
The Role Of Martin Luther, John Looke, And Voltaire In Changing The Rights Of The People

Try imagining what your life would be like to have not been born into our modern world of convenience. You were either destined for wealth or poverty. To a life of entitled leisure or of working servitude. You would not understand that there could be another way because a true revolution had yet to be born, and honestly at that time changing one's station in life was rare. No matter your position, you lived to serve. Either your master, employer, or the royalty of your country. Today, it is so hard to imagine life that way, especially in our country. But during our studies of the past three modules, there have been a few figures that have really stood out to me in regard to their development and involvement of the 'human rights' movement, long before the 1960's came around. I am going to briefly look at how Martin Luther, John Looke, and Voltaire worked towards changing the rights of the people and focus on their main.

It all began by the "hammering of 95 indictments to the door of All Saints' Church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. With that, Martin Luther launched a reformation with a singular effect. Deliberately or not, he overturned many of the bedrock assumptions of Western culture, instigating a revolution in human freedom that continues to shape the modern world today." The main issue Luther had with the Catholic Church at that time, was the corruption, the hierarchy, and the belief they placed on the institution; that it was the only way to access God. You either believed in the Catholic Church or you were against it and going to 'Hell'. In my opinion, I don't believe Luther ever set out to debate and specifically protect the 'individual' rights of the people, at least not like how we think about it today; life, liberty, speech, etc. In fact the more I researched him, the more I realized what a contradictory figure he was. He was deeply led in his path of faith and Christian principles, believing we all had the right to freely worship God without being persecuted, but he was fiercely against the idea of a democratic government or rallying against how the current leaders chose to rule. And yet, he did set out on a course that radicalized the rights and freedoms of religion, and whether done directly or not, that is fighting for the rights of people. That a person no longer had to go through the Papacy to speak with God but had that immovable, individual right, to speak with Him directly, was his core belief. All people had the freedom of a religious relationship with God and it was not dependent upon one's good deeds or ranking in the Catholic Church. He recognized the rightful, unquestionable dignity found in every person; their individual rights. He spent the rest of his life challenging and fighting for these rights with over 600 different works written. "He was not a rebel. He wasn't trying to destroy the Catholic Church or even start his own religion.

All Luther was trying to do was to stop the Church from engaging in some practices that he considered unchristian", and in doing so, was the founder of an entire reformation, leading towards the individual and free religious rights of the countless people. Whereas Martin Luther spent his life fighting for religious liberty, John Locke spent his life apportioning for three main laws of man; life, liberty and property. His first major contribution to this fight was the writing of the, Two Treatises of Government. At this time in history, the idea of a 'government' meant a ruling monarchy. A monarchy that was the top of the hierarchy, chosen by God and with all the ruling power. Whatever they said, was law and anyone beneath or not of that society, was worth little more than their superior's chattel. His two treaties completely challenged this system and claimed that all persons had fundamental, equal, human rights and freedom; such revolutionary

ideas for that time! This “assured equality”, and the idea of a “commonwealth”, aka civil society, were the core beliefs in his ideologies. That the community, regardless of its form of government, “exists for the commonwealth, for the good of all. And that in the absence of political authority and subject only to the natural law, men confront one another as free equals possessed of certain natural rights. ”

Locke believed that man was born with a right to freedom and that it is received to man by the undisputable law of Nature, not by your name, your family, your wealth, etc. It was all for the preservation of, “his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men. What I really found interesting, is how his writings and beliefs continued to live on well past his lifetime and period of direct incentive. “Revolutionary pamphleteers from James Otis to Thomas Jefferson drew from Locke’s political writings. ” His writings became a core ideology for our own Declaration of Independence, and one could easily argue, John Locke’s ideas continue to live on within our own world and country today; what a legacy.

You can effortlessly trace back Voltaire’s belief in human rights and how it influenced his life; just pick up one of his copious writings. “He Produced more than 20, 000 letters and over 2, 000 books and pamphlets”, in spite of the severe censorship laws, where he commonly risked receiving immense consequences by questioning the establishment, Voltaire was a vast and tireless supporter of people’s rights. I found this quote directly from Voltaire himself and thought it summed up entirely his belief on human rights and how very modern it is to our culture today. Je truly was a revolutionist in his principles and it was repeatedly expressed in his legacy of works. “It does not require great art, or magnificently trained eloquence, to prove that Christians should tolerate each other. I, however, am going further: I say that we should regard all men as our brothers. What? The Turk my brother? The Chinaman my brother? The Jew? The Siam? Yes, without doubt; are we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God?” (Voltaire)

It is amazing to me how far we have come from the days of these three gentlemen. And yet, the fight for human rights is still a daily and controversial issue. Still a matter we must fight for and ensure its continued development to the incoming generations. However, it can easily be said, that without the writings and determination of Martin Luther, John Locke, and Voltaire, our country, nay even our world, could not and would not be what it is today. Much is owed.