and still be saved? It was one of the first too to provide formal doctrinal answers to the problem by its admission that civic humanism as a matter of fact constituted the first stirrings from the rapidly growing ranks of a laity involved in social and political institutions more progressively complex and secular. Consequently, Englishmen engrossed in civil or other secular pursuits did not need to defend their activities to a suspicious clergy. Everyone, clergy as well as laity, appreciated the genuinely religious character of his particular function within the Christian body politic. The peculiar turn of events in Tudor England had provided the appropriate religious climate in which the Church of England could easily realize the fundamental Christian teaching that "every action of a person who is in the state of grace, if it is in any way performed in the spirit of faith, has a truly divine character; even the moral virtues are invested with a far higher dignity and meaning than they have in the natural order."⁵⁵

In the last analysis, all the Renaissance claims about the worthiness of secular activism and civil service rested on two fundamental notions: the divine precept of charity and the scholastic-Aristotelian doctrine of man as social and political by nature. Bartolomeo Sacchi, known also as Il Platina (1421-1481), stressed the latter in his essay *De optimo cive*;⁵⁶ Salutati often referred to the former in his letters.⁵⁷ Both points were summed up rather well by Salutati in a letter to ser Antonio di ser Chello. He advised his friend then that to flee one's native city even in time of plague is against both the natural and the supernatural virtues.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Nature and Grace*, tr. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, Mo., 1954), p. 361.

⁵⁶ Bartolomeo Sacchi, *ed. cit.* (see note 36), pp. 185-186.

⁵⁷ *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, I, 246-247.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 88.