

## NICCOLÓ MACHIAVELLI (1469-1527)

Niccoló Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469, the descendant of an old Tuscan family, himself the son of a lawyer. He grew up under the rule of a member of the Medici dynasty to whom the Florentines gave the title of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Lorenzo died in 1492, and his successor, Piero, was exiled two years later when the French Army appeared in Florence. . . With the establishment of the Republic of Florence, Machiavelli was elected Secretary to the Second Chancery and given charge of foreign and military affairs. When Pope Julius II drove the French from Italy, Florence was lost. Not even the new citizen army trained by Machiavelli could withstand the combined forces of the Pope's political prestige and his mercenary armies. One of the conditions of papal peace was the restoration of the Medici in Florence. Machiavelli, who had always been staunchly republican and anti-Medici, now found himself, at the age of 43, a defeated liberal without a job and in danger of arrest. He tried to make his peace with the Medici but to no avail.

In Florence everyone was suspect who had ever been identified with the liberal cause. Machiavelli was accused of being a republican conspirator, was arrested and tortured. But he was clearly innocent and was finally released. He fled some distance from Florence, and for the next 14 years importuned the Medici and the Pope for reinstatement to political office, which meant nothing less than a return to life for him. Yet, like the exiled Dante before him in the Middle Ages, it was in the period of his exile that he reached the highest point of his creativity. As he retreated more and more into his study, the civil servant, politician, diplomat, and military organizer became a man of letters. He produced *The Prince*, *The Art of Work*, *The Discourses*, *The History of Florence*, and a variety of plays, poetry, stories, and biographical sketches.

There was a final irony. In 1527, after the papal armies were defeated and Rome was sacked by the victorious French, the popular party in Florence overthrew the Medici and for a short time restored democratic government. Machiavelli hurried back to Florence, eager to regain his post as Secretary, but *The Prince*, circulated in manuscript, had brought him new enemies. Machiavelli fell sick and never learned that the final vote of the Council was overwhelmingly against him. He died in 1527.

**QUESTIONS:** What do you find appealing about Machiavelli's understanding of leadership? Would we want him as our patron for OCB? How might his understanding of leadership conflict with our vision statement and the Catholic social principles?

# THE PRINCE

NICCOLÓ MACHIAVELLI<sup>1</sup>

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## Concerning Things For Which Men, And Especially Princes, Are Praised Or Blamed

**I**t remains now to see what ought to be the rules of conduct for a prince towards subject and friends. And as I know that many have written on this point, I expect I shall be considered presumptuous in mentioning it again, especially as in discussing it I shall depart from the methods of other people. But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of a matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen, because how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live, that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil.

Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity. Therefore, putting on one side imaginary things concerning a prince, and discussing those which are real, I say that all men when they are spoken of, and chiefly princes for being more highly placed, are remarkable for some of those qualities which bring them either blame or praise; and thus it is that one is reputed liberal, another miserly, using a Tuscan term (because an avaricious person in our language is still he who desires to possess by robbery, whilst we call one miserly who deprives himself too much of the use of his own); one is reputed generous, one rapacious; one cruel, one compassionate; one faithless, another faithful; one effeminate and cowardly, another bold and brave; one affable, another haughty; one lascivious, another chaste; one sincere, another cunning; one hard, another easy; one grave, another frivolous; one religious, another unbelieving, and the like. And I know that every one will confess that it would be most praiseworthy in a prince to exhibit all the above qualities that are considered good; but because they can neither be entirely possessed nor observed, for human conditions do not permit it, it is necessary for him to be sufficiently prudent that he may know how to avoid the reproach of those vices which would lose him his state; and also to keep himself, if it be possible, from those which would not lose him it; but this not being possible, he may with less hesitation abandon himself to them. And again, he need not make himself uneasy at incurring a reproach for those vices without which the state can only be saved with difficulty, for if everything is considered carefully, it will be found that something which looks like virtue, if followed, would be his ruin; whilst something else, which looks like vice, yet followed brings him security and prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli, Niccoló. *The Prince*. Translated by W. K. Marriott. (Deodand Publishing, 2002).