Christianity and the Start of Religious Freedom in Europe

Lacoste Emanuel

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Author Note

Based on Medieval Era (476- 1453 AD)

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The start of the roots of the religious freedom in the Medieval era started with the fall of the Roman Empire as it was continuously under siege because of the barbarian invasions. After these invasions, throughout the passing of the centuries, the Christian church, established under the rule of Constantine the first, played a pivotal role in making what was later known in the history books as the *respublica Christiana*, which is Latin for Christian Republic. It encompassed both the eastern and the western half of the "former" Roman empire, which were labeled as Western Europe and the Byzantium, the latter consisting of the territories of the Asia Minor and the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Rome and Byzantium, which was later named Constantinople, became the capital cities of the Western and the Eastern halves respectively**. In this essay, we will discuss how the Christian Evolution in Western Europe helped loosen the grip of the pope and gave rise to the relative religious freedom in the religion of Christianity, and how it was different from the development of the church in the Eastern Byzantine empire.**

Under these aforementioned segregations and understandings, although differently understood in both the sectors, the civil and the religious apparatus of the state was not completely segregated. Rather, it was considered as two different halves of the same enterprise. Accordingly, the distinctions established under the original doctrines of Christianity, like the difference between coercion and belief were retained, but in a slightly different form. Also, although the association between political and spiritual authority was consistently near, there was incompatible, and at times brutal episodes of violent clashes that were aimed at maximization of authority between the political and spiritual entities for power.

During the ninth century in Western Europe, Charlemagne was successful in combining the various barbarian tribes and molding them into a unified Christian empire in the west, putting himself at the head of the church in Rome. He used the political power that he acquired for regulation and protection of the Christian belief and practice. After Charlemagne, a series of religious figures called popes came to command the highest authority in the Western European empire. The unchecked power resulted in devastating consequences in the form of Christian Crusades, which often caused more damage to both the Byzantines and the Muslims. The original aim of the pope to convert the Muslims and capture the land from them failed as the Christian princes present in the united crusader army started to rebel and acquire the land for their kingdoms.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the whole idea of the pope is the supreme power and the regent of God on earth was started to being challenged by the West in the Conciliar Movement. Some leaders in western Europe declared that the representative councils were the true holders of authority when it came to handling the affairs of the church. They believed that the systematic levels of church representative implemented a more constitutional system, which included a set of rights that gave a significant authority to the lower church officials. These members also emphasized the difference between the authorities of the clergy and civil government and raised the importance and significance of regional churches. This movement had a minor effect on the status of Western Christianity, but it would largely impact the protestant reformation movement, which would later take the shape of religious freedom in Europe.

In the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the concept of Conciliarism was much more successful. This concept was the main reason for the eastern-western split in the eleventeenth century. The church of the east, known as the Eastern Orthodox Church, favored the concept of conciliarism over the papal supremacy from the start. Also, they had placed the system of regional churches well before the West. But on a misleading point-of-view, the continuing image of the East Orthodox Church was that of a set of unified Orthodox territorial states, while commanding and implementing distinguishing spiritual functions. Religious freedom for the non-Orthodox would not thrive in such an environment.

To conclude the argument, the concept of the ecumenical council and the separation of the power from the pope was the start of the complete religious freedom that we observe today. This concept under the movement of conciliarism served the threefold concept of containing the rivalry of the Western Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox church, preventing any future wars by limiting the powers of the pope, and giving rise to the concept of a quasi-democratic trend in the church due to the subsequent discussions that were to be held by the constitutional body of the Ecumenical Council. The latter was pivotal in shaping the church as it is today and paving the way for the religious freedom that Christians all over the world currently enjoy.

# References

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