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Transition of Intellect

The Middle Ages were the developmental years of the Renaissance. It paved the way for ideas that were provoked from the Bible and religion, that guided intellects to a new way of thinking that had less emphasis on the direct relationship with God. Instead, students and teachers looked to humans to understand more about their creator. This began to form humanism. With a dissection of human beings and behaviors, came the focus of one's self or individualism. Individualism is the secular form of spiritual individualism. Therefore, spiritual individualism began in the Middle Ages, and came to complete form as individualism during the Renaissance, where secular thinking was becoming more accepted.

The Middle ages was the transition period between absolute focus on God in most aspects of life, to scientific theories and development of philosophies in the Renaissance. Therefore, the "early Middle Age's order and dignity in the world was closely associated with supernatural power."¹ This led to trying to relate the Bible to everyday needs of society and man. The conflict between the supernatural and nature was the catalyst to the creation of humanism. People believed that if they could "find new truths of the greatest general importance simply by looking within themselves."² Thus, people believed if they better understood man, then they would better understand God. With in the Middle ages, it can be observed the movement away from Biblical and church teachings in order to promote individual thought. However, these

¹ R. W. Southern *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 32

² *Ibid.* 33

philosophies would not be secular until the Renaissance, and a majority of findings still had biblical undertones.

The central focus of the Renaissance shifted away from religious perspective and shifted towards secular humanism and individualism. However spiritual individualism still played an important role in people's everyday life. One's personal success made them seem as an important individual in society. Therefore, there was a "renewed and very intense interest in a man's achievement."³ Instead of people gaining high social status by their place in the church or by how much they donated, intellectuals "stressed man's achievements as evidence of his intrinsic worth."⁴ As a result, the celebration of man kind and achievements became a common practice across Europe in all different demographics.

Although the Renaissance has a common theme of secular practices, religion was still a very important factor in the mediaeval Europe. Therefore, spiritual individualism was very prominent. For example, Joan of Arc established herself based on her strong belief in the Catholic teachings. Even though she was influenced by the Catholic church, she focused on what she believed from her different visions and voices. Her opinion was formed on her faith alone. When asked what help she has gotten from her belief, she responded, "it has taught me to conduct myself well, to go habitually to church."⁵ Outside of Joan's view of herself, she was judged on her faith. The practice of her faith on her terms set her apart and often made her creditable for her trials because they based her on her commitment to God. For example, she

³ Lewis W. Spitz *The Renaissance*. Revised ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1980). 6

⁴ *Ibid.* 168

⁵ Régine Pernoud. *Joan of Arc by Herself and Her Witnesses*, Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1994. 30

was seen as an important individual who was close to God based on her virginity.⁶ In addition, one man stated that “when I was with Joan in the tower, I often saw Joan on bended knees and engaged in prayer”⁷. Spiritual individualism began to define people and their success and failure. Salvation was important to most people of the time, however the renaissance opened the door for new thoughts and practices on how to receive the grace and mercy of God.

The prevalent philosophies during the fifteen hundreds challenged everyday people to become a part of individualism. For example, Meocchio, a fifteen hundreds Miller, was put on trial for embracing his own beliefs. His faith was based off of his own findings and opinions. A lot of them radically contrasted the Church’s teachings. For example, he believed that the “sacraments had been instituted by the church, rather than Christ, and that they were unnecessary to the salvation of the soul.”⁸ Also, he believed that “every person considers his faith to be right.”⁹ However, his practice of individualism, or self-provoked thought that was focused around his own intellect, which was very common among everyday people.

Individualism can also be seen in the acts of Martin Luther. His animosity towards the Church for having people pay for indulges grew, when he discovered through his own experiences that God’s grace was free. His ability to call out the church, in hopes of reform stemmed from his own personal views developed by his studies of theology, philosophy, and humanism. The perspective he gained could be considered spiritual individualism or individualism. Therefore, the protestant reformation was a production of the Renaissance.

⁶ Régine Pernoud. *Joan of Arc by Herself and Her Witnesses*, Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1994. 67

⁷ *Ibid.* 50

⁸ Carlo Ginzburg. *The Cheese and the Worms*, Translated by John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. 112

⁹ *Ibid.* 100

Without the new perspective of intellect and what was being taught, that began to separate human natural and the super natural, during the Middle ages, the Renaissance would have not developed with a core focus of individualism.