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A STUDY OF THE ANTI-CATHOLIC BIAS CONTAINED  
WITHIN JACOB BURCKHARDT'S THE CIVILIZATION  
OF THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the  
University of North Texas in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Michael P. Kistner, B.A.

Denton, Texas

May, 1996

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WEP

Kistner, Michael P, A study of the anti-Catholic bias contained within Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Master of Arts (History), May, 1996, 89 pp., 70 titles.

This work examines the anti-Catholic bias of Jacob Burckhardt as he employed it in the Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. A biographical chapter examines his early education in the Lutheran seminary and the influence of his educators at the University of Berlin. The Civilization is examined in three critical areas: Burckhardt's treatment of the popes in his chapter "The State as a Work of Art," the reform tendencies of the Italian humanists which Burckhardt virtually ignored, and the rise of confraternities in Italy. In each instance, Burckhardt demonstrated a clear bias against the Catholic Church. Further study could reveal if this initial bias was perpetuated through later "Burckhardtian" historians.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1860, Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) published his masterpiece, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. Since that time, it can be argued that this work has been the most influential work on the Italian Renaissance. He "could (not) have guessed that every important future historian of the Renaissance would attempt either to sharpen or to obliterate the image that Burckhardt had created."<sup>1</sup> Through the years, Burckhardt's Civilization has been attacked on various points, including questions surrounding his interpretation of the impact of the Renaissance on western culture and his interpretation of Renaissance humanism. The subject of this paper is Burckhardt's view of the role of the Catholic Church in the lives of the Renaissance Italians.

Werner Kaegi (1901- ), the foremost authority on Burckhardt, viewed Burckhardt as the preeminent Renaissance historian, devoting much of his career to the study of Burckhardt's works and letters. Felix Gilbert, in his article on Burckhardt's educational years, compared

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<sup>1</sup>Trinkaus, Charles, introduction. The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, by Jacob Burckhardt. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers): 3.

Burckhardt's greatness with von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), legendary nineteenth century historians. Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper regarded Burckhardt as one of the "great philosophical historians of the nineteenth century."<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Burckhardt is still respected in the field of Renaissance history.

This study examines Burckhardt's bias regarding the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the Catholic contribution to Church reform during the Renaissance and Reformation, and Burckhardt's failure to offer a full evaluation of the cultural impact of the Church on Italy. Burckhardt failed to give credit to the Italian Renaissance Catholic reformers whose work contributed to the reform which culminated in the Counter-Reformation and helped shape the catechism based on the doctrinal decisions made by the Council of Trent (1534-49). He ignored the contributions of the confraternal organizations of Italy which involved a large percentage of the Italian population. His remarks concerning the papacy, the Church, and humanism were incomplete at best and incorrect at worst.

Burckhardt wrote eloquently and was without doubt one of the greatest historians of the nineteenth century. His examination of the Renaissance in Italy was exemplary and

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<sup>2</sup>Dru, Alexander, ed. Burckhardt; the Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy and Other Selections. (N.Y.: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966): ix.

deserves praise. His writing style and historical theory did much to capture the imagination of his readers. Some of the most enduring and endearing works of history were produced during the nineteenth century. Historians such as Burckhardt, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) wrote not only historical studies, but literary works of art the likes of which are not emulated today.

The historian today is expected to give specific accounts or interpretations in precise quantitative formulas that provide the reader with a concrete picture of a specific event or period. Further inquiry would have to be based on new data or a re-interpretation of the old. Burckhardt and his contemporaries should be praised for their achievements and their daring for trying to shed light on sweeping topics, such as the Renaissance in the case of Burckhardt or the French Revolution in the case of Carlyle. Historians today would be reluctant to undertake such an enormous task, yet they feel it necessary to dissect one should they encounter it. As Lewis Spitz pointed out in his article from the University of Kansas' centennial celebration of Burckhardt's Civilization, Burckhardt felt "disdain" for those who critiqued "every snip of paper scribbled by some great man".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Spitz, Lewis. "Reflections on Early and Late Humanism; Burckhardt's Morality and Religion," Jacob Burckhardt and the Renaissance: 100 Years; Papers on the Great Historical Read at the Meeting of the Conference Celebrating the Centenary of the Publishing of Die Kulture Der Renaissance in Italien Held at the University, April 28-30, and a Catalog of an Exhibition of Renaissance Art from the University's Art

The goal of this paper is not to destroy a great piece of literature and a significant work of history, but to suggest that Burckhardt's bias against the Catholic Church did not allow him to evaluate properly the role of Catholic reformers and the Italian laity. This paper will place Burckhardt's work in historical context and emphasize the ingrained cultural significance of the Catholic Church to the Italian people. Burckhardt's view of humanism will be challenged and his description of the Catholic Church will be examined.

Lewis Spitz writes apologetically that Burckhardt was reluctant to reveal his own private religious feelings in his writings.<sup>4</sup> This, however, cannot excuse the omission of the contributions of a dominant and widely popular cultural institution, the Church. Equally inexcusable is to dismiss this institution as being largely decadent with little mention of the members of the Church who tried to reform from within, or those who influenced positively the people and the culture of Italy. To assume that the Catholic Church would have degenerated into a secular and immoral Machiavellian state devoid of any ecclesiastical value if it had not reacted against the outside threat of Martin Luther<sup>5</sup>, as Spitz suggested, is both incorrect and invalid.

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Collection organized in Honor of the Conference [misc. pubs. n.42].  
(Lawrence, Ks.: Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1960): 15.

<sup>4</sup>Spitz, "Reflections," 25-6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 26.



Gilbert, in his book History: Politics or Culture, which examines the lives and careers of Burckhardt and Leopold von Ranke, stated clearly an axiom that all historians should hold dear. "The historian should be impartial and his search ought to be guided by truthfulness. In order to be true, the picture has to be precise and complete."<sup>6</sup> How complete can the cultural picture of any society be without a thorough look at the established religion of that society? Burckhardt, himself, believed religion helped determine culture and wrote a chapter in Force and Freedom describing the relationship. Clearly, the Roman Catholic Church was the dominant religious influence in Italy during the Renaissance, yet Burckhardt demonstrated only the abuses within the Church, such as the secularization of the papacy, the Papal State, and the Italian people, as well as the pagan and secular nature of the humanists. Burckhardt did not examine the structure, policies, or reform movements of the Renaissance Catholic Church.

Burckhardt chose in his works to study the "great transitional periods of the past which he perceived as akin to his own times."<sup>7</sup> He viewed his own age as being transitional, and rightly so, after the Napoleonic invasions

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<sup>6</sup>Gilbert, Felix. History: Politics or Culture? Reflections on Ranke and Burckhardt. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.): 16.

<sup>7</sup>Breisach, Ernst. Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983): 304.

of the early 1800's, the revolutions in Europe of 1848, and the unification of Bismarck's Germany.

Burckhardt stated that "without the Reformation--if, indeed, it is possible to think it away--the whole ecclesiastical state would long ago have passed into secular hands."<sup>8</sup> His examination of the Italian Church should have linked the Church with the fundamental culture in Italy during the Renaissance. Burckhardt ignored the contributions of many Catholic Church reformers who were beginning the process of examining the problems of the Church before Martin Luther (1483-1546) began his preaching in Germany. Some members of the Catholic clergy were corrupt, as Burckhardt pointed out, but the Church was not on the verge of collapse. It was woven into the fabric of Italian culture. That Luther pushed the Counter-Reformation and sped up the reform process can easily be conceded, but Luther was not the savior of the Catholic Church. A reform movement had begun and would have continued, arguably at a slower pace, yet moving none the less.

A cultural historian such as Jacob Burckhardt should have included the significance of the Church to the everyday life of the Italian people in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Life for the average man or woman was greatly influenced by the structure of the Church in both positive

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<sup>8</sup>Burckhardt, Jacob. The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore. (London: Penguin Group, 1990.): 96.

and negative ways. There is no doubt that abuses occurred in the Church during the Renaissance which were detrimental to Christian Italians, but the Catholic Church also played a positive role as part of the cultural foundation of Renaissance Italy.

It would not be fair to judge an historian based on the interpretation (or false interpretation) of his motive. As Peter Burke pointed out, the flaw in Burckhardt's work was historical, not motivational. Burke felt Burckhardt's chief mistake was "to accept the scholars and artists of the period at their own valuation."<sup>9</sup> Burke believed Burckhardt composed a book on the "Renaissance" based on face value testimony of contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> Despite Burke's potent argument, it is difficult to fault Burckhardt for believing his sources. Burckhardt was thorough and meticulous when dealing with his source material. What is difficult to understand is how he was able to miss as much as he did concerning the popes, humanism, and the Catholicism of the Italian laity.

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<sup>9</sup>Burke, Peter. The Renaissance. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1987): 3.

<sup>10</sup>It should be noted here that Burke was not wholly in agreement with Burckhardt on the significance of the Renaissance. Burke thought this Renaissance was not the only "rebirth", citing the Carolingian period as another, and possibly more significant one.

## CHAPTER 2

### JACOB BURCKHARDT

Jacob Burckhardt was born in 1818 in Basel, Switzerland. His education and early life, according to Felix Gilbert in his article concerning the education of Jacob Burckhardt<sup>1</sup>, shaped his thinking on the Catholic Church and the Lutheran ministry. Burckhardt's view of history was essentially religious. He saw the Catholic Church as an evil influence in history, believing that it was unfortunate that the Catholic church lasted as long as it had.<sup>2</sup> After leaving the Lutheran seminary in 1839, Burckhardt went to Berlin to study history under Leopold von Ranke, who contributed to the molding of Burckhardt's vision of cultural history, and his idea of the modern man. Burckhardt was not isolated from the events of his time, so it was understandable that the end of the Napoleonic era and the Revolutions of 1848 gave him a conservative and authoritarian attitude that influenced his historical writing. Burckhardt's aristocratic nature was threatened by the liberal nature of the revolutionaries.

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert, Felix. "Jacob Burckhardt's Student Years: the Road to Cultural History," Journal of the History of Ideas 47 (April-June 1986): 249-274.

<sup>2</sup>Dru, Burckhardt, 89.

His father, the senior Jacob Burckhardt, was a Lutheran clergyman who, as Peter Burke wrote, "collected coins and wrote on local history."<sup>3</sup> He had studied at Heidelberg and eventually returned to his native Basel in 1816. By 1838, the senior Burckhardt was elected to the office of Antistes, a minor church office, in the Church in Basel. Burckhardt, the son, studied theology at the University in Basel until, as Burke suggested, he lost his "faith". Burckhardt's family was "deeply rooted in the traditions of the Reformation."<sup>4</sup> Burckhardt believed it was a misfortune of history that the Reformation did not spread farther than it did, and that it split into two movements, presumably Lutheran and Calvinist.<sup>5</sup>

Burckhardt defined religion as the metaphysical need of society.<sup>6</sup> It is evident that Burckhardt did not hold a great deal of faith in the church itself, Catholic or Protestant. Modern Christianity, to Burckhardt, was "a contradiction in terms," as modern man, with his lust for power and money, did not live up to Christian morality.<sup>7</sup> But Burckhardt did not lose his belief in God. Burckhardt also believed vividly in the existence of evil. Evil was "force, the right of the stronger over the weaker, prefigured in that struggle for

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<sup>3</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 1. (This note was taken from the introduction to the Penguin edition of Burckhardt's Civilization by Peter Burke.) Lewis Spitz confirmed occasional refection of faith by Burckhardt. (Spitz, "Reflections," 21)

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert, "Student Years," 250.

<sup>5</sup>Burckhardt, Force and Freedom, in Dru, Burckhardt, 89.

<sup>6</sup>Spitz, "Reflections," 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 25.

life which fills all nature, the animal and the vegetable worlds, and is carried on in the early stages of humanity by murder and robbery, by the eviction, extermination or enslavement of weaker races, or of weaker peoples within the same race, of weaker States, of weaker social classes within the same State and people."<sup>8</sup>

If evil was present and visible in the world, then so was the glory that was God. Burckhardt felt that Christianity and the Christian Empire were the "greatest revolution(s) that ever happened."<sup>9</sup> In antiquity, the Church held an antagonistic position to the state, which helped the Church preserve its "idealism." To Burckhardt, the nature of Christianity was suffering, making union with the state difficult if not impossible. If Christianity became the state religion, as in Imperial Rome and the European Medieval period, Christian suffering due to persecution or subjugation to the state would diminish or disappear. To Burckhardt, the fall of the Catholic Church came with its union with the secular governments of Medieval Europe, the rise of the Protestant churches, the adoption of the Protestant faith by the German nobility, and the religious wars in Europe that followed.

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<sup>8</sup>Burckhardt, Jacob Christoph. Force and Freedom; Reflections on History, ed. by James Hastings Nichols. (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1943.): 361.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 202.

Burckhardt's views on religion were firm. He left the Lutheran seminary, yet he remained devoutly Lutheran. He was critical of the Lutheran Church during the Reformation for aligning itself with prominent German lords instead of remaining independent of politics, something for which he criticized the Catholic Church repeatedly. It is Burckhardt's view of the Catholic Church during the Renaissance that is challenged in this thesis.

He left Switzerland in the summer of 1839 with his father's blessing<sup>10</sup> for Berlin to study history and to study under von Ranke, a respected historian who would greatly influence the development of Burckhardt's writings. Although, as Spitz pointed out, the "nineteenth century academic theology witnessed the undignified retreat of the 'wisest heads' to the study of history,"<sup>11</sup> that does not mean that those new historians left their religions behind. While in Berlin and in Bonn, several of Burckhardt's friends were "theologians, and the role of Christianity in the modern world remained vital in discussions with (these) friends."<sup>12</sup>

Leopold von Ranke, Burckhardt's mentor in history, taught history at the University of Berlin at a time when that prestigious university entertained such students as Hegel, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Huizinga, Ortega y Gasset and

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<sup>10</sup>Gilbert, "Student Years," 250.

<sup>11</sup>Spitz, "Reflections," 16.

<sup>12</sup>Gilbert, History, 53.

Burckhardt. To say that this was an exceptional time at this university would be an understatement. Von Ranke was one of the leaders of this great intellectual movement at the University of Berlin from the early to mid 1800s.<sup>13</sup> Von Ranke, in his teachings, reinforced Burckhardt's Lutheran view of history. Von Ranke believed that "in all history there lives God, can He be recognized, every moment preaches His name."<sup>14</sup> To von Ranke, neither reason nor argument could reveal God's plan for the world. The "holy hieroglyphe" was "God with his plan and his will."<sup>15</sup> History was predestined to unfold in the only way it could.

A comparison between Burckhardt and one of his German contemporaries at the University of Berlin, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) would place Burckhardt as the pessimist and Nietzsche the optimist. Burckhardt's predictions for the future generally were gloomy and catastrophic. Nietzsche, on the other hand, "celebrated the chance to revolutionize human life."<sup>16</sup> Although a cultural elitist, Nietzsche's idea of the *Urbemensch* was a positive reflection on the German people. Although Nietzsche agreed with Burckhardt on the issue of the freedom of the masses being the final nail in the coffin of European aristocratic elitism, he did not agree on

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<sup>13</sup>Breisach, *Historiography*, 229.

<sup>14</sup>Gilbert, *History*, 25.

<sup>15</sup>Breisach, *Historiography*, 233.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 304.



Burckhardt's cultural historical umbrella as the sole cause.<sup>17</sup> However, in a letter to a friend, Nietzsche revealed his respect for Burckhardt and his desire to be able to give comparable lectures.<sup>18</sup>

Burckhardt had a peculiar habit of denying the subject of his writings. In introducing his works, he would issue disclaimers that suggested that he was not attempting a major work and then proceeded to do just that. Burckhardt gave the Civilization the "title of an essay" proclaiming his limited strength and resources for a task so enormous.<sup>19</sup> However, Burckhardt tried to produce an all-encompassing work that spanned the entire breadth of the Renaissance. He also claimed in his work Force and Freedom that he did not believe in the relationship between history and philosophy, nor in the idea of a philosophy of history:

"Hegel, in the introduction to his Philosophy of History, tells us that the only idea which is 'given' in philosophy is the simple idea of reason, the idea that the world is rationally ordered: hence the history of the world is a rational process, and the conclusion yielded by world history must (sic!) be that it was the rational, inevitable march of the world spirit—all of which, far from being 'given,' should first have been proved. He speaks also of 'the purpose of eternal wisdom,' and calls his study a theodicy by virtue of its recognition of the affirmative in which the negative (in popular parlance, evil) vanishes, subjected and overcome."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 305.

<sup>18</sup>Dru, Burckhardt, xxi.

<sup>19</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 19.

<sup>20</sup>Burckhardt, Force, 80.

Interestingly enough, Burckhardt proceeded to elaborate his own philosophy of history, warning that "the philosophy of history is a centaur, a contradiction in terms, for history co-ordinates, and hence is unphilosophical, while philosophy subordinates, and hence is unhistorical."<sup>21</sup> This centaur was made of two entities, history and philosophy which, for Burckhardt, were completely different. History co-ordinates, putting together a larger picture from its fragments. Philosophy subordinates, taking the larger picture and organizing it into recognizable patterns. Burckhardt, in Force and Freedom, subordinated history into general axioms which he "proved" with examples from ancient to contemporary history. Once again, he did what he said he would not do.

To Burckhardt, history was an art. He was an idealist who viewed historical writing as poetic verse that enlightened and educated. History was the unfolding of God's plan, and yet was causational. The great men in history and the great events of the past shaped the years that followed them, yet they were only fulfilling God's scheme for the world. He was the pioneer of cultural history, but did not master the discipline, limiting his scope so much he eliminated the majority of society from his examination of

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 80.

the shaping of culture, excluding most save architects, artists, writers, and heroes.

In his work, Force and Freedom, Burckhardt separated and categorized the great institutions which influence history into the state, religion, and culture, giving no more significance to one over another. After describing the three powers themselves, Burckhardt described the interrelationships between the powers. Later, he noted the crises of history in general axioms as well as the influences of the great men of history. He then concluded the work with his analysis of the fortune and misfortune of history, ascribing value judgments to historical trends and events and either praising or condemning historical phenomenon, such as the Catholic Church, wishing it never had gained as much power as it had during the Middle Ages.

Jacob Burckhardt viewed history as the culmination of all that had happened in the past. He wrote of the "spiritual continuum which forms part of our spiritual heritage," saying that every effort must be made to collect all information possible concerning the past so it can be understood as an unfolding tapestry. He believed that "heritage is knowledge, that is, a *novum* which the next generation will, in its turn add to its own heritage as something which belongs to history, i.e. which has been

superseded."<sup>22</sup> However, history, to Burckhardt, was not the culmination of events which led to his present, but the future as well. Burckhardt clearly saw the future as extending well beyond his generation, fulfilling the destiny of future generations.<sup>23</sup>

To Burckhardt, history was a "mutable" entity, shaped by time and people.<sup>24</sup> A historian's view of history depended on the institutions he studied. As Felix Gilbert described, "In dealing with politics, military affairs, and religion, the historian describing situations and conditions will deal with institutions, techniques, and forms of organization; he will give attention to areas of life in which the historian of actions is not interested: business and trade, means of communication, learning, and education."<sup>25</sup>

Burckhardt, however, was not an existentialist. History was a spiritual, predetermined, partaking of "immortality."<sup>26</sup> To Burckhardt, the views of historians changed. Epochs of history received different treatment from different historians which may lead to alternative conclusions, but the Truth of history remained constant and forever.

Burckhardt was very concerned with the concept of objectivity. He wanted the historian's search to be "guided

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>25</sup>Gilbert, "Student Years," 266.

<sup>26</sup>Burckhardt, Force, 83.

by truthfulness,"<sup>27</sup> which meant that the historical picture needed to be complete. He wanted to rid historical writing of "wishful thinking."<sup>28</sup> Subjectivity was to be avoided at all costs.

Subjectivity, however was not limited to the sentences written by historians. It could also be found in the selections historians made concerning topics. Burckhardt believed historians chose more modern topics because they felt topics closer to their own century were more interesting than other topics, when in fact "it is (the historians) who are more interested."<sup>29</sup> The historian should be aware that his bias extended to the topic that he chose.

"The world of man is constantly acted upon by exceptional individuals."<sup>30</sup> Burckhardt held few men in so high esteem as to call them "great". To be great, one must possess the qualities of a Charlemagne or Constantine. Men could achieve great ends and not be great themselves. A great man was one who was irreplaceable in history. He was not only in the right place at the right time, he would be the only person who could achieve what he achieved.

For Burckhardt, the difference between a great man and one who is not great is that the great man makes his time, while time makes the ordinary man. A king may be a king, but

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<sup>27</sup>Gilbert, History, 16.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 103.

he may not be a great man. Without the threat of the Moors, Charles Martel may have lived on in obscurity. But Charlemagne was the maker of his time. To Burckhardt, men such as Charlemagne and Constantine would have been great regardless of their placement in time.

A great man was not bound by the same legal or moral codes that bound ordinary men. In fact, Burckhardt believed that "no power has ever been founded without crime."<sup>31</sup> Yet it is with that power that nations and culture can thrive in relative security. Great men, and only those who met Burckhardt's criteria of greatness, were immune to the judgments of ordinary men and could act with impunity with regard to their image to posterity.

Burckhardt mourned the loss of Charlemagne at such an early time in his life. He felt that if he had lived longer and could have extended his reign and empire for one hundred years, "culture would have become supreme..." He believed that Charlemagne would have preempted the Middle Ages and the Catholic Church would not have "attained the degree of power it possessed later."<sup>32</sup>

Louis XIV (1638-1715) held a particular status of contempt with Burckhardt. Louis was more a "Mongolian than occidental monstrosity" who would have been "excommunicated

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 339.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 221.

in the Middle Ages."<sup>33</sup> Louis was not only the absolute ruler of France, he also was the "possessor of rights and the sole proprietor of bodies and souls."<sup>34</sup>

Burckhardt never forgave Louis for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1598) and for the persecution of the Huguenots of France, which Burckhardt described as the "greatest human sacrifice ever offered to the Moloch of 'unity'; in other words, to the royal conception of power."<sup>35</sup>

Burckhardt felt that poetry was the most glorious method of written communication, but was only discernible by the educated and not the masses.

"For the ordinary half-educated man, all poetry (except political verse), and in the literature of the past, even the greatest creations of humor (Aristophanes, Rabelais, Don Quixote, etc.) are incomprehensible and tedious because none of all this was written specifically for him, as present-day novels are."<sup>36</sup>

History was to be read and written in poetic verse with great rhetorical style. It was not simply the transmission of facts, but a work of art. The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy is an extraordinary work, written with style and form. Burckhardt divided his research into comprehensive studies, each telling a story. They relate the great events and important figures of the Renaissance in

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<sup>33</sup>Burckhardt, Force, 180.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 96.

sweeping and bold strokes. The verbiage is knowledgeable and coherent, at the same time flowing and stylish. It is a worthy effort, even though there are glaring omissions.

Burckhardt's view of culture seems odd for a historian that wanted to be called a "cultural historian". He left out consideration of the average person, deeming him insignificant to the development of history. He felt that "it is hardly possible to discover what each man was or represented, what were his rights and claims, and how he stood to his superiors, dependents and equals."<sup>37</sup> It is impossible, however, to write about a culture without writing about the people who composed that culture.

Burckhardt defined exactly what he saw as culture. For Burckhardt, culture, "which meets the material and spiritual need in the narrower sense, is the sum of all that has spontaneously arisen for the advancement of material life and as an expression of spiritual and moral life--all social intercourse, technologies, arts, literatures and sciences."<sup>38</sup> As Charles Trinkaus said, "Culture has come to designate the generally shared outlook on life and characteristic modes of responding to situations on the part of a given socially related group of people."<sup>39</sup> It is apparent that religion and the state are not part of culture, even though he believed

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<sup>37</sup>Gilbert, History, 223.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>39</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 6. (Harper and Row edition)



they influenced culture greatly. Culture belonged to the masses, as they partook of social intercourse. Great individuals were part of society's mass, and as a result the great individuals were quite influential in the development of a society's culture. The average person, however, also played a role in a society's culture, but Burckhardt did not recognize his contributions. Culture did not involve the Church nor the state on a political level. Even though he examined the interrelationship of the independent factors, church, state and culture, he did not combine them.

Power, to Burckhardt, was the great shaper of civilization. Power was the influence, whether real or perceived, that an individual held over a civilization. Burckhardt tried to place parameters on the nature of power, usually political power, based on rationalism. "Even so-called anarchy is, as quickly as possible, shaped into separate fragments of power."<sup>40</sup> The general populace consistently blamed the leadership for the problems that began in the past. Burckhardt charted these and other tendencies of power in pessimistic realism, not trusting the motives of the leaders nor the competence of the populace.

Culture was more than the tangible results of the artists, poets, scientists and philosophers. Most of the population of a society did nothing in these fields and so

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<sup>40</sup>Gilbert, History, 275.

were summarily excluded by Burckhardt. This was not only an incomplete picture of a society and culture, it was an easy way to overlook the significance of an organization, such as the Church in the Renaissance, other than the contributions made by more notable figures. Although Burckhardt's theories concerning politics would be an interesting study, they will not be evaluated at this time, because Burckhardt separated politics and culture. However, the importance of the Italian population on Italian culture will be evaluated.

Power could and did shape the culture of society according to Burckhardt. Power, however, was not good, but evil and insatiable, bringing those who craved it nothing but evil and unhappiness,<sup>41</sup> but culture thrived under tyrannies because of the stability found in subjected societies. According to Burckhardt, culture grew more in tyrannies than in democracies<sup>42</sup>.

Burckhardt did not trust people in power, or power itself. He believed that power corrupted. This led to several warnings from Burckhardt concerning avoidance of the expansion policies of the powerful houses of his own time, including warning Europe about the designs of the Hohenstaufen in Lower Italy.<sup>43</sup> Burckhardt did not believe

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>42</sup>It must be noted here that democracies during the age of Jacob Burckhardt did not incorporate "the masses" as some in the twentieth century. Many poor and women were not enfranchised.

<sup>43</sup>Gilbert, History, 179.

morality improved from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries into the nineteenth century. He felt that he did not live in an age of moral progress, calling the idea "simply ridiculous."<sup>44</sup> According to Burckhardt, dynasties and bureaucracies existed in his lifetime that still "reduced the rights of the lower orders to a mere fiction."<sup>45</sup>

War did not impress Burckhardt as a historian, at least not as much as it did in his personal life, as will be discussed later. He believed a nation felt its power most during a war, setting itself when victorious in a position to maintain its new dominant status.<sup>46</sup> War was not heroic, even though man had placed a high value on the chivalrous and polemic nature of warfare. Burckhardt found war to be wanton destruction which did not separate men into the great and the not-so-great, as "men are men in peace and war."<sup>47</sup> The energy of a society rose during a time of extended peace. However, war was preferable to "individualism," which Burckhardt did not favor, as war was at least the "subjection of all life and property to one momentary aim."<sup>48</sup> War gives the great individual an observable stage on which to perform. Burckhardt admired the individual who risked all for his country or his people, as this was truly heroic. The

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 148-9.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 261.

individual who promoted himself above the nation received Burckhardt's contempt.

War in Burckhardt's time "certainly lack[ed] the significance and effect of genuine crises," being only the individual aspects of one general crisis.<sup>49</sup> To Burckhardt, the Revolutions of 1848 and the Wars of German Unification only postponed the real crisis to the future. Burckhardt, however, did little to reveal what he believed the crisis to be. It was not a grand new world, brought from the ashes of the old. Such a thought was "cold comfort"<sup>50</sup> to Burckhardt who felt that every thought of violence was a "scandal," and "the only lesson to be drawn from an evil deed successfully perpetrated by the stronger party is not to set a higher value on earthly life than it deserves."<sup>51</sup>

Wars fought in Burckhardt's time did not win his respect or support. They lacked significance for him and did not constitute a genuine crisis of history. The last great war was the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. It is interesting that even though Burckhardt lived through the Revolutions of 1848 and the wars of German unification these did not register importance or even nationalistic feeling with Burckhardt.

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<sup>49</sup>Burckhardt, Force, 262.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 263.

Burckhardt was born after the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna. Europe was violently disrupted by the liberalism of the French Revolution. The ideas of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" had been spread by the invading French armies and imposed upon the people of central and eastern Europe. Burckhardt, himself a staunch conservative, was not sympathetic with the cause of the past revolutionaries. That is not to say that Burckhardt was in favor of the absolute monarchies of France or Prussia, but he was accustomed to the relative independence of the nobles and aristocracy of the German states before the unification carried out by Bismarck.

Burckhardt's politics could be confusing. His political philosophy lay in the conservative movement that followed the Revolutions of 1848, and not in German nationalism. Burckhardt was Swiss by birth. When he retired from his travels through Germany and Italy, he returned to Basel, Switzerland. Yet culturally, he was German. But he was a southern German, not Prussian. Otto von Bismarck of Prussia (1815-1898) was responsible for the unification of the German state in the 1860's and 70's. Burckhardt was not enthusiastic about German unification, although he felt that Germany was a great and powerful state, because as a Lutheran trained by von Ranke, he did not believe in an inherent good in people, nor in the good in a collective mass, such as the Catholic Church. By nature, Burckhardt was conservative, yet

he did not trust political power, or the masses. Many of his later political beliefs were shaped by the catastrophic events of 1848.

Burckhardt was in Rome at the outset of the Revolution. His conservative nature placed him behind the pope during the conflict because he "had little tolerance for those who wanted to change the hierarchical government and bring about a closer union of all the Italian states."<sup>52</sup> Burckhardt did not trust the population, nor an enlarged and more powerful Italian state. So great was his mistrust, that he found himself in the camp of the Catholic pontiff, whom Burckhardt was questioning regarding the policy of papal infallibility, which had been recently reasserted.

Burckhardt viewed the Revolutions of 1848 as the lifting of a smoke screen created by the peace of 1815. Burckhardt saw the French Revolution as a monumental and disturbing cultural upheaval, granting the people rights and privileges they did not have before. The period after the peace of 1815 was "a reaction against the spirit of the French Revolution, (during which was) restored in most unequal fashion a number of former modes of life and law and a series of national frontiers."<sup>53</sup>

This comment, however, does not indicate that Burckhardt supported the French Revolution. The Revolution was a sign

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>53</sup>Burckhardt, Force, 293.

of a moral crisis in society. The lower and upper classes were mixed together in the Revolution, which completely went against Burckhardt's conservative nature.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the main causes of Burckhardt's moral crisis. Rousseau's doctrine of the goodness of human nature culminated with the idea that if men, rich and poor, were left alone, they would together, unerringly, eventually develop a golden age of man. To Burckhardt, this idea was not only ludicrous, it was dangerous.

The Catholic Church during and after the French Revolution stood in contrast to the revolutionary ideal. The ideal that came from the Revolution was of a positivist nature. The *philosophes* and the enlightenment thinkers believed in the positive evolution of the spirit of humanity, whereas the Church, the Catholic Church in particular, as Burckhardt saw it, did not. The pessimism perceived by Burckhardt was expressed in the "Syllabus, the *Concilium*, and the doctrine of infallibility."<sup>54</sup> This confused Burckhardt because "the Church...decided to offer a conscious opposition to modern ideas on a wide front."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>The Syllabus of Errors contained 10 sections with 80 theses condemning social "errors". It was passed in 1864 by Pius IX. The Concilium was passed in 1869-70 by Pius IX. It confirmed the doctrine of faith and the Constitution of the Church as well as papal primacy and infallibility.

<sup>55</sup>Burckhardt, *Force*, 299.

The Revolutions of 1848 greatly influenced the Church. The conservatism of the Church stood not only in contrast to the liberalism expounded by the revolutionaries, it actively opposed them. It is true that Burckhardt supported the pope during the Revolution in Italy, yet he felt that the Catholic Church had become a nuisance to governments and the modern democratic and industrial spirit.<sup>56</sup> It is the very conservatism of the Church that may have, in Burckhardt's opinion, become an encumbrance. Burckhardt pointed out that "while principles may be eternal, interests are in all cases subject to change."<sup>57</sup> Once again, Burckhardt faulted the Church for not popularizing its dogma, this time in support of government and industrialism.

There is no doubt about the talent demonstrated by Jacob Burckhardt in his Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, but modern historians have an obligation to offer responsible criticism. Burckhardt claimed to write a cultural history, but he excluded the majority of the Italian population from his examination. He claimed to be a "cultural historian," but he failed to include the religiosity of the Italian masses.

Burckhardt's Lutheran upbringing and education gave him a bias concerning the Catholic Church that is visible in his writing. In his Civilization, Burckhardt wrote fervently on

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 236.



the abuses and degeneration of the Catholic Church during the Renaissance, yet did not mention the many lay confraternal organizations which spoke well for the strength and morality of the Renaissance Catholic communities.

## CHAPTER 3

### BURCKHARDT'S POPES

Burckhardt said, "The belief in God at earlier times had its source and chief support in Christianity and the outward symbol of Christianity, the Church. When the Church became corrupt, men ought to have drawn a distinction, and kept their religion in spite of it all."<sup>1</sup> He then asks the question, why did Italy not "accomplish a reformation"<sup>2</sup> as Germany had. His answer lay in the ability of the Italians to deny only the hierarchy of the Church. The Church had become corrupt in doctrine and principle, and it was not "reasonable to expect that they should all of them go through that mighty spiritual labor which was appointed to the German Reformers."<sup>3</sup> Burckhardt's treatment of the Church, including the popes, reflected his view of a disintegrating spirituality in Catholicism.

Burckhardt dealt with the popes as a political entity in his chapter "The State as a Work of Art." Throughout the Civilization, he sporadically mentioned various Renaissance popes to embellish his historical argument on various topics.

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<sup>1</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 290.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 290.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 314.

Burckhardt did not recognize the spiritual side of the Renaissance popes with which he dealt. He also misinterpreted the motivation behind many of their secular actions.

When Burckhardt described the papacy in his Civilization, especially in his chapter on the "State as a Work of Art," he did not consider the dual role of the pope, which was formalized by the defeat of the conciliar movement and which resulted in the consolidation of the Papal State. Burckhardt stressed only the secularization of the papacy and virtually ignored the spirituality of the Renaissance popes and any ecclesiastical reforms they had attempted or supported.

As Paolo Prodi identifies in his book The Papal Prince, "the relationship.....between Rome and the pope as sovereign has remained unexplored."<sup>4</sup> The Renaissance popes occupied a dual position of office. They were both spiritual leader of the Christian world and temporal prince of the Papal State. Burckhardt denigrated the secular nature of the popes, but without the defense of a strong temporal army, the Papal State, and the independence of the papacy, would have been in jeopardy.

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<sup>4</sup>Prodi, Paolo. The Papal Prince: One Body and Two Souls: The Papal Monarchy in Early Modern Europe. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 50.

In his book Renaissance Diplomacy, Garrett Mattingly described Renaissance Italy as a peninsula under "a complicated net of diplomatic intrigue."<sup>5</sup> The history of Italy, accurately presented by Burckhardt, was littered with dynastic struggle and civil war. The siezure of Milan by Francesco Sforza (1401-1466) and his *condottiere*, the Medici struggle for Florence, and the Venetian-Genoese rivalry exemplified the instability of the peninsula. Even the Most Holy League (1454), formed at the conclusion of the destructive Milanese Wars (1444-1454), consisting of the most prominent Italian states, could not give Renaissance Italians political or national security. Because of the efforts of Pope Nicholas V (pontificate 1447-1455), the Papal State remained neutral during the Milanese War,<sup>6</sup> but the Sforza-Medici alliance had introduce a French intervention in Italian affairs, upsetting the minimal political security in Italy. Nicholas was also alarmed upon receiving the news of the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453.

The Papal State was not immune to political turmoil. In 1445, Francesco Sforza "carved for himself a kind of principality in the Papal States,"<sup>7</sup> only to be driven out by pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447) and two other nobles. Italian politics demonstrated to the popes of the Renaissance the

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<sup>5</sup>Mattingly, Garrett. Renaissance Diplomacy. (New York: Dover Publishing Co., 1988): 30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 72.

necessity of consolidating the Papal State for defense.

"From the mid-fifteenth century, the papacy was aware that the principle guarantee of its independence in the new European State system lay in the formation and growth of its own state."<sup>8</sup> The defeat of the conciliar movement by the papacy led to the centralization of the government of the Papal State into an absolute monarchy.

The conciliar movement in the Catholic Church attempted to "render the papacy a constitutional monarchy."<sup>9</sup> After the defeat of the movement, the Renaissance papacy was able to strip its nobility of feudal status and to consolidate all political power under the pontificate. The Renaissance popes thus cemented their claim to dual responsibility. As Prodi says, "The good Catholic saw the pope as a monarch who, like their monarchs, had made his way towards the concentration of power."<sup>10</sup>

This duality was necessary. Without it, the pope was subject to outside influence. The Avignon papacy (1309-1403) and the Great Schism (1378-1417) both demonstrated the disaster that could result if the papacy fell under outside secular control. To protect itself, the papacy formed a temporal buffer to the outside world.

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<sup>8</sup>Prodi, Papal Prince, ix.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 58.

Burckhardt did not acknowledge the spiritual role of the papacy. Trinkaus accurately said, "In 'The State as a Work of Art' Burckhardt reserves to the end the exposure of corruption in the citadel of holiness: the conditions of the papacy under Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X, and Clement VII."<sup>11</sup> For Burckhardt, the popes had replaced their spiritual role with a temporal one. They did not have a dual responsibility and they were corrupt because they spent their time and energy on temporal affairs.

Burckhardt dealt with the popes in the same manner as he treated princes and generals. By this method he could expose the corruption and secular nature that he saw in the papacy. Burckhardt's individual facts were correct concerning the various Renaissance popes. However, he selected his material to show the worst of the papacy.

There is no doubt that corruption was widespread in the church, and that thesis is not being challenged. However, Burckhardt failed to mention several reform movements or papal actions that recognized contemporary problems and began dealing with them. Although omission specifically is not a criterion upon which an historian should be judged, if there is a consistent pattern of omission, this might seriously effect the analysis of topics that are being considered.

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<sup>11</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 17. (Harper and Row edition)

Burckhardt focused his attention on the popes from Pius II (pontificate 1458-1464) to Clement VII (pontificate 1523-34). Receiving the greatest accolades were Pius II and Nicholas V who were the "two most respectable among the popes of the fifteenth century," both of whom died of the "deepest grief at the progress of the Turks" while they were planning crusades.<sup>12</sup> Pius endorsed his crusade at the Congress of Mantua (1460), and led it with an inadequate force. He was unable to secure the Genoese and Venetian fleets that were currently operating in the "same waters against the same enemy."<sup>13</sup> The crusade opened in 1463 and Pius died in Ancona one year later.

Pius II was mentioned several times in almost gestural anecdotes to prove various points. His Commentaries were used as an example of Renaissance writing, placing it next to Cellini's Autobiography in style and significance, and noting that Pius II was not self-reflective.<sup>14</sup> Burckhardt acknowledged the value of the Commentaries, but tried to categorize it as a humanist work and ultimately was not satisfied with his result.

Much of Burckhardt's treatment of Pius II, as well as most of the Renaissance popes, was negative. He gave credit to the piety Pius II had shown while collecting displaced

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<sup>12</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 76-7.

<sup>13</sup>Mattingly, Renaissance Diplomacy, 80.

<sup>14</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 217.

relics, such as the head of the apostle Andrew, but claimed Pius' enthusiasm was spurred from a "kind of shame", insinuating Pius II only wanted the head because other princes were competing for it. It would be unseemly for the pope not to participate.<sup>15</sup>

Burckhardt criticized Pius II for his negative definition of happiness he placed in a description of the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza. "He is happy who has but few troubles."<sup>16</sup> The passage described Sforza as a princely figure with great bodily gifts, but continued by describing the deadly exploits of his wife and relatives, concluding with the passage on happiness. It was overall a somewhat flattering description of Sforza, who Burckhardt saw as an "uncontrolled despot".<sup>17</sup>

According to Burckhardt, Pius II was "wholly possessed by antiquarian enthusiasm."<sup>18</sup> He traveled extensively throughout the Italian countryside touring the Roman ruins. He preferred to live in Sienna and traced his familial origins to Aeneas and Sylvius. "He probably would have had no objection to be held a descendant of the Julii."<sup>19</sup> Burckhardt described how Pius II granted amnesty to the men of Arpinum after a war with Naples because they were

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 308.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 127.



"countrymen of Cicero and Marius."<sup>20</sup> Pius II described the Roman ruins at Tivoli with a "sentimental ring" and Burckhardt implied that the pictures of this area published in 1467 were somehow inspired by this description.<sup>21</sup> Pius was a great orator, according to Burckhardt, who did not take advantage of his position by loading his speeches "with an enormous amount of antiquarian rubbish."<sup>22</sup> Pius' involvement with antiquity and "noble architecture," when compared with the "enjoyment of the popes who succeeded him," made Pius II appear "almost a saint."<sup>23</sup> Before he died, he restored civil order to Rome in 1460, and passed a bull forbidding the further destruction of Roman ruins in 1462.

Burckhardt's descriptions of the papal activities of Pius II were few. Pius was a moralist who felt that "even if Christianity were not confirmed by miracles, it still ought to be accepted on the account of its morality."<sup>24</sup> According to Burckhardt, Pius II did not support the humanists or poets in his court, preferring to be the "personal head of the republic of letters."<sup>25</sup> Charles Stinger, however, describes Pius II as a humanist who revived classical and patristic

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 320.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 147.

studies.<sup>26</sup> There was nothing else written on the court of Pius II.

Burckhardt did not mention that Pius II was crowned poet laureate on July 27, 1442, by Emperor Frederick III. With Nicholas of Cusa, Pius II reconciled the German Empire with the papacy in 1447. Both events occurred before his pontificate, however they were outstanding achievements which better illustrated the oratorical ability of Pius II than anything Burckhardt mentioned.

As pope, Pius sponsored a debate between Dominicans and Franciscans in 1462 concerning the bull of *Execrabilis*. This bull prevented any appeal of a decision of a pope to any future council, and it rendered the appellant excommunicated. It is interesting that Burckhardt praised Pius II as one of the best popes of the fifteenth century, yet did little to justify this remark.

Paul II (pontificate 1464-1471) was portrayed by Burckhardt, quite correctly, as an ostentatious monarch who began a persecution of the humanists,<sup>27</sup> and who attacked paganism, often seeing one in the other. He "felt a real anxiety about the pagan tendencies which surrounded him,"<sup>28</sup> and according to Burckhardt, humanists were guilty of paganizing Christianity. Yet Paul II was more than pleased

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<sup>26</sup>Stinger, Charles. The Renaissance in Rome. (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1985): 7.

<sup>27</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 183.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 322.

to trace his ancestry to the Roman Ahenobarbus, "who led a colony to Parma and whose successors were driven by party conflicts to migrate to Venice."<sup>29</sup> Paul II participated in the games and races of the carnivals of central Italy "entertaining the people in crowds before the Palazzo di Venezia."<sup>30</sup> There were various races and martial-style games at the carnivals. Burckhardt commented that the games were "remarkable for their warlike splendor."<sup>31</sup> Paul II buried gold and silver in the foundations of buildings he commissioned, a medieval pagan tradition.<sup>32</sup> He also commissioned the first exhibition in painting of Augustus' victory over Cleopatra.<sup>33</sup>

Burckhardt failed to mention anything substantial concerning Paul's involvement in the crusade against the Turks. In 1468, Paul II dissolved Pomponius Laetus' Roman Academy because he felt the school was too pagan in nature.<sup>34</sup> He founded the first Printing shop at Subiaco in 1465, and even though he was not remembered as a reforming pope, his effect on Rome was significant. Paul II sponsored translations of Greek Church fathers and the homilies of the Hexaameron.<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that Burckhardt did

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 267.

<sup>34</sup>Partner, Peter. Renaissance Rome, 1500-1559; A Portrait of Society. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976): 13.

<sup>35</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 230. (Hexaameron-the six days of creation)

not consider Paul to be a particularly bad pope, even though he was guilty of many of the same crimes as most other Renaissance popes. Paul II detested anything pagan, which included the humanists, a sentiment shared by Burckhardt.

In the case of Sixtus IV (pontificate 1471-1484), Burckhardt was justified in his criticism. He was the "terrible Sixtus IV,"<sup>36</sup> who secured his position in Rome through violence, family power, and the use of condottiere, who were discarded or worse upon the end of their usefulness.<sup>37</sup>

Sixtus IV was involved in constant "agitation" with Lodovico il Moro and the "Aragonese kings of Naples."<sup>38</sup> However, this constant trouble invited intervention from the major European powers of Germany, Spain and France. France and Louis XI (1423-1483), although allied with Sixtus, worried the pope greatly. He believed that if France became involved in Italian affairs, "Italy is lost."<sup>39</sup> Sixtus IV negotiated with the Duke of Milan, and, according to Burckhardt, almost gave up the papal throne to the Duke, which would have made the Papal States secular.<sup>40</sup>

Sixtus' atrocities were not confined to politics. He sold sacred relics. He attended carnivals in processions

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<sup>36</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 83.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 84.

reminiscent of "the triumph of a Roman Emperor."<sup>41</sup> At the carnival, he mingled with commoners in the most populous areas, yet he refused to "receive them as visitors in the Vatican."<sup>42</sup>

Burckhardt did credit Sixtus IV with disbelief in magic, and opposing some Bolognese Carmelites who felt there was "no harm in seeking information from the demons."<sup>43</sup> The belief in Astrology and magic was widespread during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Sixtus IV also saved the life of humanist Galeottus Martius, albeit at Lorenzo de' Medici's request.<sup>44</sup> If nothing else, Sixtus did support humanists at court. He was a patron of the arts, and he began large rebuilding projects in Rome.

Sixtus was not devoid of religion. Stinger describes Sixtus as the only true theologian of the Renaissance popes.<sup>45</sup> He strengthened mendicant orders against bishops and reformed the clerks regular.<sup>46</sup> In 1476, he passed the bull of "Salvator Nostor," which reduced the purgatory sentences of the dead by the performance of indulgences by the living.<sup>47</sup> Sixtus IV reaffirmed Pius II's position on Christ's blood in "De Sanguine Christi" (1467), he sponsored debate on the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 337.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>45</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 147.

<sup>46</sup>Partner, Rome, 9.

<sup>47</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 149.

Immaculate Conception issue, and promoted devotion to the Rosary through instituting the Feast of the Visitation.<sup>48</sup> Sixtus was not a model pope, but he did try to improve certain aspects of the Church. Burckhardt did not give Sixtus any credit for his ecclesiastical efforts.

Burckhardt said little concerning Innocent VIII (pontificate 1484-1492) that was favorable. Militarily, Innocent VIII believed he could control the French to the extent that he would be able to "sulk in the north (during his exile), and return as conqueror to Italy at the head of a French army."<sup>49</sup> His crusade against the Turks never materialized, however he became the host for the fugitive Prince Djem, for a price, and he received the Holy Lance of Longinus<sup>50</sup> from Bajazet II (1492). His "wretched administration" nearly caused the town of Osimo to surrender to the Turks, prevented by the aid of Lorenzo de' Medici.<sup>51</sup> In 1484, Innocent issued a Bull that encouraged the persecution of witches, creating a "great and revolting system"<sup>52</sup> of hunts and torture.

Innocent VIII was a "weak individual, and in poor health for much of his pontificate."<sup>53</sup> He did, however, attempt

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 148-9.

<sup>49</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 75.

<sup>50</sup>This was the lance used by the Roman centurion to probe the side of Christ at the crucifixion.

<sup>51</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 34.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 325.

<sup>53</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 9.

reform in the Church. In 1490, he attempted to unify Christian princes for a Turkish crusade, but failed. He unsuccessfully tried to improve ecclesiastical morals, and he condemned witchcraft. Although ineffectual, he did attempt some reforms. The "wretchedness" of his administration came from his lack of ability, not corruption.

Burckhardt's treatment of Alexander VI (pontificate 1492-1503) was wholly justified. The Borgia pope, who bribed his way into the pontificate,<sup>54</sup> was more a Machiavellian military leader than a religious one<sup>55</sup>, and that is how Burckhardt described him. Alexander was guilty of blatant nepotism, family dynasticism, and licentious behavior.<sup>56</sup> Other than Alexander's patronage of the arts, he had little positive effect on the Church.

The case of Pius III (pontificate 1503) was odd. Burckhardt was obviously unhappy with the considerable influence the Borgias had on the papacy. Upon the death of the Borgia pope, Alexander VI, his son Cesare tried to influence the papal conclave using military forces. However, Cesare's failing health and the protection of the conclave by Michelotto Coreglia and the Roman populace prevented Cesare from achieving his goal. The election of Pius III, a humanist with a reputation of personal virtue,<sup>57</sup> signaled the

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 11.

decline of Borgia power in Italy. Burckhardt, who spent considerable time examining Cesare, Alexander VI, and Borgia power, expended little effort on this conclave, mentioning only the election and death of Pius III.<sup>58</sup> It is an unacceptable omission that Burckhardt devoted so little to this event, while extensively divulging the evils of the Borgia family.

If Pius II and Nicholas V were the most respectable popes of the fifteenth century, Julius II (pontificate 1503-1513) must have been so in the sixteenth century. Burckhardt touted Julius II as the "savior of the papacy,"<sup>59</sup> beginning a golden age of Christianity.<sup>60</sup> Burckhardt praised Julius' ascension to the papal throne without the use of simony. He published a bull in 1505 voiding any papal elections won through simony, which was not mentioned by Burckhardt. He refused to succumb to nepotism, and he "proudly bestowed on the Church" the territory he acquired and did not bequeath it to his family.<sup>61</sup>

The popularity of Julius II was so great, he could summon a council "with a comparatively clear conscious...and so bid defiance to that outcry for a council which was raised by the opposition all over Europe."<sup>62</sup> There was a "more-than-

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<sup>58</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 90.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>60</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 298-9.

<sup>61</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 91.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 91.



human" aspect to Julius's persona.<sup>63</sup> His strength in both temporal and spiritual roles of the papacy reminded many Italians of Moses.<sup>64</sup> Julius II reissued a bull, passed originally by Pius II, forbidding appeal from a pope to a council. Julius not only had the ability to call a council, he also had the ability not to call one.

Burckhardt, however, did not see Julius as infallible. He felt Julius II was shortsighted in his dealing with foreign intervention. Julius, the warrior pope, wanted to drive the French from Italy and reestablish Roman glory.<sup>65</sup> but in the case of Julius, "There is no distinction between religious and political spheres, and in fact political action becomes a means to achieve the restoration of the Church."<sup>66</sup> His conflict with Venice, during his membership in the League of Cambrai (1509), led him to favor foreign intervention, especially Spanish. France and Spain attempted to gain control of the peninsula culminating in the Battle of Ravenna (1512), temporarily halting French and Spanish intrusion.<sup>67</sup>

Burckhardt wrote favorably about Julius II, yet he fell short of describing the career of a man he seemed to admire. By 1511, Julius II had secured the pope's supremacy in the Papal State by defeating its nobility.<sup>68</sup> Julius acted within

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<sup>63</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 11.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>66</sup>Prodi, Papal Prince, 43.

<sup>67</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 101-2.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 27.

the temporal role of the papacy. He secured the papacy from internal and external threat, and he temporarily forced the powers of France and Spain off the peninsula, freeing the papacy from the potential of foreign domination.

Leo X (pontificate 1513-1521) escaped judgment from Burckhardt. Leo X, included in E.R. Chamberlain's list of "bad popes,"<sup>69</sup> was an easy target for Burckhardt. He was a Medici, who tried to secularize the Papal States into a "Medicean appendage,"<sup>70</sup> and he was a great supporter of the humanists, musicians, poets, and architects, spending large sums of money patronizing them at court. Under Leo X "the Vatican resounded with song and music, and their echoes were heard through the city as a call to joy and gladness."<sup>71</sup>

Leo X, to Burckhardt, was "the noonday of the Renaissance."<sup>72</sup> He was educated by renowned humanists Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, and he took great pleasure from court jesters and buffoons. Burckhardt felt that the impact of Italian Humanists in the north of Europe after 1520 depended "in some way on the impulse which was given by Leo."<sup>73</sup> After all, it was Leo X who granted permission for the printing of a newly discovered manuscript of Tacitus and he "thanked heaven that he could

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<sup>69</sup>Chamberlain, E.R. The Bad Popes. (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1969.): 1969.

<sup>70</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 92.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 148.

benefit the human race by furthering the publication of the book."<sup>74</sup>

Leo X had a darker side, according to Burckhardt. Rome under Leo sank to become a city in which people "slavishly" tried to rise socially, prelates "were forced to live in a style befitting their rank (regardless of debts incurred), and literary patronage forced authors to be parasites."<sup>75</sup> Leo "scandalously" abused the finances of Rome and the papal treasury.<sup>76</sup> Leo's administration was described as a "gay corruption."<sup>77</sup> Violence was not absent in Leo's reign. In 1520, Gianpaolo Baglioni, a powerful Italian prelate from Perugia, was lured to Rome by Leo X and beheaded as an enemy of the Church. Romagna, dominated by Leo X tried to ally with Venice for protection from Rome. Upon refusal by Venice, Romagna announced that it would rather be in Turkish hands, than in the hands of the Holy See.<sup>78</sup>

According to Burckhardt, Leo X was spiritually weak. Burckhardt illustrated Leo's defense of immortality and the individuality of the soul, which was propagated in the Fifth Lateran Council,<sup>79</sup> however that was the only mention of spiritual matters in conjunction with Leo.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 128-9.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 347.

Stinger called Julius II the new Julius Caesar and Leo X the new Augustus.<sup>80</sup> Leo resolved the schism between the papacy and the French leftover from Julius's pontificate. He was also looked upon as the *Christus Medicus* of the church.<sup>81</sup> He founded hospitals, and he ordered the reform of the Roman Breviary "according to the standard of humanistic eloquence."<sup>82</sup>

Burckhardt described Adrian VI (pontificate 1522-1523) as a timid reformer overwhelmed by the German Reformation. "He could do little more than proclaim his horror of the course which things had taken hitherto."<sup>83</sup> Reforms from Adrian VI were too little, too late. Satirists in Rome made Adrian appear a fool, as "a general agreement seemed to be to take him only on the comic side."<sup>84</sup>

Timidity was not, however, a characteristic belonging to Adrian VI. Prior to his election to the pontificate, Adrian was tutor to Charles V and, upon the death of Ferdinand V of Spain, was named regent until the arrival of Charles I. He was Bishop of Tortosa (1516), Viceroy of Spain (1517), and Inquisitor of Aragon and Navarre (1517), all without the ability to speak Spanish. On June 1, 1517, he was made Cardinal of Utrecht. Adrian was the only northerner of the

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<sup>80</sup>Stinger, *Renaissance*, 12.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>83</sup>Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 93.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 115.

Renaissance popes. He alienated the humanists and artists.<sup>85</sup> Adrian was an ascetic and anti-humanist.<sup>86</sup> His frugality cut off poets and artists from the Roman coffers. He assumed an initial indifference and sometimes outward hostility to cultural concerns of Renaissance Rome.<sup>87</sup> His most immediate concern was to pay previous papal debts.<sup>88</sup> Adrian was not successful in his papal endeavors due to outside forces. He inherited Leo's empty treasury, and his French and German allies, warring with each other politically, failed to support him.

Clement VII (pontificate 1523-34) held a special significance for Burckhardt. The fact that he was a Medici did not escape unnoticed, but Burckhardt paid little attention to that. Clement, to Burckhardt, became synonymous with the sack of Rome in 1527 by Charles V of Germany. According to Burckhardt, Clement VII was hated "no less.....at home than abroad."<sup>89</sup> Hermits had even "appeared on the streets.....calling the pope by the name of Antichrist."<sup>90</sup> Clement incurred the wrath of Charles V "by a series of falsehoods."<sup>91</sup> Rome had already been attacked by Colonna in 1526.<sup>92</sup> France and Germany were struggling for

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<sup>85</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 13.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 272.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>88</sup>Partner, Rome, 57-8.

<sup>89</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 93.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>92</sup>Stinger, Renaissance, 27.

supremacy in Italy unhindered by the Italian states. Clement escaped to the Castel Sant' Angelo. The sack of Rome was the turning point for the papacy. It was made possible by the German Reformation, and it paved the way for reform-minded popes like Paul III and Paul IV.<sup>93</sup>

Clement VII, however, was more than the sack of Rome indicated. During his pontificate he fought the growth of Protestantism, tried to reconcile Francis I of France and Charles V of Germany, and struggled with the question of an annulment for Henry VIII of England and Catherine of Aragon. The fact that he was not successful dealing with these major crises does not speak well for Clement's effectiveness, but circumstances proved to be stronger than Clement.

Burckhardt knew the popes, their histories, backgrounds and careers. His facts were indisputable. However, his choice of facts and his interpretation were based on two assumptions: 1) the Church was corrupt, and 2) the German Reformation saved it. "The greatest danger of all--secularization--the danger which came from within, from the popes themselves.....was adjourned for centuries by the German Reformation."<sup>94</sup> There can be no question that many high Church officials did not live according to the rules they set for themselves. Popes fathered children. Simony and nepotism were rampant. Families, such as the Medici and

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<sup>93</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 95-6.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 95.

the Borgias, tried to transform the Church and the papacy into pseudo-dynasties. Popes, such as Alexander VI and Leo X squandered the papal treasury while Julius II conquered new land to increase the Papal States. But the sack of Rome "compel(led) the papacy to become once more the expression of a world wide spiritual power, to raise itself from the soulless debasement in which it lay, and to place itself at the head of all the enemies of this Reformation."<sup>95</sup> The Reformation, which was a major cause of the Sack of Rome in 1527, gave the Church a focal point and a purpose.<sup>96</sup> The Reformation was an additional impetus for Church reform which had already begun.

Burckhardt succeeded in showing the political nature and secular interests of the various Renaissance popes. They posed the "greatest danger"<sup>97</sup> to the Church. However, he was negligent for not examining the ecclesiastical life of some of the popes in this period. It would have been impossible to cite everything every pope attempted or accomplished in a work such as Burckhardt's, and it was the author's agenda that determined what was included and what was excluded. The Venerable Bede pointed out, "It may be usefully recalled that in every age of the Church (including the Apostolic Age) there has been sin and imperfection by clergy as well as

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 95.

laity, and that in all probability there has never been in reality such a thing as a 'golden age' in the Church, although many have been so overcome with nostalgia that they have appeared to believe in it."<sup>98</sup> The Church had survived for over twelve hundred years by the beginning of the Renaissance and nothing Burckhardt discussed definitively pointed to an impending collapse of the Catholic Church. If the Church was in complete disarray, why did Italy not become Lutheran? The Italian people had incorporated the Catholic Church into their daily lives on a local, as well as a national and international, level.

The dual role of the pope, both secular and temporal, was a necessity during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Without it, the papacy could have fallen under the control of a foreign power and lost its independence and its efficacy as salvatory agent. Burckhardt emphasized the secular role of the papacy, and virtually ignored the ecclesiastical.

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<sup>98</sup>Bede. Ecclesiastical History of the English People with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price. (London: Penguin Books, 1955; revised 1990.): 33.



## CHAPTER 4

### ITALIAN RENAISSANCE HUMANISM AND REFORM

The humanist writings concerning moral government, according to Burckhardt, "seldom got beyond a cold and resigned consideration of the prevalent violence and misrule."<sup>1</sup> Humanists, using rationalism and historical investigation, attempted only "timid...biblical criticism."<sup>2</sup> The humanist concerns lying elsewhere, "religion was left to care for itself."<sup>3</sup>

Burckhardt described humanism as pagan and individualistic.<sup>4</sup> He believed they were interested in replacing faith in God with a superficial rationalism<sup>5</sup>, and he accused the humanists of being more interested in reviving antiquity through ancient manuscripts instead of concentrating on spiritual studies. Humanists, however, were devoutly Catholic and were interested in reforming abuses within the Church that they had observed.

John F. D'Amico, in his book Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome, states "No topic so fully occupied the minds of

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<sup>1</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 321.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 320.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 319.

religious thinkers in the quattro- and early cinquecento as the state of the Church and the need for its reformation."<sup>6</sup> Although the inherent qualities of Christianity, namely "sin, decline, and regeneration" made reform of the Church an "ancient theme", the Avignon Papacy, the Great Schism, and the political role of the papacy demonstrated to the Italian people the need for clerical reform.<sup>7</sup> The humanists appreciated this need and attempted to apply their unique methods to the task of reform. "The humanists... brought to their reforms strongly rhetorical and historical ideas that made their plans more immediate and provided a more conscious statement of the sources of abuses."<sup>8</sup> Burckhardt did not view the humanists as Christian, much less as interested in improving the Church.

For Burckhardt, "humanism was in fact pagan, and became more and more so as its sphere widened in the fifteenth century."<sup>9</sup> For Burckhardt, the humanists were the vanguard of an individualist movement that replaced Christianity with secular and ancient pagan interests. Humanism "lent support...to popular superstition," supporting the "pagan inheritance...by pagan literary development."<sup>10</sup> Burckhardt

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<sup>6</sup>D'Amico, John F. Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983): 212.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 220.

<sup>9</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 319.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 329.

felt the humanists were seeking a "kind of superficial rationalism" by contrasting ancient pagan writers and discredited Church doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Lewis Spitz agreed with Burckhardt, saying "much humanism became in fact pagan as a resuscitated antiquity shouldered religion aside."<sup>12</sup>

According to Burckhardt, the humanists wanted to revive antiquity and the glory that was Rome. They busied themselves translating and collecting manuscripts of the ancient Roman, and later Greek, writers. For the Italians, Latin was easy to translate, and many of the monuments and documents of the Roman era survived.<sup>13</sup> Burckhardt criticized the humanists for their pagan tendencies, and credited them with being the first modern men.

Paul Kristeller credited Burckhardt's Civilization and Georg Voigt's Revival of Classical Antiquity or the First Century of Humanism (1859) as spurring scholarly research into the subject of Renaissance humanism.<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Toffanin, in 1952, challenged the concept of the "pagan humanist" asserting that humanists were champions "of the authentic Latin-Catholic tradition against late medieval Aristotelian science."<sup>15</sup> As Eugene Rice stated, "No humanist

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>12</sup>Spitz, "Reflections," 21.

<sup>13</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 121.

<sup>14</sup>Kristeller, Paul O. "Preface," Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy, vol. 1, ed. by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.): xi.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., xi.

was a pagan."<sup>16</sup> John F. D'Amico writes that the term "Christian humanist" can be considered anachronistic if it is opposed by the term "pagan humanist."<sup>17</sup>

Humanist Raphaelle Maffei listed six elements of the Church that needed reform. First, the financial state of the papacy and the Curia must be regulated. Second, the clergy should be berated for living extravagantly. Third, return the mendicant orders to the high standards of their respective founders. Fourth, review and authorize all religious writings. Fifth, the pope must urge temporal rulers to rule responsibly. Sixth, all Christians should live in peace with each other to strengthen Christian Europe against its enemies, especially the Turks.<sup>18</sup> All humanists stressed one or all of these points. It is interesting to note that none of these elements ere based on theology.

The individual humanists had their own theology, and there were some elements that many humanists shared, but "humanism was not an ideological program"<sup>19</sup> to be adopted by members of a group. Generally, the early Renaissance humanist was neo-Platonic and Augustinian, while the later

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<sup>16</sup>Rice, Eugene F. "The Renaissance Ideal of Christian Antiquity: Humanist Patristic Scholarship," Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy, vol. 1, ed. by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.): 17.

<sup>17</sup>D'Amico, John F. "Humanism and Pre-Reformation Theology," Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy, vol 3, ed. by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.): 351.

<sup>18</sup>D'Amico, Renaissance Humanism, 223-5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 14.

Renaissance one was Aristotelian and Thomist. Most humanists dealt with selective and "relatively unimportant" theological topics.<sup>20</sup> They did not offer an extensive dogmatic thesis, rather they critiqued the "language, logic, and presentation"<sup>21</sup> of theological works, or they wrote on "topics with theological features that relate directly to moral action but did not receive any extended treatment from the professional theologians."<sup>22</sup> The humanists saw little use for a strong reliance on metaphysics. They felt theologians spent too much time on theoretical constructs, such as how many angels could fit on the head of a pin, and not enough time convincing people to live good lives.

Humanistic theological attitudes eventually became accepted by professional theologians. Humanistic "motifs" were used by Egidio of Viterbo (1465-1532) and Tommaso da Vio, or Cajetan (1469-1534). "Both men had the normal Scholastic education of their orders, but in later life they came to use in their theology elements that were borrowed from the humanists."<sup>23</sup>

The humanists's main concern was an educational and cultural program based on the study of the classical Greek

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<sup>20</sup>D'Amico, "Pre-Reformation Theology," 349.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 366.

and Latin authors.<sup>24</sup> Humanists hunted for manuscripts of the church fathers as voraciously as they did for manuscripts of the ancient pagan writers.<sup>25</sup> As Rice pointed out, "Patristic works...were admired and used because they were treasure houses of new facts about ancient history and society, philosophy and religion, pagan and Christian, and quotations from classical texts now lost."<sup>26</sup> Humanists also used them to refute "pagan philosophical doctrine that contradicted Christian revelation."<sup>27</sup>

Humanists were contextualists. They wanted to know the author of a work, his history, the history of the area with which he was working, and his affiliations to any subject on which he was working. These factors determined the biases of the author. They even imposed these guidelines on the transcribers of the Bible, which explained their emphasis on using only the original Scriptures in their original languages as source material for Scriptural debate. "The study of the Greek New Testament and of the Hebrew Old Testament, as well as of many Greek patristic writings, had a great impact on religious and theological scholarship."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Cassier, Ernst, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds. The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; reprint, 1975): 3.

<sup>25</sup>Rice, "Renaissance Ideal," 17.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>28</sup>Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "Renaissance Humanism and Classical Antiquity," Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy, ed. by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988): 14.

The humanists were searching for a pure, or Ciceronian, Latin to express their theological style. "Since they were not professional theologians with university degrees, the humanists wished to purge theology of the corrupt Latin and neologisms that had become standard in late medieval scholasticism..."<sup>29</sup> Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), in his *De Falso Credita et Ementita Constantini Donatione Declamatio* (1442), "proved through philological methods that Constantine did not surrender the western empire to the papacy when he established his new capital at Constantinople."<sup>30</sup> The humanists used their considerable rhetorical skill to help in Church reform, but they did not offer a theology. They purified the language of the Church fathers and Church papers to gain a better understanding of their original meaning.<sup>31</sup>

The humanists called for a return to the original sources of Christianity, the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures, and the Church fathers. Pagan literature was valuable for its philosophical and rhetorical tools and as a counterpoint for the confirmation of Christian theology. Aristotelian scholastic elements in the early Renaissance felt threatened by the neo-Platonic humanists, and they attacked the humanist advocacy of the ancient writers. The humanists defended themselves by pointing out that they were

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<sup>29</sup>D'Amico, "Pre-Reformation Theology," 351.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 357.

<sup>31</sup>D'Amico, Renaissance Humanism, 212.

doing only what the early Church fathers had done. Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), according to D'Amico, "initiated the great rediscovery and use of Church fathers, which was perhaps Renaissance humanism's greatest contribution to theology."<sup>32</sup>

The humanists read with a new historical sophistication, and they could appreciate the Church fathers from a different perspective than the medieval scholars.<sup>33</sup> The humanists argued that the Church fathers not only were aware of pagan writers and poets, they referred to them in their writings.<sup>34</sup> Without a knowledge of the Ancient writers, knowledge of the Church fathers would be incomplete. "The fathers offered the humanists a Christian vision of antiquity...and a pristine theology."<sup>35</sup> The argument that the humanists were not Christological was incorrect. Pagan authors were viewed in terms of their relationship to Christianity and the Church fathers and were read with a new critical historical sense.<sup>36</sup>

Humanists frequently used the early Church as an historical exemplar by which to measure the condition of the contemporary Church.<sup>37</sup> The Church was found to be corrupt at its head, and the humanists felt that the "union of wisdom and piety with eloquence" could reform the Church.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>D'Amico, "Pre-Reformation Theology", 356.

<sup>33</sup>Rice, "Renaissance Ideals," 20.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 25.



Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), in his Divine Comedy, asserted that faith alone could earn salvation, and in Purgatory he nailed several popes to the floor of the lowest level of Hell. But Dante never proposed a definite theology or doctrinal approach to indicate how to achieve salvation, or to reform the church in its entirety. Dante also never proposed dismantling the Catholic Church. He recognized problems in Church doctrine and abuses in the hierarchy of the Church, but did not provide concrete solutions to the problems. This was typical of the Italian humanists.

Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) epitomized the Italian humanist movement. He collected manuscripts from both the ancient authors, favoring those from Cicero, and St. Augustine.<sup>39</sup> He wrote in his "Ascent of Mount Ventoux" that he carried a copy of Augustine's Confessions.

Petrarch was a Christian and a Catholic. The "Ascent" was a metaphor for his attempt to achieve salvation. In the story, the path chosen by Petrarch's brother to reach the top of the mountain, which symbolized salvation, was steeper and more rocky but more direct. Petrarch was twice deterred from the straight path by what seemed to be an easier route but proved to be a distraction that led Petrarch through a maze of valleys, which represented the leading of Petrarch away

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<sup>39</sup>Kristeller, Paul O. "Renaissance Humanism and Classical Antiquity," Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy, vol. 1, ed. by Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988.): 6.

from the true path of salvation. Petrarch was not developing a doctrine of salvation in this work. When he reached the top of the mountain, he did not feel the relief or feeling of achievement that he expected. He was only confronted with the question of what happened next. He was not satisfied with his climb. This is a classic example of humanist thought, because Petrarch examined a nagging question that plagued himself and others of his time; how do I achieve salvation? Petrarch, however, did not answer the question. Petrarch was torn between the idea of living a "good" life and using "learned" means for salvation. A "good" life was one lived in faith, as opposed to a "learned" method which was employing the use of reason to earn salvation. In the "Ascent", Petrarch was showing that just performing the Sacramental system of the church was not enough for salvation. One needs faith to be saved.

The humanists were not reformers as Luther and Calvin were. They were learned men who probed into the questions of their day trying to discover the Truth of God and their world. Reform, however, was a "topic inseparable from general humanist theological thought."<sup>40</sup> They questioned the leaders of the Church and the abuses within the Church, but they could not conceive of the destruction of the Catholic Church.<sup>41</sup> They used humanist tools, such as rhetoric and

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<sup>40</sup>D'Amico, "Pre-Reformation Theology," 366.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 366.

linguistics, to institute their reforms and to register their complaints against the Church.

Burckhardt viewed the humanists as pagans and individualists. Burckhardt only looked at the humanist's interest in the ancient Roman and Greek writers and their critical writings concerning Church abuses. He assumed that they wanted to dismantle the Church, when in fact they wanted to improve it.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONFRATERNITIES

Burckhardt believed the faith of the Italian people had been shattered by the abuses in the Catholic Church. "The reputation attach(ed) to the monks and the secular clergy must have shattered the faith of multitudes in all that is sacred is, of course, obvious."<sup>1</sup> For Burckhardt, Catholic sacraments were a "magical force" on which the Italians "who still believed in the Church" depended.<sup>2</sup> Rituals and sacraments rewarded the practitioner with salvation and reconciled the individual with God.<sup>3</sup> To Burckhardt, the practice of the sacraments was pagan in nature, and "the popular faith in Italy had a solid foundation just in proportion as it was pagan."<sup>4</sup>

Burckhardt wrote negatively about the spirituality of the Italian people in the Renaissance in his chapter on "Morality and Religion." It is clear that Burckhardt believed the Church through its corruption had disappointed the Italian populace so greatly that they turned from Christianity to pagan rituals, such as carnivals, and magic

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<sup>1</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 295.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 306.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 307.

or astrology. The Italian people, however, did not break from the Church. many joined confraternities to bolster their religious practice, to aid their communities in religious and civic activities, and to educate the younger generations in the Catholic catechism.

Traditional accounts of the Renaissance viewed a decline in the influence of the Catholic Church and the papacy in Italy from the *Quattrocento* to the sixteenth century. Although this was true for the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the popularity of religion in Italy during this time period was, if not stable, rising. The decline of the Catholic Church, the death of which Burckhardt would not have mourned, was exaggerated. Luther's Reformation split the Church, and papal abuse injured the credibility of the Vatican. However, on the congregational level, the Catholic Church was experiencing a rejuvenation from the lay people of Italy.

In the chapter "Morality and Religion," Burckhardt said, "The morality of a people stands in the closest connection with its consciousness of God, that is to say, with its firmer or weaker faith in the divine government of the world, whether this faith looks on the world as destined to happiness or to misery and speedy destruction. The infidelity then prevalent in Italy is notorious, and whoever takes the trouble to look about for proofs, will find them by the hundreds."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 289-90.

For Burckhardt, the Italian people strayed from a Godly path, but to portray them as worse than the German, French, or Spanish in the renaissance is a perilous undertaking.

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church suffered from bad leadership during the Renaissance period. Several popes and cardinals, as well as other ecclesiastical officials, had abused their offices during this era as the reader has seen in a previous chapter. The issues of pluralism, simony and indulgences had discredited many in the Church, but these issues and individuals were being scrutinized by several in the Church community, especially the humanists. The Church clearly needed reforming, and Luther is credited by Burckhardt with providing the impetus for change.

During the Counter Reformation, the Catholic Church was reacting to those involved in the mass exodus from the Catholic ranks who joined with Luther and his Reformation. This overly simplistic rendition of the Reformation period, offered by von Ranke and echoed even as late as the mid-twentieth century by the Durants, did not give credit to the reformers within the Catholic Church itself.

According to A.G. Dickens in his book The Counter Reformation, there were two reformations within the Catholic Church, the Counter Reformation and the Catholic Reformation. The Counter Reformation was a reaction to the Protestant reformers, Luther and Calvin, for example. The Catholic Reformation was distinguished from the Counter Reformation

because it was already in motion before the Protestants arrived in Europe and continued later on. Catholic officials recognized the need for reform within the Church, and they were attempting to correct the abuses without causing a rift within the hierarchy of the Church while at the same time repairing the break between the Church and the laity<sup>6</sup>.

Historians presently are giving more and more credence to the theory that much of the Counter Reformation was started during the late Medieval period.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that churchmen worked harmoniously with each other by any means. The popes tried with all of their power to retain the right to call ecumenical councils, which were needed to change Canon Law and to institute new church dogma. The papacy was also not willing to part with the ability to place people in ecclesiastical positions as a reward for loyal service, as was the right of any medieval prince. During much of the Renaissance period, particularly during the pontificates of Pius II (1458-64) and Julius II (1503-1513), "little reform radiated from the papal court."<sup>8</sup>

The Church, however, had more than its own abuses and reformers to contend with during the Renaissance. It had to deal with Luther and the Reformers of the Protestant

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<sup>6</sup>Ozment, Stephen. The Age of Reform, 1250-1550; An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe. (New Haven, Ct.: Yale university Press, 1980): 397-8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 397.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 399.

Reformation. As corrupt as the Church was and as weak as many historians have believed the Church to be, it is interesting that Italy was not a fertile ground for Reformation preachers. Burckhardt tried to answer this question by saying, "The Italian mind, we are told, never went further than the denial of the hierarchy (of the Church), while the origin and the vigour of the German Reformation was due to its positive religious doctrine, most of all to the doctrines of justification by faith and of the inefficacy of good works."<sup>9</sup> Protestant advances, however, were met by many in the laity of Italy "by clinging all the more naively to the faith of their fathers."<sup>10</sup> Italians would not be swayed by the Protestant reformers, nor, amazingly enough, by the reforms mandated by the Tridentine Church.

The laity did not limit their own alternatives to the choices presented by the Protestants and Catholics.<sup>11</sup> They were conservative, following the examples of their fathers and ancestors before them. The inefficiency of the Church, however, left a void in the lives of the people of Italy, which they supposedly filled with an ecumenical group of "late medieval spiritual writers"<sup>12</sup> who anticipated the Jesuits and St. Charles Borromeo. Yet even more than the intellectuals that filled the gap left by the Church and the

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<sup>9</sup>Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 290.

<sup>10</sup>Ozment, *Age of Reform*, 418.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 403-4.



ecclesiastical organizations that, even though in decline during the Renaissance, were still very influential in the cities and countryside, the increase in the number and membership in confraternal organizations indicates a rise in the involvement of the laity in the religious concerns of the Church.

Jacob Burckhardt himself conceded that religion was the fundament of the culture of the masses,<sup>13</sup> but only in outward behavior. The Italians during the Renaissance were becoming more individualistic and less spiritual. As Spitz said, "In the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries religion entered into the closest association with the popular culture of the epoch allying itself with the whole of human life."<sup>14</sup> But even with that explanation, religion remained by Spitz's definition outside of culture. Religious study to Burckhardt was a sociology of the religious hold on the masses. In his later writings, religion played a more positive role in society during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but during the writing of Civilization, Burckhardt predominantly discussed the negative influences from the Church.

Spitz claimed that the masses only followed religion and its leaders mimetically and heresies appeared only because

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<sup>13</sup>Burckhardt, Force and Freedom, 248.

<sup>14</sup>Spitz, Burckhardt, 23.

religion failed to fill the needs of the people.<sup>15</sup> Although the principle is sound, the situation in the Renaissance did not follow that principle. The hierarchy of the Church failed the people by not supplying adequate spiritual leadership during a crucial time, but the majority of the Italian people resisted the urge to abandon the Catholic faith and found new leaders among the lesser clergy and the laity. The people began to drift towards confraternities to satisfy their spiritual needs.<sup>16</sup>

According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, a confraternity is "a sodality that has been established as a moral person and has as its purpose the promotion of public worship."<sup>17</sup> A confraternity must have three elements in order to be considered a confraternity. It must be a moral person, it must be a sodality, and it must promote public worship. At times, confraternities were "rather hard to distinguish from trade guilds,...hospitals, and charities."<sup>18</sup>

Confraternities contributed socially to their members as well as religiously. They helped bury the dead whose families were not able to afford a funeral. They provided

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>16</sup>Banker, James R. "Death and Christian Charity in the Confraternities of the Upper Tiber Valley," Christianity and the Renaissance; Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 320.

<sup>17</sup>Lombard, F. "Confraternities and Archconfraternities," The New Catholic Encyclopedia. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1967): 154.

<sup>18</sup>Partner, Renaissance Rome, 104.

marriage services for the poor, including paying dowries for poor girls. They opened and maintained hospitals for the sick, and prisons for criminals.<sup>19</sup> Religiously, they sponsored plays to explain the mysteries of the church, and they performed death rituals for both members and non-members.

A confraternity must be able to act as a person within the structure of the Church. It must be able to own property, exist in perpetuity, to sue and be sued in ecclesiastical courts among other properties. The confraternities must exist as an organic body, or sodality, and its primary function must be centered on public worship or goods acts. Important as well is the fact that the religious superior of a confraternity is responsible to the ordinary of the confraternity.

The actual number of people who belonged to confraternities during this period can be established if the records have survived to the present. If not, estimates can be made by comparing similar towns. For example, James R. Banker, in his article "Death and Christian Charity in the Confraternities of the Upper Tiber Valley," estimated that "at least forty percent of the male adults of the town (San Sepolcro) were members of the flagellant confraternities."<sup>20</sup>

Membership to the confraternity was not exclusive to the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>20</sup>Banker, "Death and Christian Charity," 320.

wealthy or elite. Many of the nobility and upper class were involved, but the largest contingent in the confraternities were the lower middle class, for example the local shopkeepers, artisans and landowners of all statures. According to Banker, "especially numerous were tailors, shoemakers, bakers, and blacksmiths."<sup>21</sup> The average Italian was active in religious life, even though the structural hierarchy was not leading the flock as they should have. If this was the case, and there is evidence that shows that it was, why was it not mentioned in Burckhardt's Civilization?

As was discussed earlier, Burckhardt's work centered on the upper class and prominent people of the Italian Renaissance, not the average citizen. The only time the lower class Italian is mentioned, it is only to measure the impact of an important individual or event. Burckhardt started a trend that persisted until recently. The study of the "initiatives of the laity" were subordinated to the study of the "initiatives of the clergy."<sup>22</sup> The mendicants were given the credit for the formation of the confraternal organizations, using them to battle a rising tide of heresy. In truth, the mendicants played a very limited role in the formation and organization of the confraternities. As the confraternities were recognized by the papacy, the charters granted to them limited the function of all ecclesiastical

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 305.

officers within the confraternity, except those responsibilities concerning Mass.

It is interesting to note that neither of the two confraternities that had a mendicant association survived the Black Plague.<sup>23</sup> The Franciscans and Dominicans could not find support for their sponsored organizations from the plague-ravaged citizenry, while other confraternal organizations flourished. This is not to suggest that the mendicants did not support the confraternities, but they did not play the fundamental roles of foundation and organization in the confraternal society.<sup>24</sup>

The confraternities played an important role in Italian society during the Quattrocento. They headed a Renaissance Catholicism that existed in "close partnership with a city-state, striving to bring it prosperity and protection by adding to its store of merit and virtue and helping to curb and cancel its sins."<sup>25</sup> The confraternities would promote services and activities that "cast their net across the entire city."<sup>26</sup> However, they did not concentrate on any particular parish in their city; they worked to improve the entire city. "The religious aims of (each of) the

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<sup>23</sup>Banker, "Death and Christian Charity," 314.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 314.

<sup>25</sup>Pullan, Brian. "The Scuole Grandi of Venice; Some Further Thoughts," Christianity and the Renaissance; Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 276.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 276.

confraternities were too various to be distinguished usefully."<sup>27</sup>

Communities did not become less religious or lose their "love of divine truth,"<sup>28</sup> as Burckhardt's ideal of church secularization might suggest. Instead they exuded the religious vitality of Italy during this age. Salvatore Camporeale equated the rise in confraternal membership with the decline of civic life saying that confraternities "mocked" faith and spirituality stating, "Even the liturgy had lost its profoundly religious and spiritual character, owing to the introduction of *cantus figuratus* (a new vocal polyphony),.....[which] rendered the liturgical text incomprehensible, led to superficiality in terms of piety, and humiliated the solemn simplicity of the liturgy."<sup>29</sup> Camporeale's argument, however, depended on the relationship of civic humanism with the common people who tended to belong to the confraternities, which he failed to prove. Proof of humanistic involvement in the confraternities has not been established. Religion was merely being practiced by lay members of the community.

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<sup>27</sup>Partner, Renaissance Rome, 104.

<sup>28</sup>Camporeale, Salvatore. "Humanism and the Religious Crisis of the Late Quattrocento: Giovanni Caroli, O.P., and the *Liber Dierum Lucensium*," Christianity and the Renaissance; Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 453.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 457.

This did not mean that religion was becoming secularized or laicized. The laity was becoming more involved in the running of their churches. They attacked the vices of gambling, blasphemy and whoring through fines and ostracism. They did not create dogma or doctrine. They recognized the superiority of the papacy, and they abided by the rules of the Church. They were interested in involving themselves in the world of the Church and to bring themselves closer to those who had left this world for the next, as will be discussed shortly.

The main purpose of the confraternity was to help people receive divine favor, regardless of their station or membership in a confraternity.<sup>30</sup> That salvation was a product of the faith generated by the works of the confraternity, for examples the art, plays and Masses offered by the confraternity. Rituals were devised to ensure that they generated faith and salvation. However, it was not always easy for the average person to understand why rituals existed and for what they stood. To aid the people, the confraternity produced plays and festivals to enact biblical lessons as a kind of translation of Church ritual and doctrine.

Burckhardt described the Catholic dramas of the Middle Ages as something that "fed the popular imagination with the

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<sup>30</sup>Banker, "Death and Christian Charity," 307.

most sacred events and rites, heedless of profanation," adding that the Protestant drama confined itself to "allegories, morality, Old Testament scenes and some history."<sup>31</sup> The Italian plays did more than just feed the people with rites. It explained many of the mysteries of the Church in a language that the people of Italy could understand. Catholic ideas, books, and practices such as Limbo, the Old Testament, and the celebration of the Eucharist were common to the confraternal plays.

Several spectacles were performed each year. Florence held three each year after Easter in honor of the Virgin Mary: "The Annunciation in San Felice in Piazza, on the Tuesday after Easter (or later on the octave of Easter); the Ascension in the Carmine; and the Pentecost in Santo Spirito."<sup>32</sup> As Newbiggin pointed out, all three had been established by the 1430's and at least two of them were intended not only to honor a religious ceremony, but also to honor the city as well.

The reasons plays were enacted were not simple, and differed for each confraternity, but they all seemed to have some similarities. They were intended to honor God, to honor Mary, to honor the Church and to honor the city. Each play

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<sup>31</sup>Burckhardt, Force and Freedom, 254.

<sup>32</sup>Newbiggin, Nerida. "The Word Made Flesh; The Rappresentazioni of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-century Florence," Christianity and the Renaissance; Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 368.



was a festival, whose grandiosity reflected on the city. Since the plays were funded substantially by community funds, the members of the community were interested in the success of the plays. The players in the productions came from all parts of society as well. Participation was not limited to the members of the confraternities, but to regular townspeople also. It is not surprising, considering the level of participation among the citizens of the cities, that these spectacles were an important part of Italian Renaissance life.<sup>33</sup>

The confraternities played a large role in the rituals of death in the Renaissance. They provided services such as "sickness insurance, a confraternal doctor, and honors at death which surpassed those most families could provide."<sup>34</sup> The confraternities would supplement the funds of the family of the deceased to ensure an honorable burial. "Renaissance men sought.....the assistance of other men who generated merit by exchanging prayers and being present at burial, as well as by sharing the benefits of their sacred communities and their disciplined selves."<sup>35</sup> In this case, Renaissance men who belonged to confraternities were not individualistic as Burckhardt suggested.

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<sup>33</sup>Ventrone, Paola. "Thoughts on Florentine Fifteenth-century Religious Spectacle," Christianity and the Renaissance; Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento, ed. by Timothy Verdon and John Henderson. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 407.

<sup>34</sup>Banker, "Death and Christian Charity," 321.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 321.

The confraternities had a secular purpose as well. They were a way for the civic government to direct its population and to ensure that plots against the government were not acted upon.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Venice, the state organized a kind of "civic Catholicism." This was not meant as a crude system of control, but as an aggrandizement of the city. Florentines believed their city was destined to deliver the Church from corruption and the Venetians felt their role was to defend Europe against the Turk.<sup>37</sup>

The confraternities were considered a type of civic-Catholicism that linked the members closer to the Church itself. The Church accepted these new organizations forging links with the members of Renaissance society. Although there were occasions of difficulties between the Church and the confraternities, the larger problems between the Venetian state and the Jesuits in the late fourteenth century and the rise of Protestantism in the Reformation demanded much more attention from the pope in Rome, who ordinarily left the confraternities alone.

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<sup>36</sup>Pullan, "Scoule Grandi," 281.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 285.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Jacob Burckhardt felt that the Catholic Church fell into a state of collapse during the Renaissance. The Church failed to give the support that the people of Italy needed during the turbulent Renaissance era. "The belief in God at earlier times had its source and chief support in Christianity and the outward symbol of Christianity, the Church. When the Church became corrupt, men ought to have drawn a distinction, and kept their religion in spite of all."<sup>1</sup>

The crux of Burckhardt's position on the Renaissance Italian Catholic Church was that the Church was corrupt and declining in power. The Church's doctrine was self-serving and distorted. "Safe in the sense of her inviolability, she abandoned herself to the most scandalous profligacy, and, in order to maintain herself in this state, she leveled mortal blows against the conscience and the intellect of nations, and drove multitudes of the noblest spirits, whom she had inwardly estranged, into the arms of disbelief and despair."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Burckhardt, Civilization, 290.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 290.

The Italian people kept their religion. They were devoutly Catholic. The German Reformation did not penetrate the Italian frontier because the Italians had incorporated the Catholic Church into their daily lives, giving outward expression to this by joining confraternities. Although not all Italians joined these organizations, many did, and they aided their countrymen through the confraternities. Even when the hierarchy were most corrupt, the lower clergy, regular and lay, brought the salvatory power of the Church to the people of God.

Burckhardt felt that "Italy was unable to make its own way healthily through the ferment of the Renaissance because the foreign invasion and the Counter Reformation came upon it in the middle."<sup>3</sup> The Counter Reformation, which culminated with the Council of Trent, eliminated many of the abuses of the Catholic Church, including nepotism, simony, and an uneducated clergy. It limited absentee clerics, and it solidified for the Catholic faithful a doctrine which up to that point was unclear.

Much of the ill health of Italy was brought on by a muddled political system which was both confusing and detrimental to peace. Italy was divided into conflicting principalities that constantly vied for domination of small bits of territory. Granted, the Papal State was involved as

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 329.

much as the Duchy of Milan or the Republic of Venice, but the pope had to perform his role of temporal prince or risk losing the independence of the Church. The peasants were tied to the land or to their occupations. Some became involved in politics, but few left their religion because of the conflicts, even if the conflict involved the Papal States.

There is no doubt that there were abuses performed by the hierarchy, including the pope. Leo X and Sixtus IV were not ideal Church officials, but Burckhardt condemned the entire group of Renaissance popes by not including in the Civilization the positive contributions made by a number of popes, including Pius II who Burckhardt claimed was the best pope in the fifteenth century.

The humanists thought that the Church needed reform but did not think that the Church needed to be eliminated. They were good Catholics who identified the abuses of the hierarchy, and who pointed out problems, such as the lack of education for the clergy. Burckhardt labeled them as pagans because they collected and treasured the manuscripts of the ancient pagan authors. He felt that "If they sought for any leading principle, it must have been a kind of superficial rationalism—a careless inference from the many and contradictory opinions of antiquity with which they busied themselves, and from the discredit into which the Church and

her doctrines had fallen."<sup>4</sup> But the humanists were much more than this. They questioned the very abuses for which Luther later condemned the Church. They did not deliver a doctrine to follow, which, to Burckhardt, must have indicated some lack of Christian principle. It is clear that Burckhardt saw the humanists as pagans.

Burckhardt's Civilization is considered a classic of Renaissance research, and rightly so. It was well written and the amount of research was staggering. Burckhardt used specific examples for each point he presented using mostly primary source material for documentation. He and Voigt were pioneers in Renaissance history and they wrote monumental and sweeping works. But Burckhardt allowed his anti-Catholic bias color his writing. He omitted most that was positive about the Church during the Renaissance, yet was quick to judge the Church for its abuses and its perceived inability to satisfy the spiritual needs of the Italian people. Clearly the Church did not fail the Italians, nor the northern Europeans. The Church did not break apart, nor did it secularize completely. Burckhardt wrote in Force and Freedom that it was a misfortune of history that the Catholic Church lasted as long as it did. Unfortunately, that bias colored how the world looked upon the Renaissance for more than one hundred years. As Paolo Prodi pointed out, "Historians still

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 319.

favour the simplification already popular at the end of the (nineteenth) century, which tends to identify the Catholic world with the feudal and universalistic residues opposing the concept of the development of the modern state embodied in the Reformation."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Prodi, Papal Prince, 5.

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