

# The legacy of Mentor

The protégés of today are the mentors of tomorrow.” ~ Marilynne Miles Gray

## PATRONAGE - THE RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE PERIODS

Today, some believe that in later life mentors become less concerned with the welfare of a single individual, devoting more time and energy to overseeing the development of entire organizations, institutions or states in order to develop the potential of many.

This disinterested concern for the many is not what the patronage system of the Renaissance and Baroque periods seems to have been. At that time, there was a refinement of the apprenticeship. In an earlier era those who might have been mere anonymous apprentices became superstars under the guidance and support of the patron. It was not uncommon for composers and painters to live for long periods with wealthy families and be paraded forth like status symbols. If these artists were not the well-rounded types so admired in this period, they were superbly creative geniuses in a given field and thus deserving of the patron's attention. Often the patron was the well-rounded man (or woman) who dabbled in many areas thus meeting and befriending the geniuses. Several examples illustrate this.



Raphael was born into a lower class Italian family and initially instructed by his father-mentor. The fact that we know his name tells us how far beyond the medieval “anonymous artist” idea society had moved. At the age of 13, he started studies with the great fresco master Perugino who became his next mentor. At 21, Raphael went to Florence to study with Leonardo da Vinci for four years. Later, Raphael moved onward and upward to the Papal Court where, at any given time, artists could be given a commission on which they were expected to survive.

Spanish painter Bartolome Murillo -- also born into a lower class family -- was mentored for three years by Valasquez, the court painter. Nicolas Poussin, the French painter, born into a middle class though poor family, was encouraged in his art work under his first master, Varin. In Paris, Paris, Avice served as Poussin’s patron introducing him to the court and court etiquette as well as taking Poussin to Italy with him. Patron families – the Sforzas, Medicis, Viscontis, Gonzagas, and d’Estes – had substantial influence upon Renaissance artists. The de Medici family served as patrons to Michelangelo who lived at the Medici palace for two years. Today we might dismiss all the connections and master-apprentice arrangements but it is little different today as up-and-comers look for venture angels, social networks, and club memberships to do the same things but more quickly. But, does it do the job any better?



## REWRITING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

In seventeenth century France, an aristocratic priest, Fenelon, was asked to tutor Louis XIV’s grandson, the duc de Bourgogne. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? While we never hear what happens to the original Telemachus, we do know the doubly unhappy outcome of this later tale.

Fenelon secretly wrote *Telemaque*, basing it on Homer’s *Odyssey* to capture the interest of his protégé, who was being groomed as a future king.

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In *Telemaque*, Mentor points out the difference between the rule of self-interested kings and rule by kings who consider their subjects' welfare. The intent was to guide Fenelon's protégé to become a wise and judicious ruler. Notably, Fenelon stressed inward-looking, benevolent qualities of kingship, which were in direct opposition to the qualities of Louis who had bankrupted and starved his nation over a series of wars and lavish building programs. Bourgogne embraced his mentor's teachings enthusiastically.



Once the King found out about the underground novel, Fenelon was banished from court. No one, not even the greatest mentor, would dare to lecture The Sun King on the art of monarchy.

Tragedy struck shortly after. Bourgogne died of smallpox. No one was left to implement his mentor's teachings. If the young Duc had lived, it's possible the French Revolution might not have occurred.

However, history sometimes has a way of righting wrongs – Fenelon's underground book was smuggled out of France, preserved and printed. Within thirteen years, *Telemaque* had gone to 32 editions. Operas, parodies, and plays were written using his book as a model. By 1830, over 200 editions of the book had been published, influencing such writers and thinkers as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Robespierre, Rousseau, and Chateaubriand. This deep and widespread influence upon Enlightenment thinkers was especially strong with regard to education of the masses and women. Finally, without meaning to become our role model, it is Fenelon we can credit as the father of modern mentoring.



IN PART 4 OF THE LEGACY,  
WE REVEAL THE NEXT BEND IN THE ROAD