



The Kingdom Suffereth Violence: The Machiavelli / Erasmus / More Correspondence and Other Unpublished Documents

Philippe Beneton

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For five centuries, literary treasures had lain dormant in the archives of the Palazzo Tutti fare in Florence. Through a fortunate coincidence they have been recently discovered, and the present work is the result of this find. Contained herein, in fact, is the unedited correspondence – or presented as such – exchanged between Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, and Niccolo Machiavelli in 1517–1518. To these letters are added texts which serve, as it were, as annexes of the *Prince* and of the *Utopia*.

Between these three illustrious writers the discussion, or the quarrel, bears chiefly on two themes: the art of governing on the one hand, and the art of writing on the other. As was to be expected, they battle over the best manner of governing: Erasmus and More on one side, Machiavelli on the other. The confrontation occurs on two terrains in particular: morality and necessity in politics, and the political forms of necessity. In the background of the quarrel is raised the problem of Christianity's political power, perhaps that of its truth. The second theme is not unrelated to the first. Erasmus, More, and Machiavelli are accomplished writers. Each has several styles at his command, each knows and practices the resources of the art of writing, each intends to read as he should. And so in the margins of their discussion about substance, they argue about the significance of their respective works; they interpret, rightly or wrongly, the others' manners of writing; they explain their own writing or dodge explanation, they deliver their secret or lead into error. What is at stake is the meaning of these enigmatic works, which are the *Prince* (1513), the *Utopia* (1516), and, to a lesser extent, the *Praise of Folly* (1511). Any lifting of the veil necessitates a golden rule: we cannot grasp the meaning of a work unless we grasp the manner in which it was written. In the case of Erasmus, More, and Machiavelli, cunning has a role to play. The author has taken a leaf from their book.

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.” – Matthew 11:12

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