Botticelli painted* Pallas and the Centaur *to memorialize the Florentine triumph over the pope's devious behavior. The centaur, symbolizing the Pazzi conspiracy, cowers before the goddess of wisdom, symbolizing Lorenzo the Magnificent and Florence, who is pulling him away from the crumbling Vatican.

Machiavelli

The Ethics of Control & the American Condition

By M. Raphael Johnson, Ph.D.

"I conclude then that since fortune changes, and men stubbornly continue to behave in the same way, men flourish when their behavior suits the times and fail when they are out of step. I do think, however, that it is better to be headstrong than cautious, for fortune is a lady. It is necessary, if you want to master her, to beat and strike her."* —The Prince, *Chapter 25, page 76.

Politics is about power, or, more accurately, about the mode and manner of its use. It is equally about morality, or the constraints one is required to place upon the use of power. Morality is the action of reason, or the mind, upon the will, or the appetites, and therefore, morality in politics concerns the application of reason to the unlimited and directionless will-to-power. In order to critique the abuse of power, then, one must have a concept of moral behavior, a notion of the good and at least a rough idea of the purpose of life.

Niccoló Machiavelli (1469-1527) was the first thinker in modern Western history to worry about skillful manipulation of power and to define political rule as such. Many, such as Leo Strauss (1899-1973), in his thoughts on Machiavelli, believed him to be the embodiment of the will-to-power, the notion of power without any external moral standard or constraint. Others believe Machiavelli to be just the opposite, publishing his works on the methods of manipulating political power precisely to warn the opinion leaders of the Italian states of his day of the methods of political enslavement. Either way, Machiavelli needs to be studied because his understanding of the uses and abuses of political power is as relevant today as in the 16th century, and there is no question that the manipulation of power for the sake of the personal ends of the ruling classes has not changed. Machiavelli, then, becomes a powerful tool in understanding the methods and mentality of America's present corrupt ruling establishment.

This essay will explain Machiavelli's idea of the methods of political enslavement, or more accurately, the manipulative uses of political power serving the private ends of its masters. Its purpose is to further illumine the American political, social and moral landscape, where an elite cabal of party leaders, bankers and industrialists, federal judges and other bureaucrats, media oligarchs and university professors have effected a revolution in American life over the last 40 years. Their methods of both reaching power as well as maintaining it are nearly exactly as Machiavelli had explained in many significant respects.

Machiavelli's two major works are *The Prince** (1513) and *Discorsi sopra laprima deca di Tito Livio* ("Discourses Upon the First Ten Books of Titus Livy," 1513-1515). It will be these that this essay relies upon, using the recently edited and translated volume on these two works by David Wootton (Niccoló Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, Hackett, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994), considered the most accurate, lively and faithful of our modern translations. *The Prince* will be cited as "P," with "D" for *Discourses* throughout the text.

* * *

Machiavelli's work deals solely with the use of political power. Its dynamics was his sole concern. More specifically, he deals with how anyone can acquire power and then keep it. For Machiavelli, the conception of maintaining power revolves around the all-important idea of convincing one's subjects that this use of power is legitimate. In Western history, Machiavelli was the first to deal with the questions of propaganda and psychological warfare as a part of statecraft. Machiavelli did not believe for one second that any of the princes with whom he had a personal relationship were legitimate rulers, and therefore, if they were to hold on to power, they needed, above all, to convince the population that they were legitimate rulers. Whether or not he was acting in an advisory manner to Italian princes, or their hapless subjects, is another matter, and much ink has been spilled on this topic. For Machiavelli, regardless, the notion of political power was largely psychological.

Importantly, within the pages of *The Discourses*, there is much information on political liberty. Such suggests that Machia-

velli had a wider audience in mind than his autocratic and semi-autocratic clients (e.g., Chapter 7), though these thoughts on liberty are always couched in such a way that they solely serve the interests of the state. For example, in Chapter 7, the issue concerns the right of "public accusation"—in other words, to have an institutionalized system of law (either "before the people or before some magistrate"), where affronts to the public liberty can be dealt with. Machiavelli writes, however:

> **This right has two extremely useful consequences for any state. The first is that citizens, for fear of being accused, dare not attempt to do anything that might harm the state, and if they do try to do anything they are immediately and impartially crushed. The other is that one gives an institutionalized outlet to those resentments that build up in a city. . . . Otherwise, when these resentments have no institutionalized outlet, they cause people to act outside the law, which leads to the collapse of the whole political system.** (D 102)

"[A] prince wishing to keep his state is very often forced to do evil; for when that body is corrupt whom do you think you have need of to maintain yourself . . . you have to submit to its humors and to gratify them, and then goodworks will do you harm."

—NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

This is of importance for two reasons: Firstly, Machiavelli begins this chapter by referring to "public accusation" as a "right," and that it is useful for offenses against public liberty. Soon after, however, he describes people being publicly accused as daring to "harm the state." He then refers to their "crushing" as "impartial." In other words, if the procedures are correct and accepted by the public mind as legitimate, then the state can crush its opponents under the color of law. The power is identical, as is the interest. The psychology is, however, that there are institutional "procedures" that provide the crushing of one's enemies with some pseudo-legal coating. He says something similar in Chapter 9: "If you become an absolute ruler in a republic, you should also consider how much more praise, once Rome was ruled by emperors, was awarded to those emperors who abided by the laws and were benevolent than those who were the opposite." (D 111)

Secondly, in Chapter 33, he warns the prince against being evenhanded with his subjects only in time of need: "For each person will conclude that he does not have you to think for the good you do him, but your enemies." (D 136) Even in Chapter 58, in an interesting passage seemingly attacking monarchy, Machiavelli claims that the population is just as good as a monarch in making laws. He concludes by claiming that both make mistakes, and the multitudes are just as susceptible to fits of passions as are individual rulers. Such clearly shows that Machiavelli certainly had some interest in moderating the power of monarchy, but, more often than not, in the interest of the state itself.

These sorts of passages are typical of Machiavelli in that one is able to take both a cynical and a positive interpretation of it, and this is probably no accident. The cynical is that he is advising dictators to permit some liberty to justify their power; the positive is that he is asking for certain rights and privileges for his people in the guise of acting in the prince's interest. It is precisely that he might be doing both, that is, ingratiating himself with his clients while also assisting the Italian people, that has kept interest in Machiavelli so strong over such a long period of time.

Chapter 18 is of interest to the present American condition. The issue here is whether or not a corrupt people can ever be free. Many American nationalists seek salvation in the restoration of constitutional government or in "getting our people elected." This view is refuted rather well here:

> **Moreover, the institutions and laws that have been established in a republic at the time of its foundation, when the individuals who made it up were good, are no longer appropriate when they become bad. If the laws of a city are relatively easily changed to take account of changing circumstances, the institutions, on the other hand, never change, or do so only at long intervals. The result is that the new laws are insufficient, because the institutions that remain unchanged distort their impact.** (D 127)

Machiavelli was a republican, of sorts, under certain circumstances. He realized, however, that political liberty is only possible when a people is worthy of it. Our present state, the state of the complete revolutionizing of American society and the *de facto* overthrow of the American political and social order and of basic moral norms, cannot be understood without reference to the people who both affected it and were affected by it:

> **If you want to take power in a republic and change its constitution for the worse, you will only succeed if the citizens have long been corrupt, if little by little, for generation after generation, decay has set in. Now this is bound to happen, as I have explained, whenever the republic is not regularly renewed by the exemplary conduct of good citizens or not brought back to first principles with new laws.** (D 198)

It is not institutions that make citizens good. It is the combination of a strong culture, religion and morals that does this. The Constitution has been overthrown precisely because American citizens permitted this to happen. The decay, so to speak, began previous to the revolution, or else the revolutionary politics of the previous three generations is inexplicable. Elites can always be expected to behave in rapacious ways. The common people are far from immune to this. But when revolutionary elites seek to overthrow a moral and political system, they need to be able to count on a weak, effeminate and corrupt population to stand out of the way, or, as in the case of America, largely assist the revolutionary regime in its thinly disguised agenda.

* * *

Machiavelli's general task, regardless of who he might have been writing for, was to understand the methods of control. *The Prince*, Machiavelli's most famous book, was primarily concerned with this. The present essay centers around the idea, easily proved, that the American republic (that is, its constitution, religion, traditions and general moral understandings) was over-

thrown in the 20th century (particularly the second half thereof) and replaced by what is effectively a "one-party" state that utilizes an oligarchic and partisan media monopoly to change the ideas of the American population to better suit its largely economic ends. Nihilism and emotivism in ethics have become necessary to maintain the level of consumption and definition of happiness our new elites have come to deem most profitable. The traditionalist and republican ethic of American political history was no longer suitable to the new global order that also required a new moral code for Americans. Thus, the American republican tradition has been replaced by an "elite" left-revolutionary cabal, as is evidenced by such statements as these from the new elite themselves:

• "Nationhood as we know it will be obsolete, all states will recognize a single, global authority. . . . [N]ational sovereignty was not such a great idea after all." (Strobe Talbot, former deputy secretary of state. "The Birth of a Global Nation," *Time*, July 20, 1992.)

• "Every child in America entering school at the age of five is insane, because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our Founding Fathers, toward his parents, toward our elected officials, toward a belief in a supernatural being, and toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity. It's up to you, teachers, to make all these sick children well by creating the international child of the future." (Chester M. Pierce, Harvard professor of education. Quote from his keynote address to the Child International Education Seminar, Denver, Colo., 1993.)

• "Children and women can be our Trojan horse for attacking the citadel of poverty, for undergirding democracy, dramatically slowing population growth and for accelerating economic development." (James P. Grant, past executive director of UNICEF, in a speech at the International Development Conference, 1993.)

• "I think [all private property] should be in the public domain. We should get it all. Be unreasonable. You can do it. Yesterday's heresy is today's common wisdom. So I would say, let's take it back—let's take it all back." (Brock Evans, vice president of the National Audubon Society, from a speech at a "Growth Management Forum" at the New England Environmental Network at Tufts University, November 1990.)

• "To hell with the news. I'm no longer interested in news. I'm interested in causes. We don't print the truth. We don't pretend to print the truth." (Ben Bradlee, former executive editor of *The Washington Post*, at a recent Smithsonian Institution symposium.)

• "Our job is to give people not what they want, but what we decide they ought to have." (Richard Salant, president of CBS News.)

• "Fundamental, Bible-believing people do not have the right to indoctrinate their children in their religious beliefs because we, the state, are preparing them for the year 2000 when America will be part of a one-world global society, and their children will not fit in." (Peter Hoagland, former congressman from Nebraska, in a 1983 radio show with Evrett Sileven.)

• "Extremists fail to provide a viable pathway from the Cold War to the global village." (Hillary Clinton, *It Takes a Village—And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*, Simon and Schuster, 1996.)

• "We routinely wrote scare stories about the hazards of chemicals, employing words like 'cancer' and 'birth defects' to splash a little cold water in reporters' faces. . . . Our press reports were more or less true. . . . Few handouts, however, can be totally honest, and ours were no exception. . . . We were out to whip the public into a frenzy about the environment." (Jim Sibbison, former EPA press officer, in a *Washington Monthly* article in March of 1984.)

Cesare Borgia

Machiavelli's Inspiration for "The Prince"

Pope Alexander VI had a number of children, two of the recognized ones being Lucrezia Borgia and Cesare Borgia. The latter (shown above) was "The Prince" to whom Machiavelli dedicated his book of that title. Borgia narrowly missed being elected a pope himself when he was poisoned and unable to attend the voting session of the cardinals, of whom he was one. Cesare's father, Alexander, was the pope who scandalized Martin Luther into launching the Reformation by (among other things) buying the papacy and holding orgies in the Vatican. As for Cesare Borgia, he was noted for his cruelty, and for over three years filled the thoughts and slimmed the purses of the people of Florence.

Literally thousands of other examples, directly from America's new elite, could be added. America is presently a left-revolutionary oligarchy. The importance of understanding Machiavelli's *The Prince* is that it provides a blueprint of sorts by which such a revolutionary elite can take power and maintain it. From here, then, one can apply Machiavelli's insights to our present unfortunate condition.

* * *

One of the primary means by which the revolution was affected was by the skillful mobilization of minorities and other "special-interest" groups. Whether it be blacks or homosexuals,

recent immigrants or the handicapped, the regime promised them additional benefits for loyalty and suitably directed political activism. Machiavelli explained this method in *The Prince*:

> **In addition, anyone who finds himself with territory in a region with different customs . . . should make himself the leader and protector of neighboring powers who are weaker than he is, and should set out to weaken his powerful neighbors. . . . Outside powers will always be urged to intervene by those in the region who are discontented, either because their ambitions are unsatisfied, or because they are afraid of the dominant powers.** (P 10)

And again in Chapter 16:

> **Rulers either spend their own wealth and that of their subjects, or that of other peoples. Those who spend their own and their subjects' wealth should be abstemious; those who spend the wealth of others should seize every opportunity to be generous. Rulers who march with their armies, living off plunder, pillage, and confiscations are spending other people's money, and it is essential they should seem generous, for otherwise their soldiers will not follow them.** (P 50)

If, in all Machiavelli's work, the frame of reference was updated, it would not take a genius to understand that this sort of behavior has been adopted by the American ruling classes as a way to cement their own power. However, the great Italian gives a subsequent warning:

> **The simple truth is there is no reliable way of holding on to a city and the territory around it, short of demolishing the city itself. He who becomes the ruler of a city that is used to living under its own laws and does not knock it down, must expect to be knocked down by it. Whenever it rebels, it will find strength in the language of liberty and will seek to restore its ancient constitution. Neither the passage of time nor good treatment will make its citizens forget their previous liberty. No matter what one does, and what precautions one takes, if one does not scatter and drive away the original inhabitants, one will not destroy the memory of liberty or the attraction of the original inhabitants.** (P 17)

As Machiavelli knew even in the early 16th century, control is far more than about armies, battles and decrees. Control is also, if not primarily, about minds, attitudes and ideas. Control in modern life concerns as much psychological warfare, controlled chaos and institutionalized humiliation as it does the "coming police state." The difficulty is that armies, battles and decrees are easily referenced and measured, while psychological manipulation and mind control is not; rather, it is often imperceptible. As a result, the focus of much nationalist and patriotic literature has concerned itself with formal institutions, as if these can be separated from the people who run them and the ideology that justifies them. There can be no tyranny when a culture does not sanction it and, at least tacitly, accept it.

Machiavelli is writing about the nature of political power at the dawn of the modern era in the West. States were becoming wealthier, monarchs more independent. Armies were becoming larger and technology was proceeding accordingly, providing more lethal and effective weapons. For Machiavelli, clearly, the notion of power was changing. *The Prince* was written to explain the changes in the idea of power and authority in a brand new era, an era of moral sickness that Machiavelli was one of the first, if not the first, to correctly diagnose.

> ***"This gives rise to an argument: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the opposite. The answer is that one would like to be both, but since it is difficult to combine the two, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to make way."***
>
> ***—Niccoló Machiavelli***

Machiavelli was quite interested in the idea of a public image of a ruler. In Chapter 18, Machiavelli enters into a discussion of formulating a positive public image as a means of solidifying control. The true face of a ruler is another matter, and one should not hesitate to show it when the occasion permits. Machiavelli seems almost to have been living in the "Clinton era" when he wrote this:

> **Everyone sees what is happening, but not everyone feels the consequences. Everyone sees what you seem to be; few have direct experience of who you really are. Those few will not dare speak out in the face of public opinion when that opinion is reinforced by the authority of the state. In the behavior of all men, and particularly of rulers, against whom there is no recourse at law, people judge by the outcome. . . .**
>
> **The vast majority of men, so long as their goods and their honor are not taken from them, will live contentedly, so you will only have to contend with the small minority who are ambitious, and there are lots of straightforward ways of keeping them under control.** (P 55-56)

It is quite clear that Machiavelli was writing here about a primitive form of psychological warfare. In this respect alone can we claim that our modern ruling classes are Machiavellian, and that our specifically modern way of doing politics derives directly from his (seemingly) amoral writings. In other words, when one does not have the moral right to rule, these become the things one must do to hold onto power. Legitimate exercise of political power does not need "public image" makeovers or manipulative decrees. From this, one comes to a crystal clear understanding of American politics that is more important than any textbook on American political institutions. Such is made abundantly clear from this passage in Chapter 20:

> **But when a ruler acquires a new state, which is simply added on to his existing territories, then it is necessary to disarm the people, with the sole exception of those who have actively supported you in taking power. And they, too, over time, as the opportunity occurs, should be encouraged to become weak and effeminate.** (P 64)

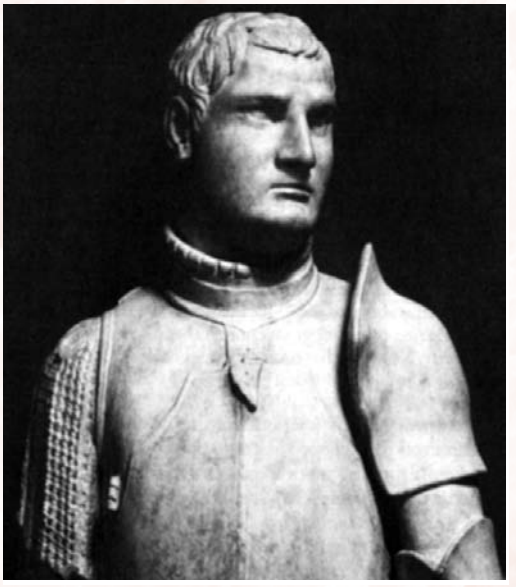
As natural law ethics was rejected by Western Europe, the notion of royal absolutism came into existence, that is, rule without moral constraint. (This notion was unknown to medieval monarchs.) Politics soon became a contest of wills and appetites primarily, rather than legal arguments or dynastic claims. Machiavelli's world was soon to flower into the so-called "Enlightenment," wherein the tyranny of absolutism was transformed into the tyranny of the machine, the will of the stronger, the economy and the impersonal bureaucracy. Given the modern relativization of morality, there is no place within the system to stand to fight back against what has become the specifically modern condition. What Machiavelli was actually writing about, regardless of his intended audience, was the moral justification for totalitarianism. He was writing about the nature of modernity and its political ramifications. He prophesied that it would not be a pleasant place.

Additionally, concerning another well-known modern political trick, Machiavelli predicted the manipulation of war to cover for domestic crimes:

> **He is always plotting and carrying out great enterprises, which have always kept his subjects bewildered and astonished, waiting to see what their outcome would be. And his deeds have followed one another so closely that he has never left space between one and the next for people to plot uninterruptedly against him.** (P 68)

The central idea in both *The Prince* and *Discourses* is that politics is not about morality but rather the unrestrained exercise of will. If there is one notion that defines the modern era, this is likely it. If individuals live according to modernity's understanding of human behavior and motivation, then they have no right to complain when it is done to them by economic or political powers. This is the paradox of modernity: Unrestrained freedom of will suits the interests of individuals in certain circumstances but soon becomes a "moral" problem when someone stronger commits the sort of acts that oppress and crush other people. Individuals then suddenly speak of abstract rights and natural law. Tyranny does not drop from the sky, Machiavelli claims, but must have a fertile field from which to sprout.

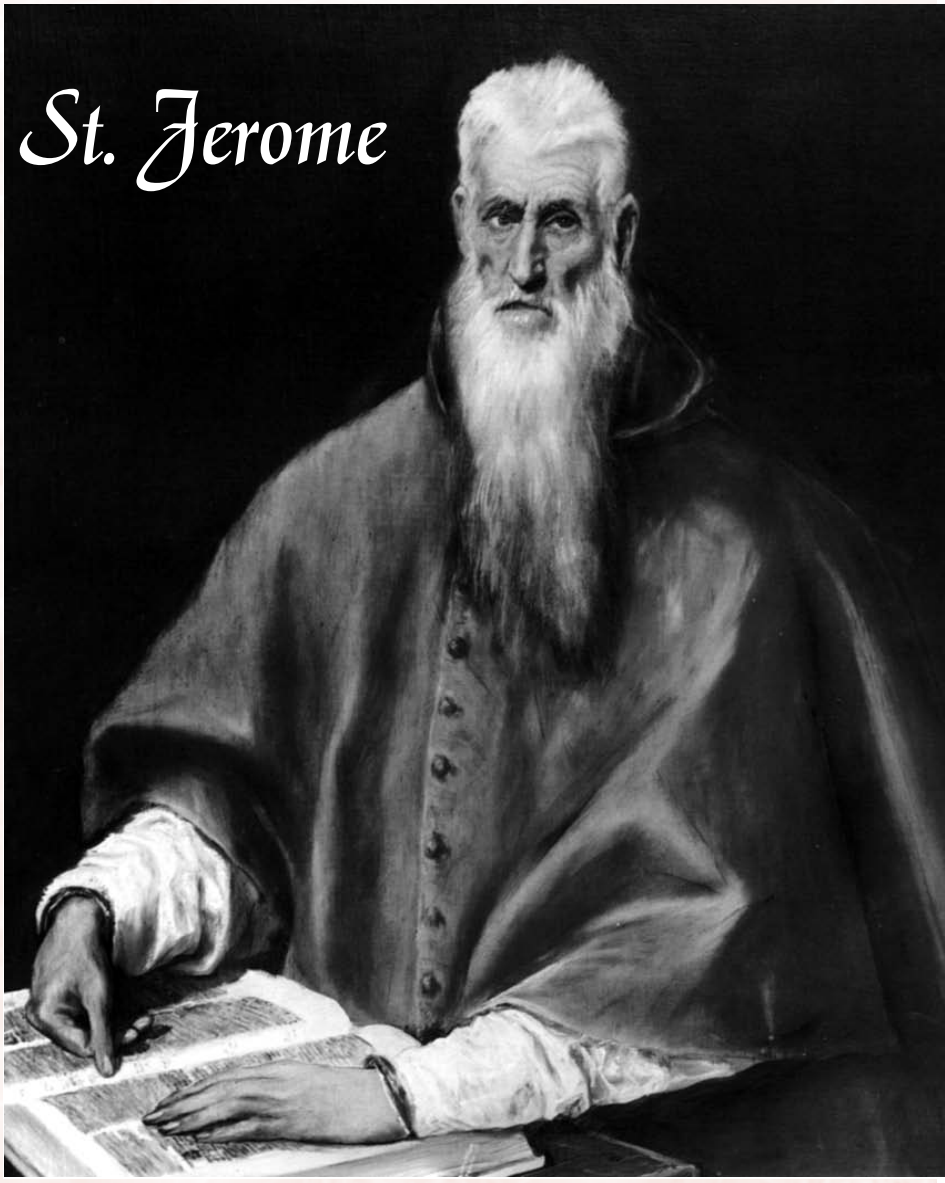
Machiavelli, in the early 16th century, sought to understand the morality of the newly emerging politics of modernity. His writings both assisted the regimes he lived under as well as warned the population of the coming institutionalization of political amorality. In this case, the amorality emanates from states immeasurably stronger than ever before, better armed and wealthier. One of the worries one feels when reading Machiavelli's work is discerning the alarm Machiavelli might have felt in describing our contemporary methods of power that utilized a war machine better trained, equipped and led than at any other time in Western history. The amorality of modernism was about to unleash that exponentially increasing power upon a population that, from then until now, seemed little disposed, or little capable, to do much about it. ❖



The Power of the Medicis

Machiavelli's last hero was the famous condottiere *(leader of a band of professional mercenary soldiers) and grand duke of Tuscany, Giovanni de' Medici, known as Giovanni della Bande Nere ("John of the Black Bands"). He fought for Pope Leo X in the Italian wars, but later changed sides and fought for Francis I of France. His nickname probably derives from the black bands he put on to mourn Leo's death. His military company was also known as the Black Bands. Giovanni died in December 1526, falling mortally wounded while advancing with his troops to prevent an army of 14,000 Germans from crossing the Po River. The Medicis were an Italian family that directed the destinies of Florence from the 15th century until 1737. Of obscure origin, they gained immense wealth as merchants and bankers, became affiliated through marriage to the major houses of Europe, and produced three popes (Leo X, Clement VII and Leo XI) and two queens of France (Catherine de' Medici and Marie de' Medici). Until 1532 the republican constitution of Florence was outwardly upheld, but the Medicis exerted actual control over the government without holding any permanent official position. They sometimes fell into disfavor, however, and were exiled from Florence in 1433-34, 1494-1512 and 1527-30. Through their patronage of the arts they helped to make the city a great repository of European culture. The first important member of the family was Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, 1360-1429, whose sons founded the two branches of the family.*

El Greco & St. Jerome



While Spain was declining economically and politically its art and literature attained their finest growth. The greatest "Spanish" painter of the late 16th and early 17th centuries was Domenico Theotocopuli, or Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as "El Greco" because he was born in Greece (specifically in Candia, the capital of Crete, 1541). His work expresses the spiritual aspect of Spanish art, although he was originally an iconographer. Shown here is his painting of St. Jerome, one of the fathers of the Catholic Church, painted between 1571 and 1600. St. Jerome (c. 342–420), is venerated for his acetic piety and for his monumental Latin translation of the Bible, represented here by the large codex on which his hands are positioned.

Following an old convention, the artist depicts him in the robes of a cardinal. (There was no actual College of Cardinals in St. Jerome's time, of course.) This composition proved popular and was produced in at least four versions by El Greco and his shop; one of these is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Both Italian and Byzantine influences may be detected in this portrait. The elongated and upthrust triangle which frames the entire silhouette is in striking contrast to the downward convergence of the beard and the folds of the "cardinal's mantle." It is thought that a 100-year-old man named L. Cornaro posed for this portrait in 1566.

Although modern painters have found El Greco a source of inspiration, many of El Greco's contemporaries viewed his work as that of a madman because of its strange combination of realism and visionary power. Thus he left no real followers in his own era.