

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

Comment on the Machiavelli's secularism in 150 words.

● FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 revolutionary break from medieval tradition → religion no longer the basis of the state → repudiates Aquinas's divine law

R2 secularism = the debate Machiavelli opened in Europe → state freed from religious determination → break from the medieval order

Body flow

emancipation of state from religion → state as autonomous institution → highest human association → supreme in worldly matters → driven by the aim of a strong state / national interest → complete secularisation of politics

Counter-view

secularism not a rejection of religion → religion as a social force/bond → harnessed for political obligation & unity → religion becomes an organ of state policy, not its guiding source

Conclusion routes

R1 separation of politics from religion's vassalage (Dunning) → entry into the modern age

R2 religion retained as the state's instrument, not its master → foundation of European secularism

Machiavelli's secularism was a revolutionary break from medieval tradition, and it began the debate on the subject in Europe. Unlike his predecessors, he did not accept religion as the basis of the state. He repudiated Thomas Aquinas, who held that man needs the guidance of divine law.

Machiavelli emancipated the state from the clutches of religion and made it an autonomous institution. As the state is the highest form of human association, he argued, it must be supreme in worldly matters. His aim was practical: to build a strong state that worked only in the national interest, which required the complete secularisation of politics.

Yet his secularism was not a rejection of religion. Aware of religion's force as a social bond, he used it to strengthen political obligation and unity. Religion thus became an organ of state policy rather than its guiding source. By separating politics from what Dunning called the vassalage of religion, Machiavelli ushered in the modern age and laid the foundations of European secularism.