

ITALIAN LECTURE

FLORENCE AND THE GREAT SCHISM

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THERE is a famous observation about the Great Schism contained in the *Ricordi* of Gino di Neri Capponi who died in 1420 after being a prominent Florentine politician for many years. 'Do not meddle with priests, who are the scum of the earth', he said,

'in matters either of money or of the Church, except so far as concerns the sacraments and offices of the Church. The divided church is good for our commune and for the maintenance of our liberty but it is contrary to the good of the soul and therefore one should not work for it but leave it to the course of nature. As far as it is possible to be concerned solely with spiritual matters, the unity of the Church is hallowed and useful to our commune. The friendship of the pope is useful to our commune and that should not be opposed, for nothing can be achieved without the friendship of the Church.'¹

There are several points to be noted here. First, the general contempt for priests, no doubt a common, though certainly not a universal, Florentine opinion. Second, the idea that the Schism had advantages for the commune and, other things being equal, was politically desirable. Third, the idea that the friendship of the pope was useful. For a large part of the Schism period the commune of Florence was not in fact firmly attached to one pope and showed a preference for ending the Schism. Nevertheless, Capponi gives a helpful indication of the sceptical realism with which ecclesiastical affairs were approached which is worth remembering when considering the affairs of the Schism. The one important thing that he did not touch on, and which is perhaps even more important for the historian, was that a united papacy could be a dangerous threat to Florence. It could be a threat in the

¹ G. Folena, "'Ricordi' politici e familiari di Gino di Neri Capponi', *Miscellanea di studi offerta a A. Balduino e B. Bianchi* (Padua, 1962), pp. 35–6.

straightforward political sense that popes might present a military danger to the contado as near neighbours or a danger to commerce by the use of the interdict which freed debtors to businessmen. It could be a threat in a more complicated way to intellectual life by forcing Florentines into subservience to religious orthodoxy or alternatively into an anxious religious nonconformity. The dominant concern of Florentine politicians in international affairs, during the Schism as at all other periods, was to cope with the recurrent threat of invasion or blockade, presented by one external power after another in the turbulent world of Italy. Sometimes the pope presented this threat, sometimes another power, and this was what mattered more than anything else in Florence's relations with the world. The Great Schism, which extended from 1378 to 1415, began with Florence at the mercy of a superior papal power, which Gino Capponi may have forgotten by 1420, and ended with a weak and friendly Papacy in a subservient position towards Florence. This contrast was in part the result of a fundamental weakening of the Papacy's relations to the European world. Florence, as its closest neighbour, was more affected by this change than any other major power. I would like to suggest in this lecture that this transformation in relations with the Papacy was of the greatest importance in the evolution of the Florentine mind.

Let us begin by looking briefly at the evolution of Florentine international politics during the Schism period.² The War of the Eight Saints between Florence and the Papacy, which had lasted more than three years, was finally ended in the year the Schism began by the peace made in October 1378 which was a Florentine humiliation, involving restitution of church property which had been seized and a substantial fine to the Papacy. Peace was hastened on the one hand by Florentine exhaustion which had led to the Ciompi revolt and on the other hand by the anxiety of Urban VI, the new Roman pope elected in 1378, because the Schism had begun and the new Avignon pope, his rival, was crowned three days after the peace. I shall return later to the War of the Eight Saints and its implications.

The end of the War of the Eight Saints was followed within a

² Florentine involvement in international politics during the Schism period is best followed in rather old accounts, notably F.-T. Perrens, *Histoire de Florence depuis ses origines jusqu'à la domination des Médicis* (Paris, 1883), Vols 5 and 6 and N. Valois, *La France et le Grand Schisme d'Occident* (Paris, 1896–1902). There is also useful material in Gene Brucker's *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1977).

few years by a new series of dangers resulting from the conflict for the succession to the throne of Naples between Charles of Durazzo, a member of the Neapolitan Angevin royal family, supported by the Roman Pope Urban VI, and Louis of Anjou, the brother of the King of France, supported by Avignon. Charles invaded Florentine territory and occupied Arezzo in 1380, to be bought off by a large loan. Louis of Anjou then came South with an army commanded by the mercenary captain Enguerrand de Coucy who occupied Arezzo as Charles had done. Florence summoned her mercenary captain Sir John Hawkwood and prepared for serious warfare, which was only averted by the blessed relief of Louis's death in September 1384.

The Louis of Anjou episode was followed by a more serious threat from Milan which lasted intermittently from 1385 to 1402. The cause of the trouble was the wish of Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan to establish links with Tuscan towns, a policy which Florence quite rightly saw as a threat of encirclement which would squeeze her out of her dominant position in Tuscany. The conflict blew up into a serious war, lasting from 1390 to 1392, in which Florence spent considerable sums of money on sending Hawkwood into Lombardy. It blew up again in the War of Mantua, lasting a year from 1397 to 1398, in which Florence, responding to the threat of Milanese links with Pisa and Siena, had some success in importing French support into Lombardy. Finally it led to the war between 1400 and 1402 provoked by the intolerable tightening of the Milanese stranglehold by links not only with Pisa and Siena but also with Bologna, Perugia and Lucca. This episode ended, like that of Louis of Anjou, with the relief of Giangaleazzo's death in 1402 when Florence seemed to be on the brink of disaster.

After the breathing-space, which allowed Florence in 1406 to complete its perfidious acquisition of Pisa, prepared incidentally by serious consideration of a plan to change from the Roman to the Avignon obedience in order to facilitate the purchase of Pisa from marshal Boucicaut, came the next threat from the aggressive Ladislas king of Naples, explicitly aiming at the conquest of Florence. In the spring of 1408 Ladislas had advanced through the Papal State, which he was reputed to be negotiating to buy from the Roman pope Gregory XII, and was breathing fire in the direction of Florence. It was at this point that the cardinals of both the Roman and the Avignon obediences took the step of breaking with their popes and organizing a council to heal the Schism. These events happened at Lucca and Pisa. We can read in the *consulte* of this period that the main Florentine reaction was terror

at the prospect of offending Ladislas, which might be done easily by breaking too violently with Gregory XII or by appearing to favour Avignonese cardinals who would be supporters of the French claim to the throne of Naples. With some hesitation Florence allowed the council to take place on her territory at Pisa. During the Council in 1409 Florentine terror redoubled, for Ladislas had now advanced to Arezzo. In face of this threat the Florentine oligarchy decided that it must call in a counterbalancing power and envoys were sent to Louis II of Anjou suggesting that he should make an expedition to conquer Naples from Ladislas with Florentine financial support. He came, Ladislas withdrew, and Florence then lost all interest in Louis of Anjou. But two years later Ladislas was again dangerously on the offensive. Pope John XXIII the pope of the new, third Pisan obedience, established by the Council of Pisa, was driven out of Rome and sought refuge in Florence. Once again the city was terrified of doing too much to offend Ladislas. John XXIII spent five months in the suburbs of Florence but was never admitted to the city, though he had influential friends in it. Ladislas had already shown what damage he could do by persecuting Florentine merchants in Naples and the city was not prepared to risk anything worse. It was not until the following year when Ladislas, like Louis of Anjou and Giangaleazzo before him, died, that Florence could breathe again. By that time, 1414, John XXIII was far away in the clutches of King Sigismund and the Council of Constance, which was to end the Schism, was about to begin.

I have listed this series of events, rather tedious to us but exciting enough for Florence at the time, to emphasize the thread of pressing concern with military danger which ran through the Schism period. It was entwined in a complicated way with the problem of obedience to the popes and the Florentines were always willing to abandon their obedience to Rome if pressing political needs suggested it. As the Schism wore on and popes became increasingly impotent, the political respect which they enjoyed in the city declined to zero. This decline of papal power was the most important result of the Schism as far as Florence was concerned. Although it was a reduction in the political importance of the popes it had, however, positive effects in helping to encourage a different attitude of mind in Florentine intellectual circles.

The decade from 1375 to 1385 can be seen in perspective as the last age of medieval Northern-European intervention on a large scale in Tuscany, the last of those episodes stretching back

through the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries which should be put in line with the earlier invasions by members of the families of Wittelsbach, Luxemburg, Valois, Anjou and Hohenstaufen. In this case the main operators in central Italy were Sir John Hawkwood and Enguerrand de Coucy and their low status has prevented recognition of their importance. The only book about Hawkwood was published exactly one hundred years ago by a wealthy English amateur, John Temple-Leader, who employed an Italian, Giuseppe Marcotti to work in the archives.³ There are in fact still hundreds of unpublished letters in the archives of Florence, Siena, Lucca and elsewhere recording dealings with Hawkwood and he remains a great unsung villain, neglected by the Italians as a despicable barbarian and by the English as a pretentious adventurer. Behind Hawkwood and Coucy stood the imperial figure of Pope Gregory XI, the last medieval ruler of the whole of Christendom, who invested vast sums of Northern European money in Italian warfare.⁴ It was the last period in which the Papacy was able to behave in that way. By the end of the Schism the popes were in general reduced to minimal expenditure derived from their imperfectly controlled State in Italy, though John XXIII did receive some taxation money from the North. The Schism was followed by a century of an essentially Italian papacy operating on a scale very much smaller than that of the popes before 1378. Their efforts between 1375 and 1378 had also been the last epoch of large-scale Northern intervention in

³ J. Temple-Leader & G. Marcotti, *Sir John Hawkwood (L'Acuto) Story of a condottiere* (London, 1889). On Enguerrand de Coucy see H. Lacaille, 'Enguerrand de Coucy au service de Grégoire XI', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, 32 (1895); L. Mirot, 'Sylvestre Budes et les Bretons en Italie', *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartres*, LVIII, LIX (1897-8). Papal-Florentine relations in the early Schism years have been reviewed by E.-R. Labande, 'L'attitude de Florence dans la première phase du Schisme', *Genèse et Débuts du Grand Schisme d'Occident*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre national de Recherche Scientifique, No. 586 (Paris, 1980).

⁴ On Gregory's expenditure see K. H. Schäfer, *Die Ausgaben der apostolischen Kammer unter den Päpsten Urban V und Gregor XI, Vatikanischen Quellen zur Geschichte der päpstlichen Hof- und Finanzverwaltung 1316-1378* (Paderborn, 1937), Vol. 6; J. Glénisson, 'Les Origines de la révolte de l'état pontifical en 1375', *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 5 (1951); L. Mirot, 'Les rapports financiers de Grégoire XI et du Duc d'Anjou', *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire*, 17 (1897). The later decline of papal financial resources was described by P. Partner, 'The "Budget" of the Roman Church in the Renaissance Period', E. F. Jacob (ed.), *Italian Renaissance Studies* (London, 1960) and there is a valuable account by J. Favier, *Les finances pontificales à l'époque du grand schisme d'occident, 1378-1409* (Paris, 1966).

Italy by any power before 1494. This transformation of the international scene was in my opinion one of the most important reasons for the successful emergence of classicist humanism in Florence, the main point I wish to make in this lecture.

The War of the Eight Saints from 1375 to 1378 was a conflict between Florence and the pope. It produced intense feeling in the city which found an outlet in exceptional taxation pressure on the clergy—they were to be squeezed according to one contemporary ‘usque ad feces’⁵—in the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, which was sold, in greater tolerance to heretical *fraticelli*, in outbursts of popular religion which filled the churches, and also, among the more devoted adherents of the guelf cause, in expressions of conviction that a war against the pope could never be successful.⁶ The strong popular feeling of hatred for the papacy at this time was expressed, for example, in a poem by Franco Sanchetti who compared Pope Gregory XI to Nero, Attila and the Saracens. His barbarian troops had devastated Faenza, delivered lands near Piacenza like Judas to the ‘Breton pigs’ and allowed the troops of the Cardinal of Geneva to rape Cesena. He deserved to be known as Pope ‘Guastamondo’, waster of the world.⁷

This conflict produced a complete schism between the papal court and the proto-humanists at Florence in the immediate aftermath of the deaths of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Petrarch’s admirer and successor Colucci Salutati was Chancellor of Florence and his diplomatic correspondence defending and promoting the Florentine cause was a powerful element in the city’s aggressive policy. Salutati brought into play all the resources of his command of the classics and his belief in the superiority of Italy and of the republican system of government. His letter on behalf of the commune of Florence to the Romans in January 1376 is a good example of his style. He urged the Romans to rebel in defence of their liberty against the tyranny emanating from the papal court, to act in the tradition of Horatius Cocles and Mutius, the Roman

⁵ A. Gherardi (ed.), *Diario d'anonimo fiorentino dall'anno 1358 al 1389*, in *Cronache dei secoli xiii e xiv* (Florence, 1876), p. 232.

⁶ Florentine conflict with the Papacy during the War of the Eight Saints is dealt with by A. Gherardi, ‘La guerra dei Fiorentini con papa Gregorio XI detta la guerra degli Otto Santi’, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Ser. 3, Vols 5–8 (1867–1868), and R. C. Trexler, *The Spiritual Power. Republican Florence Under Interdict* (Leiden, 1974). For reactions within Florence see the articles by M. Becker, ‘Florentine Politics and the Diffusion of Heresy in the Tracento’ and ‘Church and State in Florence on the Eve of the Renaissance, 1343–1382’, *Speculum*, 34 (1959), 37 (1962).

⁷ Franco Sacchetti, *Il Libro delle Rime*, ed. A. Chiari (Bari, 1936), pp. 206–9.

republicans, to remember that their city had once been the capital of Italy and the whole world, not to be seduced by the blandishments of the clergy but to join in the defence of Italy against barbarian subjection.⁸ The registers of the commune of Florence for this period are full of letters in which Salutati presented the Florentine cause with similar rhetorical splendours not only to the Italian cities but to every European prince from the Emperor himself downwards. In a private letter to a Franciscan theologian in November 1375 he put the Florentine case in a different, more considered way. Florence was not at war with the church. It had taken up arms, as always, to defend its liberty, not against the Church but against foreign invaders, enemies of the Italian name, sent to reduce Italy to miserable prey. The pope's power was almost limitless because he could release debtors and allies from their contracts. The only resource available to the city was military action against his barbarous mercenaries.⁹

In these circumstances it was not surprising that Salutati should write to Francesco Bruni, a Florentine papal secretary, in July 1377 urging him to leave the papal court and its iniquities. Men living as he did were corrupted by the society of the rich. The prelates of the Roman court were wealthy men, enemies of poverty, corrupted by simony and every other vice, whom St Peter would reprove. Bruni should leave them and allow reason to oppose the senses. It was surprising indeed that the study of the classics did not teach him a better course of action.¹⁰ At this time the breach between Florentine humanism and the papal court was complete and Salutati was the flagbearer in the vanguard of a ferocious anti-papal crusade lasting for more than three years. The religious enthusiasts of the *fraticelli* heresy and the humanists of Salutati's circle had, of course, nothing in common in the intellectual basis of their beliefs but they were united by a purely political struggle of the city against the pope, caused originally by the difficulty of procuring grain from the papal state during the famine of 1375,¹¹ later by the depredations of English and Breton mercenaries, by the enormous costs of warfare and by the dire

⁸ Archivio di Stato, Florence, Signori-Carteggi, Missive 1^a Cancellaria, 15, fo. 40. Cf. R. G. Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and his Public Letters* (Geneva, 1976), pp. 51–2.

⁹ To Fra Niccolò Casucchi da Girgenti, F. Novati (ed.), *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati* (Rome, 1891–1905), Vol. 1, pp. 213–18.

¹⁰ *Epistolario*, Vol. 1, pp. 263–76.

¹¹ J. Glénisson, 'Une administration médiévale aux prises avec la disette, la question des blés dans les provinces italiennes de l'état pontifical en 1374–1375', *Le Moyen Age*, 57 (1951).

commercial effects of the papal interdict which hampered Florentine merchants all over Europe. The War of the Eight Saints was the last and worst in a long line of Florentine conflicts with the Pope and the only one which had serious implications for the development of humanism, largely because of the unique position of Salutati, the heir of Petrarch, whose office in the city gave him a prominent political role.

The quarter-century following the War of the Eight Saints, the period of the pontificates of the two Roman popes Urban VI and Boniface IX, 1378 to 1389 and 1389 to 1404, witnessed a long relaxation of tensions between Florence and the papacy whose relations resumed their normal course of intermittent friendship and dispute, minor quarrels about the appointment of bishops, and a recovery of the dominant position held by Florentine merchants in the management of papal finances. Apart from his diplomatic correspondence Salutati sent several private letters to the papal curia during this period which show that he no longer regarded it with hatred. In 1393 he wrote to the pope thanking him for an expectative provision for his son Piero and again on behalf of his son Jacopo, who was granted a rectory in the diocese of Pistoia. In later years he wrote again on behalf of a member of his family and also about a request for a marriage dispensation.¹² Relations between Florence and Rome were, however, much complicated by the moves towards ending the Schism which emanated from France after the beginning of the pontificate of the second Avignonese Pope Benedict XIII in 1394. Already in that year Benedict made moves to negotiate with Boniface through Florence. In January 1395 Salutati, who was, of course, involved in these political moves as Chancellor, wrote a private letter to Benedict XIII, with whom he seems to have exchanged a copy of the *Odyssey* for a Plutarch, thanking him for the honour of a letter and praising his wish to end the Schism.¹³ In the last year of Boniface's pontificate, 1404, several Florentine letters indicated a wish to bring the two opposing popes together. These tendencies were much strengthened by the accession of Innocent VII, succeeding Boniface at Rome in 1404, a more pliant pope who was in serious trouble in Rome throughout his short pontificate from the pressure of Ladislas of Naples, and also by the Florentine wish in 1405 to 1406 to use the help of Marshal Boucicaut and Benedict XIII in securing Pisa.

¹² *Epistolario*, Vol. 2, pp. 434-5; Vol. 3, pp. 661-3, 665-7, Vol. 4, pp. 255-9, 263-4.

¹³ *Epistolario*, Vol. 3, pp. 53-7.

The election of Innocent VIII in 1404 marked the beginning of the gradual downfall of the Roman curia of the Schism. Two relatively weak popes, Innocent VII and Gregory XII, led in a few years to the Council of Pisa and then to the Council of Constance. The main point that I wish to make in this lecture is that these two pontificates created a quite new situation in the relations between Rome and the papacy which was an extreme contrast to the situation during the War of the Eight Saints and which allowed a new grouping and a new attitude among the Florentine humanist circle which now became divided between Florence and Rome. In order to present this view I wish to distinguish between two stages in the evolution of Florentine humanism. The first took place in the period from 1395 to 1405 when Salutati was still alive and the Florentine-curial link was not yet fully in existence. The second was in the succeeding decade from 1405 to 1415 when the link was fully established and the Roman papacy was collapsing. This evolution of Florentine-curial relations is, I believe, much more important in the history of Renaissance classicism at this period than the political crisis of the Florentine war with Milan which has been given such prominence in recent writing.¹⁴

The native Florentine school of humanism which existed immediately before 1405 was created principally by two men: Salutati himself, as an enthusiastic promoter of the study of classical literature, and the Greek visitor Manuel Chrysoloras, who was an enthusiast for everything in the classical world. It was almost certainly Salutati who persuaded the commune of Florence to invite Chrysoloras to Florence as a teacher of Greek in 1396. He came in 1397 and stayed until 1400. Not much is known about Chrysoloras apart from the rather general praise lavished upon him by his disciples. His letter to John Paleologus about the city of Rome, however, indicates that he was the teacher most likely to have extended Florentine humanism beyond the well-established attachment to Latin literature, not only into an appreciation of Plato and other Greek authors, with which he was obviously concerned, but also into linking classical literature with classical architecture and sculpture. His description of Rome praised its ancient buildings in the architectural manner of the Greeks, its triumphal arches, its Latin inscriptions and also its sculptures in the style of a Phidias or a Praxiteles.¹⁵ This letter shows a breadth

¹⁴ Notably by H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1955).

¹⁵ J. -P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia graeca* (Paris 1857-60), clvi, cols. 23-53. See M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 80-3. On Chrysoloras in general G. Cammelli, *Manuele Crisolora* (Florence, 1941).

of appreciation which might have been available to Petrarch but which was not normal in the attitudes of Salutati and his friends. Chrysoloras should be restored to the pre-eminent position he once had among the creators of the Renaissance.

His pupils in Florence included, apart from Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio, Roberto Rossi, Palla Strozzi, Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia, and Vergerio. These men were the creators of Florentine classicism and it is fairly clear that they existed as a group in the very first years of the fifteenth century. The record of their beliefs is contained in Bruni's *Dialogus*, composed in 1401, in Vergerio's *De Ingenuis Moribus*, 1402, and in Giovanni Dominici's *Lucula Noctis* of 1405. Bruni's *Ad Petrum Paulum Istrum Dialogus*, dedicated to Vergerio, which is commonly dated to 1401, records two discussions in which the participants were Bruni, Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli and Roberto Rossi.¹⁶ It is modelled to some extent on Cicero's *De Oratore*. The aim of the work is to put forward two opposed points of view about culture: one that emphasizes the hopeless weakness of modern writings and ideas in comparison with those produced in the age of Cicero, many of which are now lost; the other allowing value to the native Florentine tradition of the fourteenth century in the writings of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. It is the former naturally, that interests us. Niccoli is made to argue that philosophy, which was taken by Cicero from Greece to Italy and which is also to be found in the later writings of Cassiodorus and Chalcidius, is now hopelessly lost. All the texts are corrupt. Modern philosophers lay down Aristotle's ideas as law and do so in inelegant language and they do not really understand what Aristotle said. Modern dialectic is dominated by Oxford logicians with a list of barbaric names.

The reason for this weakness is primarily the lack of good texts and of masters fit to teach them. We lack texts of Cicero, Livy, Sallust, Pliny and Varro. Dante wrote poor Latin and had the affrontery to prefer the tyrant Caesar to Brutus the defender of liberty. Petrarch was like a painter who claimed to be another Apelles but could not in fact draw a straight line and his *Africa* was greatly inferior to Virgil's *Aeneid*. One letter of Cicero and one poem of Virgil would be worth all his writings. In the second

¹⁶ E. Garin (ed.), *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento* (Milan-Naples, 1952), pp. 44-99. There is a recent study of the controversies about the *Dialogus* by D. Quint, 'Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's *Dialogues*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985).

conversation Niccoli withdrew most of his calumnies of the Florentine writers, which he said he had put forward only to provoke Salutati, and the discussion ends with a happy agreement on the great virtues of modern Florence. That does not very much matter. What is interesting is that we find sketched here a statement that the recovery of Latin writing and of its philosophical attitudes are essential, exactly the point of view which animated the humanists of the Florentine school. The probability is that the views attributed to Niccoli here—sufficiently in agreement with half-a-dozen later literary evocations of him¹⁷—and those attributed to Salutati, the grand old defender of Florentine culture, convey a reasonably good impression of their opinions in real life. In the manner common in *quattrocento* dialogues we have famous characters, recognizable but with an added spice of parody or satire to improve the reader's pleasure.

Niccoli's gracious withdrawal of his views about the ancients and the moderns in the later part of the dialogue does not alter the fact that he had stated them. And we can tell, in fact, from the correspondence of Salutati and Bruni a few years later that the two views attributed to Niccoli and Salutati in the first part of the dialogue were true statements of opinions held in their circle. Salutati wrote two well-known letters to Poggio, who had gone to Rome, in December 1405 and March 1406, shortly before his death, reproving him for the sarcastic observations about modern writers contained in letters to Salutati and Niccoli, insisting against him that Christian authors were superior to pagan and that Petrarch had much to recommend him.¹⁸ Salutati, in contrast to Poggio and Niccoli, attached enormous value to classical literature but also insisted at the same time on putting it within a Christian framework. Like Boccaccio before him, he believed that classical stories were valuable if they were given allegorical interpretations which revealed a meaning acceptable to Christian ethics. As far as their beliefs went, Christians were always preferable to pagans. But it is clear that the effect of the instruction

¹⁷ Niccoli's opinions have recently been re-examined by P. A. Stadter, 'Niccolò Niccoli: winning back the knowledge of the ancients', *Vestigia Studi in Onore di Giuseppe Billanovich* (Rome, 1984), Vol. 2, and his contemporary reputation by M. C. Davies, 'An emperor without clothes? Niccolò Niccoli under attack', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, 30, (1987).

¹⁸ *Epistolario*, Vol. 4, pp. 126–45, 158–70. There are modern works on Salutati by B. L. Ullman, *The Humanism of Coluccio Salutati* (Padua, 1963), and R. G. Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads. The Life, Works, and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, N. Carolina, 1983).

given by him and by Chrysoloras had been to create a small group which adopted a much more indiscriminate classicism which asserted the general superiority of the ancient to the modern world. This point of view was represented again by Vergerio's *De Ingenuis Moribus* which proposed an ideal liberal education without any reference to Christian precepts.¹⁹ A liberal education should consist of history, moral philosophy, to teach men the secret of true freedom and eloquence. No mention was made of the subjects principally valued in contemporary university education.

The views held by the extreme classicists at Florence were attacked in 1405 by the Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici in his book *Lucia Noctis*. Dominici's view was quite simply that Christianity and pagan literature were incompatible. The arguments in favour of pagan writings as a support to Christianity were quite valueless. Christians would do better to ignore them and take up manual labour. 'Sacred writings are neglected', he said,

'books of faith uncared for, the writings of pagans are bound in silk, decorated with gold and silver, read as precious things, and all the schools of Christians—Christians in name only—resound day and night, holy days included, with the words of pagans.'²⁰

Dominici's words refer, recognizably, to the classicists' obsession with manuscripts which is often indicated by their letters. And his argument is clearly true. The group represented by Niccoli, Poggio and Vergerio did indeed favour a general attachment to

¹⁹ 'Petri Pauli Vergerii De Ingenuis Moribus et Liberalibus Studiis Adulescentiae etc.', ed. A. Gnesotto, *Atti e Memorie della R. Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti di Padova*, 34 (1917). There are recent studies of Vergerio by D. Robey: 'Vergil's statue at Mantua and the defence of poetry: an unpublished letter of 1397', *Rinascimento*, 20 (1969); 'P. P. Vergerio the elder; republicanism and civic values in the work of an early humanist', *Past and Present*, 58 (1973); 'Humanism and Education in the Early Quattrocento: The "De ingenuis moribus" of P. P. Vergerio', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 42 (1980); 'Humanist views on the study of poetry in the early Italian Renaissance', *History of Education*, 13 (1984).

²⁰ R. Coulon (ed.), *Beati Iohannis Dominici Cardinalis S. Sixti. Lucula Noctis* (Paris, 1908), Chap. 13. There are more recent studies of Dominici by P. Da Prati, *Giovanni Dominici e l'Umanesimo* (Naples, 1965) and C. Mésoniat, *Poetica Theologia. La 'Lucula Noctis' di Giovanni Dominici e le dispute letterarie tra '300 e '400* (Rome, 1984) but the most useful account of his life in the period considered here remains that by H. V. Sauerland, 'Cardinal Johannes Dominici und sein Verhalten zu den kirchlichen Unionsbestrebungen während der Jahre 1406–15', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 9 (1887).

classical culture which would, if accepted, create an alternative lay culture which would have no place for Christian beliefs and this attitude of mind did become dominant a generation later in the important writings of Brunì, Alberti and, most of all, Lorenzo Valla.

A new stage in the circumstances of the Florentine humanist group resulted from the move by Brunì to the papal curia at Rome in April 1405 and the death of Salutati in May 1406. Salutati's death meant that a restraining hand was removed from the group. Salutati had been a supporter of traditional religious assumptions and a defender of the Florentine intellectual tradition of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. Poggio had moved to the papal curia in 1402 as secretary to the Cardinal of Bari. By 1404 he was scriptor. After working for popes Innocent VII and Gregory XII he became a scriptor for the Pisan popes Alexander V and John XXIII. Later on he became a secretary.²¹ Brunì went to Rome in April 1405 and quickly became a secretary to Innocent VII.²² His acceptance and promotion were evidently due to Salutati's enthusiastic recommendation. Brunì described in a letter the reception of Salutati's letter to the pope about him, read aloud in a group including several cardinals, who expressed doubts about his youth but were moved by the gravity and ornamentation of the letter and by the charity of Salutati's praises. He claimed that he, Brunì, had impressed the pope by a reply he wrote to letters from the Duke of Berry which surpassed a version submitted by Jacopo d'Angeli, incidentally another member of the Florentine circle, and according to his own account he quickly became important in curial business.²³ Brunì remained with the

²¹ On Poggio's career at the papal court in this period, see W. von Hofman, *Forschungen zur Geschichte der Kurialen Behörden vom Schisma bis zur Reformation* (Rome, 1914), Vol. 2, p. 110; E. Walsert, *Poggius Florentinus* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 19–41. Cf. M. C. Davies, 'Poggio Bracciolini as rhetorician: unpublished pieces', *Rinascimento*, 22 (1982).

²² On Brunì's career at the papal court see von Hofmann, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 107, 110; C. Vasoli, 'Leonardo Brunì', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 14 (1972). There has been a great deal of modern work on Brunì by H. Baron in *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance; Humanistic and Political Literature in Florence and Venice at the Beginning of the Quattrocento* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); and *From Petrarch to Leonardo Brunì* (Chicago–London 1968). There is a recent addition by C. Griggio, 'Due lettere inedite del Brunì al Salutati e a Francesco Barbaro', *Rinascimento*, 26 (1986).

²³ L. Mehus (ed.), *Leonardi Brunì Arretini Epistolarum Libri VIII* (Florence, 1741), Vol. 1, pp. 1–3; F. P. Luiso, *Studi su L'Epistolario di Leonardo Brunì* (Rome, 1980), pp. 5–8.

courts of Innocent VII and Gregory XII. In the middle of 1408 he said he intended to stick by Gregory although the pope was being abandoned by his cardinals, but in April 1409 he in fact moved to the council at Pisa because he said he now believed that the action against Gregory was necessary since he had been so misled by his advisers.²⁴ Both Poggio and Bruni therefore eventually went North with John XXIII to be present at the Council of Constance. The papal court also included at this period, among humanists having very close connections with the Florentine group, Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia, who became a scriptor under Boniface IX in 1401 and later on was a scriptor under John XXIII,²⁵ and Vergerio, who joined the curia in 1405 and then rejoined the court of John XXIII in 1414 to become one of the four *votorum scrutatores* at the Council of Constance.²⁶ A discourse by Vergerio has survived in which he urged the court of Gregory XII to give way to the other side in order to end the Schism and deplored the failure of Innocent VII to do this.²⁷ There was, then, a distinct Florentine humanist group of functionaries entrusted with writing at the papal court which lasted through the pontificates of Innocent VII, Gregory XII and John XXIII from 1405 to 1415.

Throughout the period from 1406 to 1415 our knowledge of the humanist circle depends mainly on the correspondence between Poggio and Bruni at the papal court and Roberto Rossi and Niccolò Niccoli at Florence. There are few letters from the hand of Poggio surviving from this period, though those that we have are important, and none of course from Niccoli. But there is a large number of important letters from Bruni, which present a vivid picture of the relations between the four men and constitute our main source of information for a decade of Florentine humanism. The two important things that emerge from this correspondence are, first, the intense pursuit of strictly humanist objectives—the search for manuscripts, exchange of manuscripts, admiration for Plato, observation of Roman remains—

²⁴ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 2, pp. 21, 22; Luiso, op. cit., pp. 50–2.

²⁵ von Hofmann, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 108, 255; R. Weiss, 'Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia (c. 1360–1410/11)', *Medioevo e Rinascimento Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Florence, 1955), Vol. 2.

²⁶ L. Smith, 'Note cronologiche vergeriane', *Archivio Veneto-Trentino*, **10**, (1926).

²⁷ C. Cambi, 'Un discorso inedito di Pier Paolo Vergerio il seniore', *Archivio Storico per Trieste, l'Istria e il Trentino*, **I**, (1981–2).

and, secondly, the curious combination of the secretaries' self-conscious importance at the curia resulting in their ability, for instance, to help in securing benefices, with a classical detachment from the purposes of the great religious organization they were serving. 'If I thought that what is done here', Bruni wrote to Niccoli from the Council of Constance in 1414 'and what is said here interested you, I would tell you about the acts of the council and give you a commentary on everyday affairs. But, if I know you well, your attitude is that you not only do not care to know about these things but you prefer to be ignorant of what you call the tedious behaviour and absurdities of men'. I think therefore, Bruni went on, that the best thing I can do is to describe my journey through the Alps. He mentioned with amusement that one of the things he had seen was a marble slab surviving from the Roman period with an inscription nearly worn out by the reverence of the faithful which turned out on examination with a humanist eye to record the names 'not of the saints of Christ but of the persecutors of the Christian faith'.²⁸

One personage whom the humanists encountered at the papal court in the period immediately preceding the Council of Pisa was their old intellectual critic Giovanni Dominici. Dominici was sent to Rome by the commune of Florence in November 1406 after the death of Innocent VII with the mission of influencing the conclave of cardinals which eventually elected Gregory XII. Contrary to custom, Bruni reported, Dominici was allowed to address the cardinals in conclave through a window but they reported their intentions to him rather than acceding to his suggestions.²⁹ Florence was by this time actively in favour of a union of the two popes to end the Schism and although still in the obedience of Rome was receiving envoys from Benedict XIII. Dominici, however, was won over to the side of Gregory XII and remained at his court. The commune wrote to him in May of the following year, 1407, saying that he was dismissed from his employment as envoy and that if he wished to be paid his salary he must return to Florence.³⁰ He did not. He remained with Gregory after the pope had turned against the conciliar idea and was made a cardinal in 1409 among those appointed to fill the gap caused by the flight of Gregory's cardinals to the Council of Pisa. Bruni replied in 1408 to a letter from Roberto Rossi asking what he

²⁸ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 4, p. 3; Luiso, pp. 81–2.

²⁹ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 2, p. 3; Luiso, p. 26.

³⁰ Sauerland, 'Cardinal Johannes Dominici', p. 248.

thought about Dominici since there were various opinions about him in Florence. Bruni wrote thoughtfully that he regarded Dominici as outstanding as a man of learning and eloquence. He held it against Dominici, however, that when he was made a bishop by the pope he immediately gave up his support for conciliar union. Bruni hoped that he was moved by wisdom and not ambition; nevertheless, he could not help liking him.³¹ Poggio, characteristically, took a rather more light-hearted and critical view. Many years later he wrote a dialogue about hypocrisy in which he gave Dominici a prominent place. He recalled that when Dominici had been in Florence he had been a successful preacher against public immorality, had secured the abolition of games of dice in the festivals of May Day and had attacked license in female clothing. When he joined the court of Gregory XII, he joined the crowd of hypocrites and won Florentine disapproval by becoming first bishop of Ragusa and then a cardinal. Poggio recalled that in those days, when he was in the middle of everything at the court of Gregory, he had been present at a dinner where Dominici, recently arrived in Rome, had criticized the pope's policy. 'I told him', Poggio said, 'the offer of a cardinal's hat will change your opinion . . . And, as I had predicted, so it fell out.'³² Poggio presumably remembered the attack on the point of view he shared which had been delivered by Dominici in Florence and took pleasure in the failure of the rigid Gregorian line to which Dominici had been faithful when the humanists all joined the court of the Council's pope John XXIII. The latter was of course also an old ally of Florence and a financial associate of the Medici.³³

If we looked at the letters of ordinary, non-humanist laymen visiting the papal court and the councils, we would no doubt find their observations equally dispassionate and sceptical. In that sense the only significance of the humanists' remarks is that they were couched in good Latin and are more amusing as sentences composed for deliberately classical compositions. Their importance, however, becomes much greater if we place them in context. In the first place the humanists were important in papal business. It was not only that their position at the curia gave them an influence in securing benefices as the letters from Niccoli and

³¹ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 2, p. 19; Luiso, p. 49.

³² *Centra hypocritas dialogus*, reprinted in Poggius Bracciolini, *Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Fubini (Turin, 1966) Vol. 2, pp. 73-4.

³³ G. Holmes, 'How the Medici became the Pope's Bankers', N. Rubinstein (ed.), *Florentine Studies* (London, 1968).

others asking for their assistance showed. Bruni claimed that he had refused the offer of a bishopric made to him by Innocent VII.³⁴ The really important thing was that scribes and secretaries wrote the pope's major political letters. They were employed to do this because their command of classical Latin carried weight in the diplomatic world. Giangaleazzo remarked that Salutati's letters written as Chancellor of Florence were worth a squadron of cavalry³⁵ and that was why Salutati's recommendation secured Bruni his place in the curia. The composition of such letters inevitably made them privy to all the secrets of their masters. It is remarkable that such detached observers should have been in control of supremely important ecclesiastical affairs.

Secondly, humanist activity at the curia was significant because it was accompanied by a passionate and continuous pursuit of classical culture, accompanied no longer by the restraining hand of Salutati. In Bruni's letters his frequent reports of curial affairs and his complaints about the turbulent war-ridden society about which the papal court moved are only intervals in a torrent of classical enthusiasm. Roman remains were observed. Bruni's description of the ancient monuments at Rimini in 1409 led him on to reflections on the superiority of ancient republican institutions in the city. The essence of a city he said was a magistracy with the power to summon citizens, a point connected with his interest in the Roman-republican origins of Florence.³⁶ Poggio was at this time already beginning the investigations which were to lead him many years later to compile the first list of Roman inscriptions. The letters contain many references to the exchange of treasured manuscripts between the classicists. Bruni writes to Niccoli in 1406 about a three-way exchange of Greek manuscripts between them and Antonio Loschi, also at that time at the papal court.³⁷ There was evidently a constant interchange of manuscripts between them. The connection with Loschi, who was also a papal secretary under Gregory XII and John XXIII, should remind us, incidentally, that classical friendship between the humanists was more important than the temporary political opposition which had placed Loschi and Salutati in opposite camps in the war

³⁴ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 2, p. 11; Luiso, pp. 35-6.

³⁵ Ullman, *Humanism of Coluccio Salutati*, p. 14.

³⁶ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 3, p. 9; Luiso, p. 63.

³⁷ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 10, p. 19; Luiso, pp. 23-4.

between Florence and Milan.³⁸ Bruni displayed a keen interest in the translation of Plato about which he several times wrote to Niccoli. Above all, the vision of the classical world, which this acquaintance with monuments and manuscripts inspired, was accompanied by an enthusiastic exaltation of the ancient world for its superiority to present times as shown by its literature, its philosophy and its political deeds. 'We are in these times' wrote Bruni in 1408 'small men (*homunculi*) in whom greatness of soul is not lacking but the material is certainly lacking for the amplification of our name and glory.' In comparison with the deeds of Minutius and Marcellus 'what have we which is similar or equal? What is great or admirable apart from study and letters?'³⁹ This depreciation of modern men and events in comparison with the ancients had been deplored by Salutati. It was now given free rein. It was encouraged by the humanists' consciousness that, being in contact with the very cockpit of modern christianity and politics, they knew everything about the corrupt and disordered world in which they lived and could see clearly its inferiority to the glories of ancient civilization. There can have been no time in European history when antiquarianism produced a more vivid sense of the superiority of a past age, worthy of the total dedication of the student in the hope of imitating and recreating it in the present. This was the state of mind which was to lead to the total classicism of the Florentine renaissance, the attempt to imitate not only Roman methods of writing but Latin letters, Roman architecture, Greek sculpture and Platonic philosophy, the whole panoply of revival and rebirth which was to make up the classical renaissance.

The culmination of Florentine humanist effort in the late Schism period was, from one point of view at any rate, Book I of the *History of the Florentine People* which Leonardo Bruni composed in 1415 to 1416, immediately after he had returned to Florence from the court of Pope John XXIII.⁴⁰ This told the story of Florence from its foundation by Sulla in the Roman republican period until the Guelf-Ghibelline disputes in the

³⁸ Loschi's life was first recounted by G. da Schio, *Sulla vita e sugli studi di Antonio Loschi vicentino* (Padua, 1858). There is a recent investigation of part of it by D. Girgensohn, 'Antonio Loschi und Baldassare Cossa', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, 30 (1987).

³⁹ *Epistolarum Libri VIII*, Vol. 2, p. 1; Luiso, p. 47.

⁴⁰ *Leonardo Bruni Aretino Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII*, ed. E. Santini & C. di Piero (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XIX, iii, Città di Castello, 1914-26), pp. 5-26.

thirteenth century. The book presented the original Florence as a city established under the inspiration of the Roman republic whose remains were still visible in Bruni's day. He mentioned the aqueduct by which water was brought into the town, the theatre outside the walls, now incorporated into the city, the temple which was now the Baptistery. These people, he said, had built in imitation of Rome itself. They had a capital and forum, public baths, a temple of Mars. This was the city to which Cicero and Sallust had referred, in Bruni's estimation, and no doubt in his remarks we see the humanist assumptions about the buildings of contemporary Florence which deluded Brunelleschi into his confusion of Roman and Romanesque architecture. Florence was in fact poor in Roman remains but classical enthusiasm encouraged its devotees to create a political chronology based on literary sources, while exaggerating the archaeological evidence in order to strengthen the essential Romanism to which they were attached.

The decline of the Roman Empire began, said Bruni, at the time when Rome, having abandoned liberty, began to serve the emperors. Augustus and Trajan were worthy rulers, but after them came disaster. 'Liberty ended in the imperial name and after liberty virtue also departed.' 'Under Julius Caesar how many lights of the republic were extinguished.' The idea of imperial decline, perhaps taken over from Orosius, was converted into a conception of the loss of liberty and with liberty of the civilization that went with it. With these sentences the Gibbonian conception of history was inaugurated. Bruni also had a clear idea of the long period of decay caused by the barbarian invasions. After that flood had passed he said, 'cities throughout Italy began to grow and flourish and to raise themselves up into their early authority', *pristina auctoritas*. The distinction of ancient and medieval history, the decline and recovery of civilization were present to his eyes.

When Bruni was back in Florence writing his *History of the Florentine People* his friend Poggio was still at the Council of Constance to which he had gone as a secretary of Pope John XXIII. There are no elaborate published literary pieces from Poggio at this time but there is an oration about the clergy and there are various letters which convey a distinct impression of an individual mind and attitude. The oration about the clergy is an attack on clerical behaviour which might have come from any sharp-minded observer, distinguished only by its wide-ranging criticism of hypocrisy and financial greed and by the charming

Latin in which it is couched.⁴¹ The letters seem to me more interesting because Poggio presents himself in them as an employee of the curia observing the Council of Constance with the enlightened detachment of an observer, watching a collection of people and events to be described with the parallels and the insights of classical authors. In the period before Martin V's election in 1417 he wrote to Francesco Pizzolpassi advising him not to come to Constance before a pope was elected because the discussion in the Council might have disastrous effects and constructing parallels at some length between ecclesiastical disputes and the political quarrels of the last days of the Roman republic.⁴² The most remarkable thing that Poggio wrote at Constance however was his letter to Bruni about the trial and burning of the Czech heretic Jerome of Prague dated 30 May 1416.⁴³ Jerome evidently made a profound impression on Poggio. It was not for him, Poggio said significantly to decide who was right or wrong. What impressed him was the language of the martyr which approached the *facundia priscorum*, the eloquence of the ancients, the arguments, the demeanour, the faith with which he answered adversaries. His dignity resembled that of another Cato. His behaviour when he was burnt was close to the constancy of soul of the Stoics. His acceptance of death claimed comparison with Mutius and Socrates. In all these writings one must of course allow a certain force to the passionate devotion to the Latin tongue which Poggio characteristically showed. The power of composition, *ratio dicendi*, was what separated men from animals and Poggio was at that time conducting his expeditions from Constance to nearby abbey libraries in search of manuscripts of Cicero and Quintilian which would improve the literary powers of modern humanity. But beyond this purely linguistic aspect of his outlook there was also an acceptance of the classical point of view which made the proceedings on which his income depended appear to him barbarous so that he appears in his writings almost as an anthropologist observing the deplorable behaviour of a curious sect. This is an

⁴¹ *Oratio Patres Reverendissimos*, reprinted in *Opera*, Vol. 2, pp. 13–21. Cf. R. Fubini, 'Un' Orazione di Poggio Bracciolini sui Vizi del clero scritta al tempo del concilio di Costanza', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 142 (1965).

⁴² A. Wilmanns, 'Ueber die Briefsammlungen des Poggio Bracciolini', *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, 30 (1913), pp. 459–60, reprinted *Opera* (Turin, 1969) Vol. 4, pp. 320–1.

⁴³ T. de Tonellis, *Poggii Epistolae*, reprinted in *Opera*, Vol. 3 (Turin, 1963), letter I, p. 2; Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere*, ed. H. Harth, (Florence, 1984), Vol. 2 pp. 157–63.

attitude which classicism has never ceased to encourage but it is interesting to see it so clearly presented already by Poggio.

It might be objected that, in emphasizing the extreme classicism of Bruni and Poggio, I am presenting a one-sided view. I do not think that this is so. Bruni, Poggio and Niccoli, from whose hand nothing remains but who is shown clearly by the others' letters to share their point of view, remained close friends for many years after 1415 and presided over the Florentine Renaissance, not only its literary manifestations but also the artistic side developed by Brunelleschi and Donatello with the patronage of Cosimo de Medici. It is therefore worth noticing that this group flourished and blossomed in the last decade of the Schism in political circumstances which were exceptionally favourable to its attitudes.

I have ignored in this lecture two notable compositions of the classicists in the period before Salutati's death which have attracted much valuable attention as expressions of their political interests. I mean Salutati's reponse to the invective of Antonio Loschi⁴⁴ and Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*.⁴⁵ These are both defences of the virtues of republicanism as exemplified in the Florentine constitution and they are no doubt responses to the threat of Milanese tyranny. I have neglected them because they seem to me to be of relatively subsidiary importance in the evolution of humanism and it may be helpful, in contrast, to present humanism against the ecclesiastical background, whose importance has been rather underestimated in recent writing. The really important point about humanism was not that it was republican but that it was thought by some people to be pagan. In one sense the most important document about early humanism was Dominici's *Lucula Noctis* in which the point was fully and correctly stated. The reason why humanism developed so extravagantly at that period was partly that the humanists had an exceptionally easy relationship with the centre of ecclesiastical power at the papal court. This was made possible by the events of the late Schism period which gave both the city of Florence and the individual humanists unparalleled power over the papacy. It is of course extremely dangerous to state general links of causation of this kind between political and cultural movements. There are so many accidental factors involved which determined the careers of individual humanists and helped to shape their outlook. Nevertheless it seems to me impossible to imagine Florentine humanism evolving

⁴⁴ Garin, *Prosatori Latini*, pp. 8-37.

⁴⁵ H. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, pp. 232-63.

in the way it did if it had been faced by a powerful papacy defending orthodox values and on the other hand easy to see it in the circumstances of ecclesiastical confusion in which their city had a crucial power over popes and councils and they were valued functionaries of the papal bureaucracy. They were not heretics anxious to fight the church. They were aesthetes who were largely indifferent to it and the acceptance of its generous salaries for their invaluable literary expertise gave them the easiest position for the adoption of an alternative set of values which could not be condemned quite simply because they were indispensable. The Schism, which was the collapse of the medieval papacy, provided the setting for the promotion of the Renaissance.