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GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA AND THE PROBLEM
OF HUMANIST REFORM IN FLORENCE

THESIS

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Girolamo Savonarola lived at the apex of the Renaissance, but most of his biographers regard him as an anachronism or a precursor of the Reformation. Savonarola, however, was influenced by the entire milieu of Renaissance Florence, including its humanism. Savonarola's major work, Triumph of the Cross, is a synthesis of humanism, neo-Thomism and mysticism. His political reforms were routed in both the millennialist dreams of Florence and the goals of civic humanism. Hoping to translate the abstract humanist life of virtue into the concrete, he ultimately failed, not because the Renaissance was rejecting the Middle Ages, but because the former was reacting against itself. Florence, for all its claims of being the center of the Renaissance, was not willing to make humanist reform a reality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A REASSESSMENT OF RENAISSANCE HUMANISM AND SAVONAROLA'S PLACE IN RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

Since Jacob Burckhardt first defined the Renaissance as the beginning of modernity, debate has raged over the exact meanings of medievalism, humanism and reform. Distinctions become even more vague when certain individuals seem to have characteristics of all three. Girolamo Savonarola was such an individual. A product of the Italian Renaissance, yet educated in the scholastic tradition, and who challenged the papacy in a way which later would be associated with Martin Luther, Savonarola has posed a problem for historians trying to place him within one of the three historical periods. Usually, Savonarola is described as an anachronism, that is, a medieval man living in the Renaissance, or as a precursor to a reform movement which did not begin until nineteen years after his death. The first view assumes that nothing of the Middle Ages survived to influence the "true" Renaissance man; the second assumes that the only difference between Luther and earlier Catholic reformers is that Luther succeeded. To consider Savonarola in the context of his times, however, it is necessary to set forth definitions of medievalism, humanism and reform, while keeping in mind

Ernst Cassirer's warning that the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, did not start and stop at any specific time, but overlapped and intertwined in a very complicated fashion.¹

The Middle Ages was by no means the Dark Ages. The growth of cathedral schools in the eleventh century sparked a new interest in the wisdom of the ancients. As Plato and Aristotle were rediscovered, the Moors in Spain and men returning from the Crusades introduced Arabic scholarship to Europe. This knowledge, however, was restricted to an elite few, and the monastic life proved to be the only option for a scholar.

Ancient philosophy was merely a stepping stone to understanding the mysteries of Christian theology. Church leaders placed emphasis on resolving contradictions, not exploiting them. When Peter Abelard attempted to point out the inconsistencies in the opinions of the Church patriarchs, the Church hierarchy censored him and burned his works. Even the works of Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest medieval scholars, were forbidden reading for members of the Franciscan order, while the saint's own order, the Dominicans, severely criticized his rationalism. The medieval church valued conformity over originality, and the organization over the individual.

Since the time of Gregory VII and the Gregorian reforms which had attempted to cement the power of the Church in

both the spiritual and secular worlds, the Roman Curia had concentrated on developing a complex doctrine. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Canon law was codified, with Gratian making the most substantial contributions in the twelfth century. By 1400, then, the validity of the Christian faith rested on observing the letter of the law, even if the spirit was lacking.

Although the Church appeared to be structuring belief, the political system in Europe between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries made a consistent system of laws imperative. Although the institution of the monarchy was gaining strength, the overriding political institution was still feudalism. With its complex requirements of vassalage, which varied from contract to contract, political alliances varied from person to person, fief to fief. The monastic arm of the Church became a valuable acquisition for those seeking to extend their power in a certain area. The monastery at Cluny in France built a reputation, not only as a center for religious studies, but as a feudal stronghold as its abbots turned the institution of feudalism to their benefit.

As monasteries became a part of the feudal hierarchy and acquired status and wealth, many of them began well recognized programs of scholarship. Plato and Aristotle were read in standard Latin translations, sometimes in piecemeal, to prevent anything contrary to Christianity from

being taught. In the earliest translations, however, there was seemingly no conscious attempt to make the ancients, particularly Aristotle, Christian. The problem arose later as commentaries of Aristotle's thought became merged with the thought itself.

The systemization of Aristotle's thought became most apparent in the growth of the dialectic. The dialectic, with its complicated series of questions, arguments and counterarguments, was the primary means of inquiry, and through it, scholasticism developed as an educational methodology.² Scholasticism, in its highest form, represented the corporate spirit of the Middle Ages. The answer to the question being debated was never in doubt; rather, the success of the argument was not determined by the conclusions, but by the proper use of form.

The Pope has no right to bind me for defending the truth. Rather I should be deemed worthy of reward. In any case when there are men who will endure death for the defense of an earthly fatherland, should I not incur the danger for the sake of the heavenly home? Be gone then tremor and trepidation. With a stout heart, a firm trust and a good hope, let us defend the cause of truth, the cause of justice and the cause of God.³

When Lorenzo Valla exposed the Donation of Constantine for the forgery it was, he sent a tremor through the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The Church had established its claim on the west based on the centuries-old grant, and the uneasiness experienced stemmed from the fear that it could not maintain its spiritual claim without a matching temporal

one. Valla, in defending his actions, was also issuing an eloquent defense and explanation for humanism, as interpreted by one of the leading humanists of the fifteenth century. In defending the common causes of truth, justice and God, humanism as a philosophy of reform sought to release the Church from the shackles of earthly tradition, made firmer by successive generations of bureaucrats, thus permitting the Church to achieve spiritual perfection and peace in the purest neo-Platonic and mystical sense. If, as Plato believed, the soul was the prisoner of the body, then the spiritual Church was held captive by its temporal form.

The Renaissance, while being a time of great social, political and philosophical change, was reacting against itself. Not completely able to shed its medieval heritage, the Renaissance attempted to liberate the mind of Man from the attitude of docility and unquestioning acceptance on which the medieval Church had insisted. A thousand year heritage was difficult to overcome as the humanists were as affected by the pull of Catholicism as their more traditional colleagues. No humanist ever broke nor intended to break with Catholic tradition insofar as the articles of faith were concerned. Moreover, unlike Luther, who branded the Catholic Church as an impediment rather than an expedient to salvation, humanist reformers believed that the Church could be a greater force for social and religious change if it understood itself as an institution. No amount

of learning or knowledge of ancient philosophy could change the inherent truth of Christianity, and as the ultimate truth was greater and more complex than the human mind could comprehend, no question was controversial enough to challenge the revealed word of God. Ironically, perhaps the humanists, who revered the mind of Man and sought to use it to its full potential, were expressing a more profound Christian faith than those who regarded questions which seemingly challenged the faith as dangerous.

No humanist ever doubted the veracity of Christianity. Whether neo-Platonic or Aristotelian, humanist arguments never eliminated the reality of God. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in his attempts to uphold the truth of Christianity by connecting it with the partial truths uncovered by earlier religions, began with Christianity as his constant. The other beliefs, whether Zoroastrianism or Platonism, were true only insofar as they agreed with Christianity; the truth of Christianity did not depend on its agreement with earlier beliefs.⁴

Humanism did not develop in a vacuum nor were the humanists unaware of the political and social world around them. Although they maintained a mystical attachment to the contemplative life, the heart of their reform centered on creating a harmony between the spiritual message of the Church and its actions. They decried the hypocrisy of an institution which condemned sin in others while engaging in

larger sins itself. Society, in general, and the Church, in particular, seemed incapable of distinguishing a religious individual from an irreligious one, especially when the latter made certain that he, publicly at least, followed all the appropriate rules.⁵

Humanist asceticism was intimately related to the cloistered life of the monastery. As no avenues existed for fulltime scholarly pursuit outside the Church, the religious life became synonymous with the scholarly life. In addition to the major monastic orders, the Brethren of the Common Life spawned humanists and mystics who would make a profound contribution to the philosophical history of the Renaissance. Erasmus and Thomas à Kempis were the two most notable examples. The Brethren taught that Man was saved by the love and grace of God, and that the only part Man had in his own salvation was his desire to attain it. Even the desire for salvation was implanted by God.⁶

The similarity between the mysticism of the Brethren and Luther is unmistakable.⁷ Luther's admonition that the just shall live by faith can be seen as a logical extension of the doctrine of the Brethren; however, a key difference exists between Luther's theology and the Brethren's thought. God, for the Brethren, did not deny anyone who sincerely asked for salvation, and all Catholics had an equal chance of cultivating the attitude necessary to want to ask for it. Conversely, Luther believed that Man was so inferior that he

was incapable of asking for salvation, even if he desired it. The degree to which Man participated in his own salvation was the primary difference between the Renaissance and the Reformation. The elect of God, in a Catholic sense, were those who were moved to ask for God's grace, not those who were chosen without their knowledge.

The shift from overriding asceticism and withdrawal from society to an active program of reform was the basis for what Hans Baron has called "civic humanism." Earlier humanists who, like Petrarch, saw public life as fraught with danger and an impediment for the true scholar were slowly replaced by men like Leonardo Bruni who believed that his knowledge of philosophy could be used to improve the government of Florence.⁸ Some historians have viewed this attention to spiritual and secular morality as proof that humanism sought to reduce Christianity to a set of moral platitudes and injunctions. While humanists tracts did include exhortations for humans to live better lives, they did not equate morality with faith. Petrarch believed that there could be no happiness without faith and immortality, and he accepted "in humble faith the secrets of nature and the mysteries of God."⁹ Furthermore, Petrarch differentiated between a mere knowledge of morality and the actual practice of it.

Those are far wrong who consume their time in learning to know virtue instead of acquiring it, and, in a still higher degree, those whose time

is spent in learning to know God instead of loving Him.¹⁰

The theory of learning and the value of philosophical knowledge is a key element in separating humanism from the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. Obviously, the medieval period was not devoid of learning, and most humanists were as well schooled in Thomist theology as any Dominican scholastic. Indeed, the Thomist view that Man had the ability to seek God intellectually as well as spiritually was echoed in most humanist thought. Although the mind of Man was considered so far inferior to that of God that Man was incapable of all but a very superficial understanding, the belief that intellectual ability was rooted in the soul, the spiritual center of Man, was proof that intellect and spirituality were intimately connected.

Just as the interpretation of Man's role in his own salvation separated the Renaissance from the Reformation, the approach to learning and what should be learned separated the Renaissance from the Middle Ages. Obviously, the works of Aristotle and Plato were well-known prior to the dawning of the fourteenth century, but the scholastics held the works of pagan philosophers at arms length. By the fourteenth century, it was impossible to distinguish the words of Aristotle from the words of his various commentators. The humanists' desire to "return to the fount" did not arise out of a desire to "paganize" Christianity but out of a need to separate the original from

the commentaries. When Petrarch lambasted those Aristotelians who called him ignorant, he was not criticizing Aristotle, but those who could not distinguish between Aristotle and a commentary on Aristotle.¹¹

The medieval approach to Biblical scholarship was similar. The Latin Vulgate contained not only Scripture, but the insights and interpretations of Catholic tradition. The way in which the Church Fathers interpreted Scripture became as important, if not more important, than the Scriptures themselves. When the later Christian humanists sought to purge Scripture of all its later additions, they were criticized for tampering with the faith. For Erasmus, however, the truth of Christianity did not rest on any particular translation. Correcting the mistakes of inattentive transcribers was not fatal to the Catholic Church.¹²

His [Savonarola's] spirit was very great, his learning as outstanding as anyone's in two centuries, a great philosopher and an excellent Thomist, a unique orator, more persuasive than anyone of his time, and among the moderns the leading interpreter of the intimate secrets of sacred and divine scriptures. In eating, dress, manner, and speech he was most humble, the divine herald of the word of God, the most powerful exponent of the primitive Christian life.¹³

When Bartolomeo Cerretani wrote his assessment of Girolamo Savonarola after the latter's death, a cult of the prophet's followers had already formed. Throughout the succeeding centuries, however, the historical opinion of Savonarola has

varied widely. From Gianfrancesco Pico's hagiography in the early sixteenth century to Rachel Erlanger's 1988 portrayal of Savonarola as a combination of Protestant fundamentalism and religious fanaticism, the true character of the man known as The Prophet of Florence has been overshadowed by those wishing to make him a saint or a demon.¹⁴ In part, the variety of views about Savonarola is caused by the contradictory nature of the man himself. In his sermons, Savonarola was dogmatic and unyielding. In his writings, particularly Triumph of the Cross, he was rational almost to a fault and displayed none of the alleged fanaticism so associated with his public life.

Most biographies of Savonarola have concentrated on his public life at the expense of his theological and philosophical thought. His philosophy has been deemed so contrary to his public actions that it frequently has been treated only in passing. The philosopher got lost within the prophet. Savonarola can only be understood, however, when his philosophy remains at the forefront, even when considering his public career. Seeing Savonarola's public life as a reflection of his contemplative life brings him more into line with the general nature of Renaissance thought. If Burckhardt's pervasive definition of humanism can be reassessed, then Savonarola becomes, not an anachronism in an otherwise secular Renaissance, but a true reflection of humanist goals and dreams on the eve of the

Reformation.

Pasquale Villari's two volume biography of Savonarola, published in the late nineteenth century, belied much of the author's own Italian nationalism and made Savonarola as much an Italian folk hero as a humanist. Although the book was extensively researched for its time, Villari undercut the validity of his argument by abandoning any attempt at objectivity. Referring to Savonarola as "our hero" throughout, he believed that a close study of Savonarola's philosophy would resolve any contradictions between his private and public lives. The contradictions remained because of Villari's reluctance to admit that some paradoxes simply could not be resolved.¹⁵

Of the modern studies, the works by Roberto Ridolfi and Donald Weinstein give a far more objective and realistic portrayal. Ridolfi, while not admitting that Savonarola was a humanist, believed that he was an integral part of the Renaissance and provided the impetus for melding Catholic reform with the humanist life of virtue in Florence. Ridolfi, however, cannot resist speculating on the possibilities for the Catholic Church if Savonarola had succeeded.

Had his voice been listened to, perhaps beyond the Alps Luther would not have risen, or his influence would have been less; and the Reform, of which every Christian heart felt the need, would then have been born in the very bosom of the Church of Rome.¹⁶

Donald Weinstein believed that the relationship between Savonarola and Florence was reciprocal. Just as Savonarola changed Florence, so Florence changed Savonarola. Basing his argument on the change in Savonarola's prophecies, Weinstein saw a prophet of disaster change after the invasion of Charles VIII and the overthrow of the Medici to a prophet of the millennium. Savonarola's success was based on his recognition of the Zeitgeist of Florence as it rediscovered republicanism, and his inclusion of Florence's legends of greatness into his programs of reform.¹⁷

The dream of reform, however, had existed before Savonarola and would continue to flourish after his death. A large part of the greatness of Florence, which attracted Savonarola, was centered in its acceptance and promotion of the Renaissance in all its glory. The humanism which influenced Florentine art and literature also influenced Savonarola, and he, unlike other humanists, was able to translate humanist dreams into reality.

The humanist prophet, however, ultimately failed. Cast out of the Church as a heretic, Savonarola created more problems for Florence than it was willing to endure. Faced with interdicts which threatened to destroy the livelihood of the merchant city, Florence silenced Savonarola in the interests of political and economic expediency. The city, which was the center of the Renaissance, could not reconcile its medieval heritage with its new-found status, and in a

very real sense, the medievalism of humanism was at war with its modernity.¹⁸ Throughout it all, the view of Savonarola by his contemporaries remained admiring and yet unsure. They admired him for his rationalism, but they wanted to believe in his prophecies. "If he was good, we have seen a great prophet in our time; if he was bad, we have seen a great man."¹⁹ After almost five hundred years, the assessment of Savonarola remains intact.

NOTES

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4. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," in Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selected Writings with Critical Introductions: Petrarch, Valla, Ficino, et al, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul O. Kristeller, and John H. Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 223-54. Hereafter referred to as Renaissance Philosophy of Man.
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10. Ibid., 105.
11. Ibid., 101-2.
12. Erasmus, "Letter to Martin Dorp, 1515," in Praise of Folly, trans. Betty Radice, 8th ed. (New York: Penquin Classics, 1983), 244.

13. Bartolomeo Cerretani, Storia fiorentina; quoted in Donald Weinstein, Savonarola and Florence (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 185.

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CHAPTER 2

THE MAKING OF A HUMANIST REFORMER

Girolamo Savonarola witnessed the Florentine Renaissance at the apex of its influence. During the late fifteenth century, the city boasted an array of philosophical and artistic geniuses unrivalled by any other city in Europe, and many of these Renaissance masters regularly attended Savonarola's sermons and studied in the San Marco library. To brand Savonarola as an anachronism or to project him forward as a precursor of the Reformation denies both his philosophical heritage and his Catholicism. Savonarola was contradictory in the same way that the Renaissance was contradictory. Humanism blended with scholasticism, medievalism co-existed with modernism, and rationalism competed with superstition. Above it all, the pervasive influence of the Catholic church permeated every aspect of society. If the Renaissance is considered secular, then Savonarola has no place in it; however, if Girolamo is considered within the context of his times and perhaps as a microcosm of the contradictions of the Renaissance, then his medievalism and his humanism can be explained without sacrificing the integrity of either. If humanism is considered to be more Catholic than it was pagan, then

Savonarola's deep religious beliefs were not anathema to intellectualism but a reflection of its highest aim: to return to a pure Catholic Church which could fulfil both the intellectual and emotional needs of man.

Girolamo Savonarola was born on September 21, 1452, in the Tuscan city of Ferrara. The third of seven children born to a minor courtier, Girolamo grew up in the shadow of the House d'Este and seemed to be destined for a life at court like his father, Niccolò, and his grandfather, Michele. Michele Savonarola had built a reputation as a professor of medicine at the University of Pisa, and in 1440, brought his family to Ferrara at the request of Duke Niccolò III to whom he was to be court physician. A professor at the University of Ferrara until his death in 1468, Michele exercised the principle influence on his grandson's life.¹

Michele Savonarola disliked the frivolities of court life. A severe moralist, he infused his grandson with a profound piety and asceticism as well as a comprehensive knowledge of natural science and philosophy. Girolamo's education began at age five, and he proved to be an adept pupil. Moving quickly from the natural sciences to the more advanced disciplines, he showed an aptitude for philosophy and theology. Although it is not certain exactly what classics he read, the scholasticism of his grandfather would seem to suggest that Savonarola read the standard

Latin translations of Plato and Aristotle, along with the Arabic commentaries of Averroes and Avicenna. Prior to his entry to the University of Ferrara, Girolamo studied the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, from whom he seemed to have adopted many of his ideas on the nature of God and the relationship between philosophy and theology.² It is not surprising that when Savonarola decided to enter the monastery, he chose the Dominican Order.

As his academic prowess surpassed that of his siblings, Girolamo became his family's choice to follow his grandfather into the medical profession, and his studies reflected that end. Shortly before his grandfather's death, Savonarola began studying the liberal arts at the humanist school of Battista Guarino. Guarino's father, the famous humanist Guarino da Verona, established the school in 1429 at the request of Niccolò d'Este. Guarino was a student of the Bible and insisted on strict rules of morality and religiousity. Although the elder Guarino was dead before Savonarola began studying there, it is quite probable that the school continued in the tradition he established. Students at Guarino's school combined the study of Greek and Roman classics with advanced study in the Bible, and the humanist believed strongly that the study of so-called "pagan" literature and the Bible was not contradictory.³ Savonarola only studied briefly at the Guarino School, but the strict morality certainly must have pleased him.

Moreover, it is equally likely that he was comfortable with the combination of studies in philosophy and theology. Throughout his life, although he relied heavily on the Bible, he was quite adept in ancient philosophy. In later life, he would decry attempts to make Plato and Aristotle the basis for all religious life, but he never denied that ancient philosophy expressed some truths.

Savonarola continued his education at the University of Ferrara where he quickly became disillusioned with the competition among rival professors. The faculty, he believed, were more interested in impressing each other than in teaching their students. Their scholastic wrangling left him intellectually uninspired, and Savonarola would maintain this typically humanist attitude toward the schoolmen throughout his life. He saw theology as a living entity which could not be reduced to a series of truisms expressed in arguments and counter arguments. He did succeed, however, in receiving a Master of Arts and began specialized study in medicine. The works of Aquinas and Aristotle, however, soon took precedence over those of Galen.

Savonarola's growing desire to explore the mysteries of theology corresponded with a growing urge to abandon a world he believed was corrupt. No sudden conversion prompted his entry into the monastery. Instead, his pessimism for the future overcame the inherent optimism of youth. Three years before he became a monk, Girolamo already was convinced that

the world was doomed.

Quivi se estima chi e de Dio nemico
 Catone va medico;
 Ne le man di pirata e gionto il scetro:
 A terra va San Pietro;
 Quivi lussuria et ogne preda abunda.
 Che non so come il ciel non si confunda?

La terra e si oppressa da ogne vizio,
 Che mai da se non levarà la soma:
 A letta se ne va il suo capo, Roma,
 Per mai pui non tornar al grande officio.

Canzon, fa' che sia accorta.
 Che a purpureo color tu non te appoggie:
 Fuggi palazzi e loggie,
 E fa' che toa ragion a pochi dica:
 Che a tuto el mondo tu serai nemica.⁴

"De ruina mundi" was written in Petrarchian meter, a style which characterized Savonarola's early works. The humanist qualities of Girolamo's poetry, however, are more substantial than a mere adherence to form. The tone of the poem is one of despair, not total disgust. It laments the superficiality of Man and his quest to satisfy physical desires at the expense of intellectual and spiritual pursuits. The last stanza suggests, moreover, that those who yearn for the spiritual and the intellectual cannot find them in the secular world because it is contemptuous of true spirituality.

Girolamo's poetic style was just one manifestation of his father's desire that his children should be part of the aristocracy. Although the family was common by birth, Niccolò insisted that Girolamo and his siblings learn the social graces necessary for a life at court. Savonarola

learned to play the lute, and Niccolo hoped that his son, armed with a classical education, musical talent, and some reputation as a poet, would become a well-respected courtier and scholar. Niccolo's first attempt to introduce his son to court life, however, was a disaster. Girolamo's first and only visit to the Este court so disgusted him that he vowed never to return. It is probable that Michele's influence extended into this area as well, and Savonarola was predisposed to dislike what he saw.

Biographers of the prophet recount the story of an early unrequited love which may have prompted Savonarola's renunciation of the world. At age nineteen, Savonarola allegedly proposed to Laodamia, the illegitimate daughter of Roberto Strozzi. The Strozzi were a powerful noble family in Florence before a change in government and an increase in republican temperament forced them to leave. Although they possessed only a fraction of the wealth they had acquired in Florence, they still retained an aristocratic pride in their ancestry. When Laodamia rejected his proposal, saying that a Strozzi would never condescend to marry a Savonarola, Girolamo responded hotly by reminding her of the circumstances of her birth. Fra Benedetto, a devoted follower and friar at San Marco, recounted the story in his Vulnera Diligentis and claimed to have heard it from Savonarola's brother, Maurelio.⁵

Two of Savonarola's recent biographers have vastly

different views on the importance of this incident. Donald Weinstein sees the rejection as having a significant influence on the future reformer, particularly when combined with a dream Savonarola experienced shortly before entering the monastery. He dreamt that he felt icy cold water being poured on his head. Immediately awakened, he vowed to begin a new life. "That was the water of repentance and with it was extinguished the carnal heat of desire, while its coldness froze in him every worldly appetite."⁶ Roberto Ridolfi, however, does not attach much meaning to the failed love affair. Savonarola's retort, he says, was very much in character, but Ridolfi maintains that Savonarola already had deep misgivings about pursuing a secular life, although he had not yet decided to become a monk.⁷

The published accounts of the love affair and the dream post-date Savonarola's death. In the thirty years following his execution, Savonarola became saint and cult figure to his many disciples, and it is not unlikely that the retelling of his early life was exaggerated and romanticized. The stories are not necessarily untrue, but they must be considered in context. If it is true that Savonarola experienced no sudden conversion prior to entering the convent, then the love affair and the dream represent only two of many incidents which influenced the introspective young man to become a monk.

In 1475 when he was not yet twenty-three, Savonarola

left home to join the Monastery of St. Dominic in Bologna. He left without saying good-bye to his family, taking advantage of a feast day to make an unobserved exit. After being accepted at the monastery, Savonarola wrote a letter to his father, asking his understanding and explaining that he was choosing to live "rationally, not as a beast among swine."⁸ Girolamo also left an essay for his father to read. "On the Contempt of the World" makes clear that Savonarola could not reconcile himself to life outside the Church.

To be rated a man, you must defile your mouth with the most filthy and brutal and tremendous blasphemies, and set on your neighbor to slay him, and sow sedition and brawls. If you study philosophy and the edifying arts, you are considered a day dreamer; if you live chastely and modestly, you are rated a fool; if you are pious, you are dishonest; if you put your faith in God, you are a simpleton; if you are charitable, you are effeminate.

One biographer believes that all the friar's later reforms were motivated by a need to take revenge on a world which had rejected him.¹⁰ It is more likely, however, that Savonarola simply found a world which permitted contemplation and did not condemn gentleness. His reaction to the vulgarity of secular life was not unlike other humanists; he found meaning in intellectual and spiritual pursuits, not in courtly festivities and secular occupations.

Immediately upon entering the monastery, Savonarola plunged into a life of extreme asceticism. He spent hours

in prayer and contemplation and ate barely enough to prevent starvation. His bed, if one can be so generous, was a sack of straw across a support of wooden tressles. If the bed was uncomfortable, the young novice did not notice because he rarely slept. His superiors, while pleased with Savonarola's devotion, eventually had to order him to eat and sleep regularly in order to preserve his health. Savonarola wore the oldest, but probably the cleanest, clothes in the convent, and he continued this denial of physical needs throughout his life. Later, as Prior of San Marco, he dressed no better nor ate any more. Moreover, he routinely assigned himself the most menial and unpleasant tasks in the monastery.¹¹

Ralph Roeder believes that Savonarola deprived himself in his first year in the monastery because he had difficulty in separating himself from the secular world.¹² The pattern of asceticism continued, however, throughout the friar's lifetime, although not to the extent evidenced in the first year. It is possible that Savonarola initially expected more from monastic life than he received. Although no evidence exists which indicates he was unhappy, perhaps he resisted attempts to take him out of the monastery because he believed the more he isolated himself the closer he would come to achieving spiritual perfection. When his superiors ordered him to attend the University of Bologna, Savonarola resented the command but had no choice but to agree. Having

had some experience with the scholastics in Ferrara, perhaps he was not interested in hearing theology dissected and reduced to moral platitudes, preferring instead to approach theology and philosophy from a more personal vantage point. In spite of his misgivings, he remained at Bologna for seven years until 1479, and the experience he gained in Church doctrine and scholasticism would allow him later to achieve a reputation as an expert on Canon law.¹³

Savonarola spent seven years at the Bologna monastery where his knowledge of Scripture and Canon law resulted in his appointment as the instructor of the novices. In this role, the well-known Savonarola charisma first began to surface. As he gained a loyal following among the younger monks, he first began to speak openly about the corruption in the Church which he had written about soon after he joined the monastery. In "De ruina ecclesiae" he portrays the Church as a virgin, scarred by corruption, forced to seek refuge in a cave.

Così dissi io alla pia Madre antica,
 Per gran desio ch'io ho di pianger sempre:
 E lei, che par che gli occhi mai non tempre,
 Col viso chino e l'anima pudica,
 La man mi prese, et alla soa mendica
 Spelonca mi condusse lacrimando;
 E quivi disse: Quando
 Io vidi a Roma intrar qualla superba,
 Che va tra' fiori e l'erba
 Securamente, mi ristrinsi alquanto
 Ove io conduco la mia vita in pianto.

Dopoi Madonna, dissi: Se 'l ve piace,
 Di pianger con voi l'alma si contenta.
 Qual forza ve ha così del regno spenta?

Qual 'arrogante rompe vostra pace?
 Rispose sospirando: Una fallace
 Superba metetice, Babilona.
 Et io: Deh, per Dio, Dona,
 Se romper se portria quelle grande ale!
 E Lei: Lingua mortale
 Non po', ne lice, non che mover l'arme.
 Tu, piangi e taci: e questo meglio parme.¹⁴

As indicative of Savonarola's despair that nothing could be done to save the Church, the poem ends with the lament that neither words nor armies will change the situation. Those who are devout can only remain silent and weep. The reformer had not yet emerged, but the humanist was already there. Not knowing how to effect reform, Savonarola took the attitude of many humanists. For him, piety meant tears and the monastery was his cave.

The Dominican Order was a preaching order, and all scholarship was directed toward the eventual purpose of communicating theological concepts to the general public. Monks with the required theological knowledge were expected to become itinerant preachers as the Order needed them. Savonarola's first efforts as a preacher were not entirely successful. While it is a mistake to rate them a complete failure, the friar had not yet perfected the rhetoric and oratory which were to make him the most popular preacher in Florence. In early sermons in Bologna and Ferrara, he followed the established pattern of mixing moral platitudes with Aristotelian logic. The sermons did not work because they were not his. The traditional sermons of the day were highly scholastic and probably rather dull, and Savonarola

had neither the reputation nor the expertise to draw crowds. Scholasticism was also highly impersonal, and Girolamo was never able to inspire personal devotion through impersonal words. Although Savonarola did become more at ease in the pulpit as he became confident of his own style, his later success was due to the increased personal nature of his sermons. The prophecies and the admonishments, combined with a superior knowledge of theology, worked together to present a faith which must be believed not simply observed. The impersonal religion of the Middle Ages, which laypersons and clergy alike had learned by rote, did not inspire Savonarola. Theology could not be reduced to a series of platitudes or canonical truisms because, for Savonarola, it was a living, breathing entity which demanded the personal involvement of the faithful before it could truly enlighten.

In 1482, the future prophet saw the city which was to figure so prominently in his prophecies. When war threatened Ferrara, the Order sent Savonarola to San Marco in Florence. San Marco had originally been a poor house of St. Sylvester with more problems than monks until Cosimo de' Medici received permission to move the few remaining Sylvesterian monks and reorganize the monastery as part of the Dominican Lombard Congregation. As the convent was in desperate need of repair, Cosimo hired the famous Florentine architect, Michelozzo Michelozzi, to rebuild it. The new San Marco was completed in 1443, had taken six years to

complete and cost 36,000 florins. Cosimo created a library at San Marco by donating many manuscripts from the library of Niccolò Niccoli which he had acquired by paying the debts on Niccoli's estate. Although Cosimo was no humanist, he hoped to establish San Marco as a major center for humanist scholarship. His generosity was not without limits, however, as Cosimo kept many of the most valuable manuscripts for himself. The first public library in Italy, San Marco attracted learned Dominicans from all over Italy, and many were to make lasting contributions. Fra Angelico, a humanist, who came to San Marco during this time, created the magnificent frescos which still decorate the walls of the monastery. His "Annunziata" is still considered a masterpiece of the Renaissance.¹⁵ Later, Savonarola would continue the tradition of scholarship at San Marco by purchasing the entire Medici library after the dynasty was overthrown in 1494.

Savonarola was enthralled by his first visit to Florence. According to his nineteenth century biographer, Pasquale Villari, the friar thought Florentine art was the perfect mix of faith and genius, a curious observation by a deeply religious monk confronted with so-called secularized Renaissance art.¹⁶ Savonarola was probably not as overwhelmed by Renaissance art as Villari claimed, but even a moderate appreciation for the artists' ability to combine piety with great beauty would seem to cast some doubt on the

secularity of Renaissance art. Because Savonarola was becoming more convinced that religion must be personal to be effective, perhaps he saw in the works of Renaissance masters the attempt to present the artist's own religious convictions.

Not long after his arrival in Florence, Savonarola was elected Reader at the convent, and continued to expound his view of Scripture to novices and experienced monks as well. Later that year, he was selected to represent San Marco at the Dominican Chapter in Reggio d'Emilia. In that forum, he first spoke out publicly against the corruption in the Church. He also met Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a young Florentine humanist who was extremely impressed with Savonarola's conviction. Savonarola, for his part, was impressed by the obviously learned young man who showed great promise for piety. No record exists concerning the reaction of Savonarola's colleagues to his diatribe against the Church, nor evidence of an official reprimand. Shortly thereafter, however, the Girolamo was sent to preach in the provinces.¹⁷

In 1484, Savonarola was back in Florence, preaching the Lenten sermons at the Church of San Lorenzo, the family church of the Medici. These early sermons were largely ignored, but as with the sermons in Ferrara and Bologna, they were not as disastrous as first believed. Although Savonarola was becoming more vocal in his dismay at the

corruption of the Church, he was still struggling to match his oratory to his conviction. His continued lack of success was discouraging, and he seriously considered giving up preaching for teaching. At least, as a teacher, he had a captive, loyal audience. Teaching was also more suitable to Girolamo's character at this time. In his lessons, he did not have to adhere to the rigid scholasticism which he felt bound by in his sermons, thus enabling him to assume a more individualistic, humanistic tone. Later, he would learn to make his sermons more personal, but until then, successful or not, Savonarola continued to preach.¹⁸

Savonarola's goal as a Dominican leader and later as Prior of San Marco was to restore the Dominican order to the original intent of its founder, St. Dominic. The Dominican Order was founded in 1215 as a preaching order. Originally a group of friars assigned to nunneries of reformed prostitutes, the Order built an organization which, while allowing great freedom for its itinerent preachers, provided a consistent set of rules and observances. Friars were required to be priests and were thoroughly trained in Church doctrine, and unlike many other new orders of the thirteenth century, the Dominicans very rarely used lay brothers, or individuals who lived the monastic life without ordination, in the support of their convents.¹⁹

St. Dominic adopted the Rule of St. Augustine for his monks. Dominicans, as a result of their adherence to the

rule, became canons regular, meaning they were members of clerical orders, rather than monastic religious orders. Dominican religious ideals centered on the attainment of perfection through love of God and preaching. To achieve perfection, the Order functioned much like other monastic orders. Monks were expected to spend much time in contemplation and to practice poverty, chastity and obedience. For a Dominican, poverty and chastity were important, but obedience to superiors was particularly stressed. The relationship between a friar and his superior closely resembled the lord-vassal relationships of the secular world.²⁰ Given this tradition of almost blind obedience to superiors, it is not surprising that the friars of San Marco followed Savonarola so unquestionably.

For a Dominican to preach, he must have superior knowledge of the Scriptures and Canon law. Study of sacred law took the place of manual labor, and monasteries usually were forced to depend on donations for survival. The Dominicans were among the first to weave religious study into the life of a monk, and Dominican monasteries became known as centers of learning with extremely well-endowed libraries. While it was not uncommon for Dominican scholars to congregate in the monasteries with the best libraries, no friar was tied to a particular monastery or church. This freedom of movement, furthermore, was not impeded by administrative duties or the overseeing of corporate

possessions. Originally, the Dominican Order owned no land, collected no rents nor managed estates.²¹

By the end of the thirteenth century, however, observance of the rules began to slacken and the first to go was the observance of the rule of poverty. Monasteries began to acquire land, and friars began to accumulate possessions, to ride horses instead of walking barefoot, and to wear costlier clothes. By the time Savonarola entered the Order in 1475, the vow of poverty was virtually ignored. A story, no doubt apocryphal, recounted the visit of two monks from the Vallambrosian Order to the Convent of San Marco. The two brothers, suddenly aware that they were dressed much more elegantly than the simple friar who was their host, attempted to explain why they were so well-dressed. The more expensive cloth lasted longer, they said, to which Savonarola replied, "What a pity St. Bernard and St. Giovanni Gualberto did not know that as they may have wished to do the same."²² While the story may have sprung from the imagination of one of the friar's early biographers, it does illustrate an important point about the friar. Of all his reforms, the first one instituted and the one most strictly adhered to was the vow of poverty. Savonarola's goal to restore the Dominican Order, and in a larger sense the Church, to its pristine purity put him in close alliance with the humanists who desired similar reforms.

In fulfilling his role as an itinerent preacher, Savonarola spent six years in small communities around Florence. In 1490, he was recalled to Florence at the request of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Pico believed that Savonarola's message of piety would be very attractive to the Florentines, and he persuaded Lorenzo that the friar would bring fame to San Marco which had been waning in prominence since Cosimo's death. In early 1492, the brothers of San Marco elected Savonarola as their prior.²³

Lorenzo the Magnificent was at the height of his power in 1490. Succeeding where others had failed, Lorenzo continued the family dynasty by preserving a belief in Florentine republicanism. He controlled Florentine elections and insured that political changes were in the best interests of the Medici family. Acknowledged as the ruler of Florence, Lorenzo only held elective office three times, but his success in building coalitions enabled him to work more effectively on the fringes of the elected government. Since 1434 when Cosimo established himself as de facto tyrant of Florence, the Florentines had proven that they were not opposed to tyrants, only those who made their tyranny too obvious.

When Cosimo rebuilt the Convent di San Marco, he established himself as its patron. The brothers of San Marco continued to accept the patronage of the Medici until Savonarola became prior. According to tradition and

expectations, the newly elected Prior was to pay a courtesy call to the patriarch of the Medici family. Savonarola, however, never made such a visit. Crediting his election as prior to God, not Lorenzo, he refused to pay homage to the corrupt, if seemingly benevolent, despot. Lorenzo was offended but too intelligent to show his offense. He began taking long walks in the San Marco garden, hoping to shame Savonarola into greeting him. While il Magnifico's presence panicked the younger friars, Savonarola was unmoved. If Lorenzo was not asking for him, he said, then let him walk in the garden as long as he wished.

Lorenzo, however, was not a man to give up easily. Soon after Savonarola's election, the friars found a fortune in gold florins in the alms box. The donation was, of course, anonymous. Savonarola ordered that the windfall be given to the Brothers of St. Martins for the relief of the poor.²⁴ By trying to curry favor with the friar, Lorenzo succeeded only in confirming Savonarola's suspicions about him. The friar was interested in true repentance, not in shows of generosity with ulterior motives.

In his Lenten sermons of 1491, "Savonarola became the master of the Florentine people."²⁵ As his influence continued to grow, he became less hesitant to speak openly of his visions. His preaching changed, and the learned, scholastic preacher became a fire-breathing revivalist. In April 1492, he warned of a sword hanging over Florence which

threatened to destroy the city if it did not change. "Ecce gladius Domini super terram, cito et velociter."²⁶ The friar's sermons continued to draw crowds, and he was not reluctant to take all of Florence to task, including its leaders. Lorenzo, in one last attempt to stem Savonarola's popularity, financed the rise of a rival Franciscan, Fra Mariano de Genazzano. Unfortunately for Lorenzo, he could not have chosen a more incompetent champion. Fra Mariano, in attempting to ridicule Savonarola's prophecies, got carried away and subjected his audience to a stream of obscene denunciations of the Dominican. Lorenzo was furious, and even those who disliked Savonarola, could not abide such blatant and ridiculous character assassination. Savonarola, for his part, responded to Mariano's diatribe with a vigorous reproach, then proceeded to disallow all of Mariano's statements. The Franciscan never forgave him, and years later, as Savonarola was having difficulty with the Papacy, Mariano fueled the flame with vicious innuendos and denunciations.²⁷

When two personalities as strong as Lorenzo and Savonarola clash, the story of the conflict becomes a mixture of fact and fiction. Perhaps the most enduring myth about their relationship concerns the demands Savonarola allegedly made of Lorenzo on his deathbed. In April, 1494, Lorenzo was dying and gave orders that Savonarola be sent for to hear his confession. The friar went to Lorenzo's

bedside and, according to the legend, made three demands of Lorenzo before he would absolve him of his sins. The first required Lorenzo to confess a belief in the mercy of God; the second required him to restore all his ill-gotten gains; and the third required him to restore liberty to Florence. According to the myth, Lorenzo readily accepted the first condition, reluctantly agreed to the second, but rejected the third. Il Magnifico then turned his face to the wall and died without absolution.²⁸

As a kernel of truth lies at the heart of every legend, parts of the story were indeed true. Lorenzo did ask Savonarola to come to him, but it is extremely unlikely that the friar set conditions on the salvation of Lorenzo's soul. Of his modern biographers, Villari repeated the legend in full and did not question its authenticity. The friar's later biographers, however, expressed great doubt that the story was true. It is quite likely that early Dominican biographers embellished the deathbed scene to contrast the evilness of Lorenzo with the republican principles of Savonarola. Moreover, the only eye-witnesses, Angelo Politian and Carlo del Benino recorded that the friar merely prayed with Lorenzo and accepted his confession. Additional evidence that the story was exaggerated is found in the relationship between Savonarola and Piero, Lorenzo's son and heir. Initially, their relationship was quite good, and Piero never indicated any bitterness toward the friar.

Piero's later problems with the Florentines were of his own making.²⁹

Upon becoming Prior of San Marco, Savonarola began to realize his dream of reform. Internally, he reinstated the observance of the poverty vow in practice, not just in theory. The friar required his brothers to relinquish any elaborately decorated crucifixes and all expensively illustrated manuscripts. Each friar was allowed to retain a simple wooden crucifix or breviary and a Bible. The brothers' robes were to be made of coarse, inexpensive cloth and cut close to the body so as not to waste material. Savonarola wore cobbled shoes and encouraged others to do the same.

To avoid the problem of rich patrons attempting to control the monastery in return for large donations, Savonarola decreed that San Marco would be self-supporting. Monks who were skilled artisans were to sell their services as manuscript illuminators, painters or sculptors in order to support those engaged in scholarly pursuits. The Prior assigned the average scholars to the confessional and duties involving explanations of the Scriptures. Preaching and more intense work in theology were reserved for a small elite. Those capable of advanced study were urged to learn languages, including Greek, Arabic and Hebrew, in addition to philosophy, theology and moral science.³⁰ It is a mistake, however, to deduce that Savonarola encouraged the

study of languages merely for the joy of education; speaking the language of infidels was the first step in converting them.

Savonarola's example at San Marco began to affect people outside the monastery. Alms to the poor increased, and many people ceased practicing an ostentatious display of wealth. The friar's humility also attracted many followers and cemented the loyalty of his monks. The fire-breathing preacher had a very gentle nature. The man who bellowed from the pulpit never raised his voice in private. Lapses were corrected with soft, if firm reprimands, not tirades. When he debated scholars from other orders, while his learning impressed his opponents, they were more impressed with his gentleness. He argued effectively but without raising his voice. This virtue not only attracted many followers, including Pico della Mirandola, but it won him the respect of his adversaries.³¹

As the reformer began to take shape, Savonarola began to change. The ascetic became the revivalistic preacher. The conflict between the ascetic scholar and the prophesying preacher is reflected in Savonarola's published works. The sermons reflect the latter, while The Triumph of the Cross reflects the former. While Savonarola could not dismiss his prophecies, he tried to rely on his reason as much as possible. He realized that prophecies seemed to discredit him in the eyes of many intellectuals, but they did gain him

a following among the lower classes. The crowds which gathered to hear the friar preach came not for his learning, but for his revivalism. If he reverted to a scholastic argument, he lost his audience.³² Roeder believes that Savonarola relied on prophecies and proclaimed himself the mouthpiece of God because he wanted his preaching to have a tangible influence.³³ He seems to suggest that the friar was more interested in the theatrical effect of his prophecies than in their truth. Although Roeder states that he believes Savonarola's visions were real, he seems to doubt the friar's motives in revealing them.

In 1493 in order to achieve his goal for the total reform of San Marco, Savonarola began the process of petitioning the Pope for separation from the Lombard Congregation, the regional ruling body for all Dominican convents in the Tuscany area. The friar succeeded in this, not only because of his political shrewdness, but because he had powerful friends. The Lombard Congregation was controlled, for all intents and purposes, by Lodovico Sforza. Sforza, called "the Moor" because of his dark complexion, was Duke of Milan, the central city in the Lombard Congregation, and he had managed to extend his political influence into areas bound together by ecclesiastical ties. As leaders of the two most powerful cities in Tuscany, the Medici and the Sforza were usually on different sides.

Piero de' Medici hoped to embarrass Lodovico by wrenching San Marco from his control. With many powerful cardinals as allies, and Savonarola's disciple, Domenico da Pescia, lobbying in Rome, success came when Alexander VI, growing bored with the whole controversy, allowed his signet ring to be used to seal the Papal Bull. The Pope treated the matter as insignificant at the time, but later as he became more and more determined to rid himself of Savonarola, found that he was unable to reverse the separation which now seemed very important. On August 13, 1493, Savonarola was named Vicar General of the Congregation of San Marco which included San Domenico of Fiesole, and Dominican houses in Prato and Sasso. Only the house at Siena refused. As Siena was not under Florentine rule, they were not obligated to join the new congregation.³⁴

Once San Marco was independent, Savonarola could begin his reforms in earnest. The asceticism became more rigid, but the number of men wanting to join the convent increased. With an increased number of followers, Savonarola began to prophesy with more regularity. One of his first ones dealt with the scourge of God on Florence. God would send an avenger, the prophet said, if Florence did not reform and repent. In November, 1494, Charles VIII, leading an invasion force, entered Tuscany.

Charles VIII, the French king, was attempting to exercise an old claim to the Kingdom of Naples. Naples,

controlled by the Spanish, had been jointly claimed by the French through Charles of Anjou. As he had to pass through northern Italy on his way to Naples, Charles thought he might as well subjugate it on the way. As the French king marched closer to Florence, Piero, who would never be known as a brilliant statesman, capitulated to all of Charles' demands. Almost volunteering to give away all Florentine strongholds, Piero merely made it easier for Charles to believe he could rule Florence without difficulty. Once it became clear that Piero had sold out the city, the Medici were overthrown, and Piero fled for his life. Amid cries that Florence needed men, not boys, for leaders, members of the new Signoria pressured Savonarola to lead an expedition to see the king at Lucca or Pisa. Savonarola was to ask Charles to spare the city. According to Piero Capponi, the friar was asked to go because he was "a man of holy life . . . worthy, courageous, able and highly esteemed."³⁵

Savonarola agreed to help, but only for the purpose of saving the city. He considered his mission an act of charity, not of rebellion, and he said he would plead the case of no private citizen, only that of the city as a whole.³⁶

Charles VIII was a vain, petty man who viewed himself as the new Charlemagne. Savonarola fed his ego by telling him that he was indeed the instrument of God, and that all Florence would welcome him, if he left the city in peace.

Charles listened intently to the prophet, convinced that his destiny had just been confirmed. The king, however, proved to be a most unsuitable champion for the "will of God."

When Charles entered Florence on November 17, he entered in the stance of a conquerer, not a savior. Riding with his lance parallel to the ground--the symbol of conquest--Charles immediately antagonized the Florentine people and worried Savonarola. He also refused to leave. The Signoria again summoned the friar when Charles's attitude toward the city hardened, and he began demanding conditions which were not in the original agreement. Although the king received the friar with great reverence, Savonarola lashed out, telling him that he was disobeying God's will by remaining in Florence. The friar appealed to Charles's vanity by saying that his prestige would increase if he left the city immediately. Charles and his army left Florence on November 28, 1494.³⁷

Even before Charles had left Florence, Savonarola had begun his famous Advent sermons in which he proposed a new republican government. Florence would be the leader in God's new world. A democracy among the people, Florence would actually be a monarchy without an earthly king. Christ, Savonarola proclaimed, would be the new king of Florence. Historians seem to agree that from the Advent Sermons of 1494 until his final sermons in February of 1498, the city

and its people turned to Savonarola for both spiritual and political guidance.

As Florence was shaking off the Medici yoke, Savonarola's prophecies began to change. From his previous statements that God would scourge His Church, Savonarola began to preach that Florence would be the beneficiary of that scourge. Rome was corrupt, and Florence was to replace Rome as the center of Christendom. Florence was to become the "new Jerusalem." Savonarola first revealed his new prophecies in January, 1495, which, according to Donald Weinstein, had changed because of the influence of Florence. Although Savonarola still believed that decay would come, the result would not be Armageddon, but a renovated Church, a perfect Church, centered in Florence. In 1495, the prophet of doom became the prophet of the millennium.³⁸

The overthrow of the Medici and the adoption of a new republican constitution did not throw the city into a reign of terror. Savonarola, in his role as peacemaker, prevented the change of governments from becoming a bloodbath. While endearing him to the common people, many factions who hoped to gain power or, by contrast, lost power resented him. The seeds of the revolt which would result in the friar's death in 1498 were already germinating three years earlier. The Arrabiati, the "enraged," wanted to punish the Medici and all their supporters for maintaining a stranglehold on Florence. Although Piero was banished, many of the Medici's

strongest supporters remained in Florence. Savonarola's pleas for peace saved the lives of many of them. In spite of Savonarola's kindness, however, power proved more important than personal safety, and many would later turn against the friar in order to reestablish themselves as leaders of Florence.³⁹

As mentioned earlier, Florence had never minded tyrants, as long as they did not act like tyrants. It also can be said that the Signoria was against tyranny only if they could not participate in it. The friar's supporters managed to pass many laws which restricted the power of the Signoria. One of these was the infamous "six beans" rule. With a majority of six votes, the Signoria could arbitrarily seize the property of, imprison or execute any citizen of Florence. Prior to Savonarola, no right of appeal existed for those so affected. Savonarola, through moral suasion, was able to insure a right of appeal.⁴⁰

Not the type to give up easily, the Arrabiati tried to discredit Savonarola using the same tactic that Lorenzo had tried, with disastrous results, three years earlier. They tried to give Savonarola some competition. Fra Domenico da Ponza was a former follower of Savonarola who had attempted to copy the friar's success in prophecy. His prophecies, unlike Savonarola's, had not come true, and he was banished from Florence. Recalled in 1495 for the express purpose of criticizing the friar's involvement with the state, Ponzo

appeared before the Signoria on January 18, 1495. The clergy, he said, should not be involved in worldly affairs. Savonarola did not respond to the charges immediately, saying that he would deal with all objections in his sermon on January 20. In that sermon, on the Feast of St. Sebastian, he cited the examples of church leaders from St. Dominic to St. Catherine of Siena who had been involved in political matters.⁴¹

Perhaps unwittingly, Savonarola, by entering Florentine politics, also became involved in the intrigues of papal diplomacy. As part of the bargain to persuade Charles to leave the city, Florence had signed a defensive alliance with the French king against the other major cities in Italy. In late March, 1495, Pope Alexander VI, Venice, Lodovico Sforza, Emperor Maximilian, and the King Ferdinand of Spain formed a defensive league against Charles. They hoped that by isolating Florence, Savonarola's influence over the city might be lessened as practicality would win over spirituality. With the formation of the Holy League and the recruitment of the Tiepidi, the "lukewarm" clergy, the first murmurings of a possible heresy began to emerge. To try to discredit him, the Tiepidi accused Savonarola of being a Fraticelli. The Fraticelli, or spiritual Franciscans, had been declared heretical in 1317 because they believed the Church should not hold possessions. The friar's accusers knew the allegations were false, but they

hoped that Savonarola would get carried away in defending himself and dig his own grave.⁴²

Savonarola did not dig his own grave, at least, not immediately, and the friar's detractors in Rome resorted to more direct measures. In 1495, Savonarola published his first book, the Compendium of Revelations. On July 21, 1496, Alexander VI wrote to the friar requesting his presence in Rome to discuss his prophetic mission. Savonarola, knowing that enemies of the Pope who were foolish enough to go to Rome were never seen again, pleaded illness as an excuse not to go. Actually, the excuse was partially true. Savonarola had a very fragile nature, and he frequently preached to exhaustion. The friar, however, only took the advice of his doctors when it suited him.

The Pope seemed to accept Savonarola's excuse and did not press the matter until September. In fact, Alexander did not seem to be terribly concerned with Girolamo's activities. Savonarola's enemies, however, represented a powerful and persuasive lobby. They brought the Pope almost daily reports of the friar's activities, exaggerated his sermons, and stressed the unfavorable things Savonarola might have implied about the Pontiff. On September 8, Alexander sent a second brief to Savonarola, accusing him of "dogmatic errors, heretical propositions, of nonsense, [and] of false prophecies." The brief also accused the friar of disobedience in refusing the summons of the first brief.

Apparently, the "heresy" stemmed from Savonarola's Compendium of Revelations. Fra Sebastiano Maggi, Vicar General of the Lombard Congregation, was assigned to review and try the friar's case. Furthermore, Savonarola was suspended from teaching and preaching in public, and the convents of San Marco and San Domenico were to be attached to the Tuscan-Roman Congregation, a new organization created specifically for the purpose of silencing Savonarola. Savonarola's lieutenants in the monastery, Fra Domenico da Pescia, Tommaso Busini, and Fra Silvestro were to report to the Dominican convent in Bologna and be assigned elsewhere.⁴³

The Papal Brief proved to be a study in bureaucratic incompetence. The Brief was originally sent to Santa Croce, the Franciscan monastery, not San Marco. Savonarola's enemies hoped that this deliberate mistake would allow the contents of the Brief to be known throughout Florence before Savonarola saw it. The plan failed because the Prior of Santa Croce did not see the document until it had been lying on his desk for several days. Actually, the mistake, along with eighteen others, invalidated the brief -- a fact which Savonarola later pointed out.

In his reply written between September 29 and October 1, 1496, Savonarola said his prophecies must be proven false and as many of them had already come true, this would be rather difficult. The friar protested that his call for

repentance did not violate the doctrine of the Church, and that the separation of San Marco from the Lombard Congregation had been accomplished by a well-respected leader of the Church, not a group of "perverse friars." Moreover, Savonarola had not refused to come to Rome, he had simply asked that the journey be postponed because of his health. Lastly, the Vicar General, Maggi, was a sworn enemy of the friar, and all law, both civil and ecclesiastical, prevented an enemy of the defendant from serving as his judge.⁴⁴

A third Brief, dated October 16, forbade Savonarola to preach until he could come to Rome.⁴⁵ Obeying, Savonarola did not preach again until Lent of 1497 when the Pope relented and gave him conditional approval to preach. The Signoria had pleaded with the Pope to lift the ban on Savonarola's preaching because only the friar could maintain calm and keep peace among all the factions vying for power. Later, when approached by Bishop Niccolo Pandolfini, an enemy of the friar, the Pope did not deny that he had approved Florence's petition to let Savonarola resume preaching. Approval reached Savonarola on February 15 or 16, after the Signoria had already ordered him to preach. The friar's first sermon in four months filled the Duomo to capacity. Special bleachers were constructed, and the Ash Wednesday crowd numbered 15,000.⁴⁶ Florence had regained its prophet.

The renewed sense of enthusiasm which greeted Savonarola's return culminated on February 27, 1497 with the first Savonarolean carnival. Children collected trinkets and "vanities" to be burned in a spectacular bonfire in the Piazza della Signoria. Luca Landucci recounted, "There was made on the Piazza de' Signori a pile of vain things, nude statues, and playing boards, heretical books, Morganti, and many other things of great value, estimated at thousands of florins."⁴⁷ To celebrate their new found morality, the Florentines allegedly burned any reminder of their materialistic selves. Great disagreement still exists concerning the value of the items burned. Villari believes the Florentines would not consign valuable works of art to the flames. Lewis Spitz terms the account that works by Boccaccio and Petrarch were destroyed as "pure fabrication," and Ferdinand Schevill agrees that no proof exists that anything of much value was burned. Ronald Steinberg, however, presents a strong case for the opposing view. A Venetian merchant offered 20,000 ducats for the items on the pyre. Why would a merchant offer such a considerable sum of money for wigs, cosmetics, playing cards, and similar trivia? Moreover, Steinberg states that mass hysteria might have caused some artists to contribute their own works.⁴⁸

Most of the evidence supporting the fanaticism of Savonarola centers on the two "Burnings of the Vanities." While many interesting theories have been advanced

concerning a list of items burned, the fact remains that Landucci's account is the only eyewitness report. Subsequent "lists" of works by Boccaccio, Petrarch, Botticelli and others, which reportedly were burned, were first recorded in the Vita latina in the sixteenth century. The lists could have become exaggerated in a variety of ways. Savonarola's supporters, some of whom were more fanatic than he, may have wished to make Girolamo a crusading book-burner believing that this would prove his orthodoxy and devotion to reform. His enemies may have wished to blame all lost masterpieces on Savonarola's bonfires. Perhaps some valuable works did succumb to the flames, but these must have been the exception, rather than the rule. No evidence exists to suggest that Savonarola purged the San Marco library; indeed, just two years before, he had arranged to purchase the entire Medici library to prevent it from being auctioned off and possibly destroyed.

Savonarola had not been idle during his four month absence from the pulpit. During this time, he completed his greatest work, The Triumph of the Cross. This work, in which Savonarola tried to balance his prophetic message by explaining Christianity in rational terms, will be discussed later. During his respite from preaching, Savonarola also removed himself from all worldly affairs to concentrate on his writing. Such isolation was not required by his mere absence from the pulpit, and anyone seeking to prove that

Savonarola willingly thrust himself into Florentine politics in order to control the city must take notice of this fact.

Savonarola continued to preach through Lent to record-breaking crowds, and although the Signoria had asked him to return to the pulpit, his return prompted increased tension between Savonarola's followers and his detractors. Aware of the growing tension, the Signoria passed a law stating that all public preaching was forbidden the day after Ascension Day, 1497. The Arrabiati wanted the ban made permanent in Savonarola's case, but the Signoria, afraid that the absence of the friar would provoke riots, allowed preaching to resume the next day. The ruling body, however, ordered that all extra seating and special accommodations be removed from all churches. The codicil was obviously directed at Savonarola as the friar's sermons were the only services in Florence that drew enough people to make extra measures necessary.⁴⁹

The Arrabiati and the Compagnacci, a more violent group of Savonarola's opponents, were unsatisfied with the Signoria's decision, and tried to ensure that the friar would not preach on Ascension Day. In an act that even many of Savonarola's detractors regarded as sacrilege, they placed a donkey carcass on the pulpit of Santa Maria del Fiore which they then smeared with manure and blood. Knowing that the friar pounded the pulpit frequently during his sermons, they hammered nails with the points sticking up

into the edges of the pulpit. Prior to the Ascension Day sermon, several of the brothers at San Marco discovered the mess, and managed to clean the pulpit and the altar area in time for Savonarola to preach. The Campagnacci, however, were not content to admit failure. During the friar's sermon, opponents planted in the congregation began a riot. The Compagnacci hoped to kill Savonarola during the confusion, but the friar's supporters surrounded the pulpit, prevented an attack, and escorted him safely back to San Marco.⁵⁰

By the time of this riot, which polarized the city even more, the Pope and his allies were already laying the groundwork for the excommunication. Papal Briefs, dated May 12 and 13, were sent to the Signoria and to the churches of Florence. According to Ridolfi, the copy sent to the Signoria has not survived, but copies preserved in Florentine church records reveal that Savonarola was excommunicated for preaching heresy and for disobedience in refusing to join the Tuscan-Roman Congregation. According to Ricciardi Becchi, Florentine ambassador to Rome, members of the Holy League had discussed the excommunication as early as mid-March, and by the end of April, they demanded it, not because of Savonarola's preaching, but for his insistence that Florence maintain an alliance with France. From the beginning, then, politics clearly motivated the excommunication.⁵¹

Savonarola received word of the impending excommunication largely because the Curia chose Maestro Giovanvittorio da Camerino to deliver the documents. Camerino had been banished from Florence in March, and needless to say, was not terribly anxious to return. Camerino stopped in Siena, and for several weeks, made no contact with the Pope or Florence. All element of surprise was lost as the Curia was forced to ask the Florentine leadership if Camerino had arrived. While Camerino was hiding out in Siena, Savonarola wrote a very humble letter to the Pope, protesting his innocence. The letter placated Alexander VI temporarily, but the friar's enemies again persuaded the Pope that Savonarola must be silenced.

On June 16, a full month after he had left Rome with the excommunication, Camerino asked Florence for safe-conduct. As the entire city knew the nature of his mission, the Signoria refused his request. Unable to complete his plan with his first messenger, Alexander VI sent another emissary with another copy of the brief, an act which thereby invalidated the excommunication. When the excommunication arrived in Florence, many churches refused to publicize it, not only because proper canonical form had not been observed, but because they realized the blatant political nature of its issuance.⁵²

On June 18, the excommunication was read in only five Florentine churches. The following day, Savonarola published

a short tract, "Contro la escomunicazione surrettizia nuovamente", in which he disputed the charges made against him. He declared the charge of heresy absurd and his "disobedience" nonexistent. Both charges, he declared, were the work of his enemies. The tract was published first in Italian, then in Latin, and included a point by point rebuttal of the charges made in the brief. Using his knowledge of Church doctrine and history, Savonarola supported his case so well that even his opponents were forced to validate his arguments.⁵³

The excommunication further divided Florence along party lines. Although the excommunication was doctrinely invalid, the Friar's opponents now had a powerful political weapon. Failure to observe the excommunication could result in interdiction which would mean economic ruin. For a merchant city like Florence, the mere threat of interdiction was enough to change political and spiritual alliances. The Arrabiati also gained another weapon. According to Canon law, anyone associating with an excommunicate put his own soul in jeopardy, and the "enraged" could now cast themselves as the protectors of the Florentines' salvation.⁵⁴

The tension in the city caused by the excommunication and threatened interdict was soon replaced by the spectre of death. In early summer, plague broke out in Florence, and those who could afford to fled the city. In the interest of

public health, all public gatherings, including sermons, were banned. Savonarola spent the next months tending the sick and comforting the dying. Refusing to leave the city himself, he sent many of the younger friars and those who showed the most promise to other convents outside of Florence or to stay at the country homes of his wealthier supporters. As if the plague was not bad enough, the Signoria uncovered a plot formed by five of Florence's most prominent citizens to recall Piero de' Medici. The republicans in the Council of Two Hundred, many of whom were Savonarola's supporters, were outraged, and called for the immediate execution of all five. The men's relatives appealed the decision which was summarily rejected, and all five were beheaded that same night. As the fight for execution was led by Savonarola's supporters, many biographers of the friar criticize him for not trying to stop the slaughter. Actually, Savonarola could not have intervened without rejecting the principles of government he had espoused, namely equal justice for all citizens. Reluctantly, he had recommended leniency for the youngest of the conspirators, but he did not act to save another conspirator who was the brother of one of his greatest supporters.⁵⁵

Although he believed that the excommunication was invalid, Savonarola did not preach again until February, 1498. Throughout the fall of 1497, the Signoria, through

its ambassadors in Rome, attempted to placate the Curia. On October 13, the friar wrote a very humble and conciliatory letter to the Pontiff. Savonarola referred in the letter to the impending publication of The Triumph of the Cross which he said would prove his orthodoxy. For their part, the Signoria was unwilling to let the Pope dictate the affairs of Florence. Also, the ruling body was still very pro-Savonarola, with the Piagnoni, the "weepers," holding a firm majority. The friar was a source of civic pride and was also good for business. During 1497, bronze medallions of the friar were sold by the hundreds.

Savonarola hoped that his letter of October 13 would soothe the Pope's feelings, and ease the tension between them. Ordinarily, Alexander might have been touched by Girolamo's contriteness. For all his corruption, Alexander did not bear a strong sense of malice against Savonarola and wished that the case would be settled. Ridolfi believes that Alexander also may have been in awe of the friar and perhaps a little afraid of him.⁵⁶ Whatever the Pontiff's personal feelings might have been, politics again intervened and dictated a nonconciliatory policy toward the friar and Florence. The truce with France had ended, and the Holy League feared the renewed threat of an invasion from the north. Bringing Florence into the alliance against the French king, which meant silencing Savonarola, overshadowed and subordinated any feelings of reconciliation.⁵⁷

During the months away from the pulpit, the friar became more and more restless. For Savonarola, preaching was like breathing. He drew his strength from the pulpit and without it, he felt helpless and weak. As the Pope had made no new threats against Florence since the October 13 letter, he hoped that his pleas for forgiveness had been accepted. The Pope, however, did not rescind the excommunication, and Savonarola could abstain from preaching no longer. On February 11, 1498, the friar again mounted the pulpit in Santa Maria del Fiore.⁵⁸

Savonarola's return to preaching delighted the Piagnoni, but it only intensified the pope's anger, particularly when the friar's sermons centered on the invalidity of the excommunication. The attacks continued throughout February, and at the end of the month, Gianfrancisco Pico, nephew of the famous humanist and an early biographer of the friar, published a two volume work on the excommunication, refuting every charge in great detail. The Pope, furious at the insolence of the Florentines, gave them an ultimatum: silence the friar or face the consequences of an interdict. On March 3, with the threat still fresh, Savonarola threw down the gauntlet. The Pope, he charged, had refused to listen to the friar's protestations of loyalty. He was only trying to do his Christian duty, and Alexander had hindered him at every turn. "Therefore, Holy Father," Savonarola thundered,

"delay no longer in providing for your salvation."⁵⁹ The die was now cast. For Alexander the choice was simple: capitulation, which would mean an irrevocable loss of prestige and power, or revenge. Savonarola, with his exhortations, had made his choice and sealed his destiny: martyrdom.

The arrival of the Papal ultimatum corresponded with a change in the government of Florence. Previously, Savonarola's followers had controlled a majority of votes on the Signoria and could deflect any attempts to silence the friar. In March, however, the political alliances of the Signoria changed. Only three members were avowed Piagnoni, one was a lukewarm supporter, and four were Arrabiati. The ninth member of the Signoria, Gonfalonier of Justice Piero Popoleschi, was violently opposed to Savonarola. Six votes were required for any action, and the Arrabiati now controlled five.⁶⁰ The renewed threat of an interdict prompted the moderate to switch sides. When faced with a choice between moral courage or economic survival, the Florentines always chose economics. On March 17, representatives from the Signoria visited Savonarola and forbade him to preach. In his last sermon on the following day, Savonarola made a last attempt to publicly vindicate himself and issued a final plea for repentance.⁶¹

Taking advantage of the shift in attitude toward Savonarola, his rivals, the Franciscans, took the offensive.

On March 25, Fra Francesco di Puglia challenged Savonarola to an ordeal by fire. God would protect the one telling the truth, Francesco cried, and he was willing to risk death to prove the falsity of Savonarola's doctrine. The Franciscan had been known to issue such challenges without considering their consequences. A year earlier, when he and Fra Domenico were both preaching in Prato, he had issued a similar challenge. When Domenico eagerly accepted, Francesco discovered that he had to return to Florence earlier than planned. As he had in Prato, Fra Domenico, who had replaced Savonarola in the pulpit, eagerly accepted the challenge. Francesco, who now wished he had kept quiet, wanted to back out, but the Arrabiati would not let him. Savonarola was disturbed that Domenico had not ignored the challenge, and reprimanded him severely. Such an exercise, he believed, was tantamount to tempting God, but he allowed the challenge to stand.

On March 28, representatives of both Orders appeared before the Signoria to attest to the conclusions to be proved. Essentially, all Savonarolean doctrine was to be tested including the validity or invalidity of the excommunication. Francesco and Domenico were designated as champions for each side, and each signed the conclusions. Francesco, however, wanted to go into the fire with Savonarola, not Domenico. During the debate that followed, new champions for each side were proposed. Domenico still

wanted to go into the fire, and eventually a new Franciscan champion was chosen.

On April 7, a huge crowd gathered at the Piazza della Signoria anxious to test the doctrine of the friar. The Franciscans arrived early with little ceremony and secluded their champion, Guiliano Rondinelli, in the Palazzo Vecchio. The Dominicans came in procession, Savonarola in the lead, followed by Domenico. Domenico was dressed in a bright red pluvial to which the Franciscans immediately objected. Saying that the Dominican's clothes might be bewitched, the Franciscans insisted that he change. Savonarola agreed, and the Ordeal was set to begin. As Domenico prepared to enter the flames, he carried a crucifix. The Franciscans again objected. Carrying the host into the fire was not accepted, either. Meanwhile, the Franciscan champion was still nowhere to be seen, and it was starting to get dark. The challenge was halted; the crowd went home disappointed, and rain drenched the carefully prepared piles of wood.

The Ordeal by Fire marked the beginning of the end for Savonarola. Although the failure of the spectacle was no fault of his, many Florentines believed that because it proved nothing, Savonarola had lost the challenge. Actually, according to the terms of the agreement between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, Savonarola would have been banished had Domenico refused to enter the fire or died in it. Since the Signoria did not banish Savonarola, it

proves they knew the delay was not of the friar's making. Florence turned against the friar because the day's events had not proven anything.⁶² They had come to see a medieval morality play in which Good was supposed to triumph over Evil. God was to select His champion, and if He chose not to intervene, then perhaps Savonarola was not the prophet he claimed to be. For a people who believed in signs and oracles, the absence of a message from God was as significant as hearing a voice from heaven. If nothing miraculous happened, however, the Florentines still would have had a delightful afternoon watching the suffering of others.

The following day was Palm Sunday, and the disappointment of the previous day turned into anger and violence. Led by the Compagnacci and the Arrabiati, a mob attacked the Convent of San Marco, trapping many worshippers within its walls. The friars rang the bells of the convent in a desperate plea for help, but the tocsin attracted both friend and foe. As a pitched battle raged in the courtyard of the monastery and outside on the street, Savonarola remained secluded in the choir. As the fighting got closer, many of the younger friars, among them Fra Benedetto, took up arms to protect their leader. Benedetto was known for his hot temper, and allegedly was stalking intruders in the monastery, carrying a sword. After learning of this, Savonarola forbade his monks to carry weapons.

The Signoria, unable to stop the violence which continued throughout the evening, issued a statement at 10 p.m. which banished Savonarola from Florence. He was to leave within twelve hours. Plans were made and vetoed in which Savonarola's followers would keep the invaders occupied in another part of the convent, while he slipped out the back. The horror of knowing that many of his followers were dying and seeing his peaceful brothers clutching swords prompted Girolamo to surrender. Domenico, his faithful lieutenant, asked to share his fate, and in the early hours of April 9, the two men surrendered to the mob. The third defendant, Fra Silvestro Maruffi, was arrested the next morning. Contemporary biographers, who drew parallels between Savonarola and Christ, cast one of the friars in the role of Judas. While not betraying Savonarola to his enemies, the friar allegedly asked his master if he (Savonarola) should not sacrifice himself to save the rest of them.⁶³

The three friars were imprisoned in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, where the examination of Savonarola began on April 9. From his capture to his execution on May 23, Girolamo was tortured regularly. His examiners used the strapado, a rope and pulley device in which the victim's hands were tied behind his back and the rope was threaded through a pulley on the ceiling. The victim was then hoisted by his arms up to the ceiling and subsequently

dropped. Just before his feet touched the ground, the rope was pulled taut, jerking the victim back up with it. One such turn on the strapado usually dislocated the victim's shoulders; several could render his arms useless. Savonarola was subjected to four to six turns on the device at each of his torture sessions. Not surprisingly, after several days, Savonarola broke and recanted his prophecies. Several historians have interpreted Savonarola's recantations in a variety of ways. Roeder believes that the torture drove the friar to admit his own ambition which he had successfully hidden to that time. John A. Symonds, a nineteenth century Renaissance historian, remarks that Savonarola "had the will but not the nerve for martyrdom."⁶⁴ Everyone seems reluctant to admit that Savonarola might have been a mere human being who was reduced to confessing anything, true or false, in order to avoid torture. The friar had a very delicate nature, and he recanted his visions under torture, then recanted his recantations. Furthermore, his confessions were altered to make the charges against him stronger. Threatened with more torture (his left arm was now useless), Savonarola signed them. Later, as his resolve and his faith returned, he rejected his earlier confessions.⁶⁵

Savonarola received three trials, two civil and one ecclesiastical. During the second civil trial, Domenico and Silvestro were also tortured in an attempt to obtain

additional information on the Prior. Domenico remained faithful to Savonarola even though his inquisitors told him that his superior had already confessed to being a false prophet. The questioning of Silvestro was a bit more successful, but yielded no damaging information.⁶⁶

Alexander VI, upon hearing that the friar had been incarcerated, wanted him sent to Rome for trial. The Florentines, however, wanted to deal with a "Florentine problem" themselves. Piero Popoleschi, gonfalonier of justice, also knew that the engineered confessions might be discovered and embarrass the Signoria.

As for examining them [the friars] again, I consider the matter should be allowed to close here, seeing how the investigation was made, and for the peace and quiet of the city, for if these things were all gone into again, it might give rise to scandal.

The Signoria also worried that the Pope would object to their torturing a cleric without his consent. They had no need to worry. On May 12, Alexander sent Giovacchino Torriani and Francesco Romolines of the Dominican Order to Florence to conduct the ecclesiastical trial on his behalf. The verdict was decided before the two men left Rome; the trial was for the purpose of discovering what ties Savonarola still had with the king of France, and if he had allies in Rome.⁶⁸

The third trial yielded very little useful information. Indeed, Savonarola's guilt over his earlier denials overcame

his fear of torture, and the "confession" he rendered was not the one expected by his inquisitors.

Now, hear me. God, Thou has caught me. I confess that I have denied Christ, I have told lies, O Signori of Florence! I have denied Him for fear of being tortured: be my witnesses. If I must suffer, I wish to suffer for the truth: what I have said I received from God Himself. God, Thou givest me this penance for having denied Thee: I deserve it. I have denied Thee, I have denied Thee, I have denied Thee for fear of being tortured.⁶⁹

As the torture commenced, the friar continued to cry that he had denied God out of fear. In spite of the torture, Torriani could get no significant information on the friar's political activities. Savonarola did implicate Cardinal Caraffa of Naples but retracted that statement, saying that he could not be absolved before his execution without confessing any untrue statements.⁷⁰

On May 22, the verdict already agreed upon was rendered. The three friars were convicted of heresy and schism and sentenced to die. They were to be hanged and their bodies burned. Savonarola was no more schismatic than Guiliano della Rovere (later Pope Julian II) who had engaged in similar negotiations with France to try and gain the papal mitre, and his innovations consisted of such novelties as believing that indulgences should be banned and that the clergy should not have mistresses or engage in sodomy.⁷¹ The political ends of the Pope, however, were satisfied. Savonarola would be silenced.

At 10 a.m. on May 23, the three condemned men were led

out onto the Piazza della Signoria. In the center of the square, a scaffold with a tall center rod and crosspiece had been constructed. The crosspiece had been shortened several times because the structure resembled a cross. Three iron rings hung from the crosspiece, and at the base of the structure, wood had been piled to burn the bodies after they were hanged. Savonarola and his two followers were stripped of their habits and went before Fra Benedetto Paganotti to be degraded. Paganotti was a former member of the San Marco Congregation and was still in awe of Savonarola, so the exercise of excommunicating his former superior was very painful. In excommunicating the three men, he pronounced them separated from the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. The Prior of San Marco corrected him gently, "The Church Militant only--the Church Triumphant is not your concern." After being formally excommunicated from the Church, the men then turned to the tribunal where their ecclesiastical judges sat. Romolino speaking on behalf of the Pope said that Alexander VI wished to free them from Purgatory, give them plenary indulgence, and restore them to their "pristine innocence." The three "heretical and schismatic" friars gave their consent.⁷² In effect, Alexander had reversed the excommunication.

Savonarola, Domenico, and Silvestro were then led to the scaffold. Domenico was singing the Te Deum, Silvestro was in a trance, and Savonarola looked as a man who had

already left this world. Silvestro was the first to climb the scaffold, then Domenico, and finally, Savonarola. The lifeless bodies of the three were then engulfed in flames. A sudden wind briefly blew the flames away from the bodies, and the crowd held its breath for a miracle. The wind soon died, however, and the bodies were consumed. The scaffold was guarded to prevent the ashes from being collected for the purpose of veneration, and at the end of the day, the ashes of the three friars were thrown into the Arno.⁷³

With the friar's death, the controversy about his life began. Donald Weinstein believes that Savonarola changed as a result of his contact with Florentine society and philosophy. Was the friar's new interest in civic ideals prompted by his exposure to Florentine humanists, or were humanists, like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, attracted to Savonarola because of the glory he prophesied for Florence? The answer may lie in the common philosophical beliefs that all the humanists, including Savonarola, held. Man, with God's help, could affect his own destiny. His intelligence would provide the tool, and his great capacity for piety would be the means by which Man could change his world. Savonarola translated humanist goals for reform into a concrete plan because of the special influence of Florence. The Florentines were too independent for impersonal religion; they had no patience with religion by rote. They were arrogant with a proud tradition, and

Savonarola used both to achieve his reform. Savonarola was contradictory in many ways, but Italian humanism labored under the same paradoxes. As Savonarola struggled with his prophecies and his reason, so did Pico and Ficino. Unlike the latter two, however, historians have neglected Savonarola's reason in favor of his prophecies. To fully analyze Savonarola, as a humanist and a theologian, his scholarly treatises cannot be neglected. The contradictions will not be resolved; indeed, they will become more complex, but to attempt to take Savonarola out of his time by casting him backward into the Middle Ages or forward into the Reformation, is in Ridolfi's words, to transform him into "a mediocrity."⁷⁴

NOTES

1. Villari I, 2-3; Ridolfi, 2.
2. Villari I, 4; Roeder, 6-9; Ridolfi, 2.
3. Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 222-23.
4. Girolamo Savonarola, "De ruina mundi"; quoted in Ridolfi, 5.
5. Villari I, 14; Weinstein, 80.
6. Pseudo-Burlamacchi, La Vita del beauto Ieronimo Savonarola; quoted in Weinstein, 82.
7. Ridolfi, 4-7.
8. Girolamo Savonarola, Le lettere di Girolamo Savonarola, ed. Roberto Ridolfi; quoted in Weinstein, 82.
9. Roeder, 15.
10. Ibid., 94-95.
11. Ridolfi, 273-76; Villari I, 20.
12. Roeder, 23-24.
13. Weinstein, 83-84; Roeder, 25.
14. Girolamo Savonarola, "De ruina ecclesiae"; quoted in Ridolfi, 6.
15. Villari I, 34-35.
16. Ibid., 36.
17. Roeder, 38-39; Weinstein, 83-84.
18. Weinstein, 84.
19. William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., The History of the Dominican Order, Vol. 1 (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 39, 125.
20. Ibid., 122-24, 129.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 162-63; Ridolfi, 273-75.
23. Weinstein, 101-2.
24. Ridolfi, 45.
25. Ibid., 36.
26. Ibid., 49.
27. Ibid., 41-43.
28. Villari I, 148-49; Roeder, 72-73; de la Bedoyere, 84; Weinstein, 4-5.
29. Ibid.
30. Roeder, 90-91.
31. Ridolfi, 275-77.
32. Roeder, 50-54, 57; Weinstein, 78.
33. Roeder, 50-54.
34. Weinstein, 109.
35. Ridolfi, 80-83.
36. Weinstein, 131-33.
37. Ibid., 134-45, 137.
38. Ibid., 68.
39. Ibid., 28-29; Ridolfi, 106-7.
40. Ibid.
41. Ridolfi, 108-9.
42. Ibid., 116-117. The Fraticelli challenged the authority of Pope John XXII on the issue of poverty. For a complete account of the history of the sect, see Decima L. Douie, The Nature and the Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1932; reprint, New York: AMS, 1978).
43. Ridolfi, 136-37.

44. Ibid., 137-39.
45. Ibid., 142.
46. Ibid., 151.
47. Luca Landucci, A Florentine Diary, trans. Alice de Rosen Jarvis (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 130-31.
48. Villari I, 135; Ronald M. Steinberg, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art, and Renaissance Historiography (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977), 6-7; Lewis Spitz, The Renaissance and Reformation Movements (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1971), 237; Ferdinand Schevill, Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Age of the Medici and the Coming of Humanism, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 447.
49. Ridolfi, 193-94.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 197.
52. Ibid., 197-202.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 210-11.
56. Ibid., 212.
57. Ibid., 213.
58. Ibid., 216.
59. Ibid., 226.
60. Ibid., 223.
61. Christopher Hibbert, The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1975), 198.
62. Ridolfi, 236-43.
63. Ibid., 245-50.
64. Roeder, 297-99; John Addington Symonds, A Short History of the Renaissance in Italy (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), 102-4.

65. Ridolfi, 252-54.
66. Ibid., 255-56.
67. Ibid., 256-57.
68. Ibid.; de la Bedoyere, 228-29.
69. Ridolfi, 262-63.
70. Ibid., 163-64.
71. Ibid., 265.
72. Ibid., 269-70.
73. Ibid., 271.
74. Ibid., 285.

CHAPTER 3

SAVONAROLA AND THE POLITICS OF REFORM IN FLORENCE

Girolamo Savonarola achieved his greatest fame as "the Prophet of Florence." As the most popular preacher in the city from 1491 to 1498, the friar had a profound impact on the city and its people. Although Savonarola initially entered the political arena somewhat reluctantly, he soon saw political action as a way to achieve his spiritual mission. The combination of religion and politics, however, does not imply that Savonarola had ulterior motives. He was as influenced by the milieu of Florentine culture as the Florentine people were influenced by him. To adequately discuss the relationship between the prophet and the city, a brief overview of Florentine government, the city's republican tradition, and the ultimate rise of the Medici might be helpful.

Although Florence, in the heat of renewed republicanism, overthrew the Medici, the instability of the city's political systems contributed to their eventual dominance. Perhaps more important is the fact that Savonarola was an influential figure in Florence, the center of humanism in Renaissance Italy. Not only was Savonarola regarded as the intellectual equal of any of the humanists, but he translated humanist goals for reform into a concrete

plan of action. As many intellectuals, humanists and non-humanists, were active followers of Savonarola, the definition of Girolamo as a fanatic moralist must be reexamined. If Savonarola was an anachronism, then Renaissance Florence and its humanism were equally anachronistic. Savonarola was a man of his time, influenced by Florence and the intellectual and artistic philosophy it espoused.

City government in Florence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was based loosely on the principle of representative democracy. The central power brokers were the guilds, which were loosely organized according to profession. There were fourteen minor and seven major guilds. The major guilds seemed to control the majority of votes, but the many rebellions in Florence centered on the desire of the lesser guilds to achieve political parity, a goal which was temporarily achieved on numerous occasions. The members of the guilds made up the Commune which elected the Signoria. Eight priors were chosen from the guild community with the ninth, the gonfalonier of justice, chosen at large. Sixteen lesser gonfaloniers who represented the city's neighborhoods served as an advisory board to the Signoria, and also organized the city's citizen-army. Other advisors included the captains of the Parte Guelfa and the guild consuls, who supervised the work of the various magistrates.¹

Florentine government changed every two months. In attempting to prevent tyranny, Florence inadvertently left itself open to tyrants because no elected government could accomplish its goals in so short a time. City office holders were selected by lot from those eligible, and many political battles concentrated on the criteria for eligibility. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, new laws governing eligibility were passed in order to exclude one group or another. The magnates or the aristocracy, for example, were excluded until 1517. The members of the city's largest and most powerful families tried to supplant the guilds' political interests on several occasions, and banishment and execution always were the result. The belief that all members of the guilds were equal and obligated to help each other regardless of wealth or social position caused the entire guild community, rich and poor, to unite against those who promoted an inherently unequal society. This ideal of egalitarianism was so strong that wealthy families, like the Medici, while living the lifestyle of princes, maintained membership in a guild.²

The struggle for power between the aristocracy and the guilds erupted into several conflicts in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The most serious revolt which led to the establishment of the guild regime, and the banishment of the aristocracy from political power was the Ciompi Revolt in 1378. When the Commune was established

after Florence gained her independence in the twelfth century, the aristocracy had organized to keep members of lower guilds from achieving full political participation. Whatever inroads the lower guilds had made by the mid-fourteenth century were destroyed by the Black Plague which decimated the ranks of lower guildsmen. Although the aristocracy had not been wholly unaffected, more of their number survived because they had the resources to leave the city and the plague. The aristocracy had two goals: to increase the number of old and prominent families in government, and to insure that the Parte Guelfa increase its political power.³

The struggle between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines dominated Florentine politics for nearly two hundred years. Ostensibly a contest between the followers of the Pope (Guelfs) and those of the Emperor (Ghibellines), the principle of church versus state became a subterfuge for asserting and maintaining control over local institutions. Prior to the Ciompi Revolt, the most serious conflict ended in 1304 with the banishment of the entire Ghibelline party, which included Dante among others. Throughout the fourteenth century, the label of "Ghibelline" was used to discredit anyone the Guelfs wanted out of power or to discourage popular support for any demand not in accordance with Guelf political aims.⁴

During the 1360's, the Guelf aristocracy launched an

intensive campaign to rid the city of Ghibelline influence, i.e. all undesirables. The purge included "new men of uncertain origins," but it also affected old Guelfic leaders, such as Matteo Villani and Francesco del Bene. The common people were outraged, and the middle level guilds joined forces against the Parte. In 1366, this coalition which included artisans, tradesmen, bankers and some members of old and prominent families, managed to limit the Guelfs' power by restricting their arbitrary authority to act against alleged Ghibellines. Success, however, led the coalition to assert its own power, and in 1375, it violated one of its own laws by waging war against the Papacy. The 1372 law stated that Florence could not wage war or dispatch troops without the prior consent of a special assembly. The Signoria, now controlled by the coalition, ordered the Balìa, or military leaders, to seize large amounts of church property. To try to regain power, the Guelfs proscribed almost one hundred people in preparation for a planned revolt on June 24, 1378, the feast day of Florence's patron saint, John the Baptist. News of the conspiracy caused a revolution. The clothworkers guild seized power and controlled the government for six weeks.⁵

When the Guelf conspiracy became known, guildsmen, poor laborers and the aristocratic middle class joined forces to defeat the Parte. The guilds presented petitions to the Signoria demanding government reform. Their intent was to

limit political participation to those who worked in trades or businesses, thereby excluding the idle rich.

Theoretically, even the lowliest tradesmen would have an equal chance of being chosen for public office as the wealthiest businessman.⁶

According to Gene Brucker, the reforms would have produced a more democratic government, but the way in which they were presented also threatened the authority of the Signoria. The guilds threatened to revolt if their demands were not met, and calls for protection of the Signoria from the mob were ignored. Citizens who could afford it hired private armies to protect their homes, convinced that the Signoria could not maintain law and order. Florence teetered on the brink of anarchy for a month until July 22 when the Signoria fled, relinquishing power and the Palazzo Vecchio to the mob.⁷

The clothworkers' government which ruled Florence until August 31 was a moderate coalition, not a workers' republic. Actually, the attitudes of the Signoria were more middle class and tended to represent propertied interests. Unfortunately, their moderate attempts at reform did not satisfy the lower classes, and unrest continued. The lower echelon of cloth workers demanded a permanent magistrate from the lower classes and the right to be consulted by the Signoria on all legislation. The inability of the Ciompi to quiet dissension in its own ranks weakened the government,

and at the end of August, the other guilds united and overthrew the clothworkers regime.⁸

The larger guild community was disturbed by the attempted reforms of the Ciompi. Although the reforms, such as equitable taxation and higher wages, may be seen as moderate and egalitarian, the propertied classes from artisans to wealthy merchants viewed them as a disruption of natural order, thus the guild regime which remained in power until 1382 is noted for its relative conservatism and attention to the interests of the property owners. Because the regime attempted to represent so many variant interests, from lower class artisans to the aristocracy, internal conflicts threatened the stability of the government. In spite of this, however, it ran an effective administration. For all its claims of broadbased support, the guild regime was still controlled by the upper class.⁹

The Guild Regime and the governments which followed it did succeed in limiting the influence of the Parte Guelfa, and by 1387, the Parte was increasingly disturbed that so few of them were chosen for office. Between May, 1386 and April, 1387, only nine Parte members were chosen for the Signoria out of fifty-four possible seats. As eligible members of the lower guild community could not be prevented legitimately from inclusion in the selection process, the Guelfs invented two devices to control elections. They first granted discretionary authority to election officials

in considering the qualifications of those chosen. Secondly, they changed the election of officials from a selection by lot to election a mano. When a Guelf controlled Signoria passed these "reforms" in May 1387, participation of the lower guilds in the political process was effectively stymied.¹⁰

By the early fifteenth century, the government of Florence which Savonarola would help to reform was taking shape. The debates of the Signoria and the voting privileges of the Commune became a public facade for decisions which had already been made "in dining halls and in studies".¹¹ According to Brucker, however, the decision makers were not deliberately manipulative, rather, a leadership elite had developed among men who advised the Signoria and participated in government whether or not they currently held elective office. While not true republicanism, it was not pure despotism, and the system had no precedent in the history of Florentine politics. It was through the reggimento that the Medici began to assert their influence.¹²

Lauro Martines was the first to describe the reggimento as a set of concentric circles. The largest circle included the most citizens and exerted the lesser influence. The smallest included the fewest men and exercised the greatest power over government decisions.¹³ The smallest circle, however, did not necessarily include only those with the

most wealth. Rather, admission to the leadership elite was based on merit and experience. In 1417, Antonio Alessandri listed the qualities desirable for one chosen to the war magistracy. The position required men "who are very knowledgeable, who possess authority, experience and prestige; who are affluent; and who in any conflict between public and private interest will also opt for the general welfare."¹⁴ It is clear from Alessandri's statement that wealth was not unimportant in the selection of government officials, but an appropriate civic attitude and experience could overcome a lack of wealth.

The change in Florentine government from corporate to elitist corresponded loosely with the rise of the Medici family. Giovanni de' Medici built a reputation as a successful banker, but in 1413, his position was assured when the Medici bank in Rome became the depository for most Church revenues, for which the family received a substantial commission. Giovanni also acted as chief financial advisor to Pope John XXIII until the latter was deposed in 1415. This setback, however, was only temporary as the Medici continued their close connection with the papacy which eventually would make Giovanni's son, Cosimo, the richest man in Europe.¹⁵

Prior to his becoming the Pope's financial advisor, Giovanni had already proved himself valuable to the Florentine republic. He was first elected to the Signoria

in 1403 and for the next two decades built political alliances to safeguard Medici interests. In 1421, he was elected gonfalonier of justice, and the Medici party was securely in power.¹⁶ The Medici were just one example of the way the reggimento could work to benefit those with talent and money. Between 1400 and 1421, Giovanni only held appointive or elected office five times, but his membership in a powerful guild and his professional expertise gave him entre to the Palazzo and a voice in decision-making at the highest level.

After Giovanni's death in 1429, Cosimo continued to direct the efforts of the Medici party, but he was not immediately the Pater Patriae of Florence. Although the Medici controlled Florentine politics, they faced a series of challenges by a rival faction, led by Rinaldo degli Albizzi. The most serious threat to the budding Medici dynasty occurred in 1433 when Albizzi's supporters gained control of the Signoria, and more importantly, elected one of their number as gonfalonier of justice. Using the arbitrary power of the Signoria, Albizzi had Cosimo arrested on a charge of trying to seize power illegally. Rinaldo would have preferred to have Cosimo executed but settled for banishing the Medici patriarch to Padua for ten years. The exile, however, lasted only ten months, and when the Medici regained power in 1434, they were not to relinquish it for sixty years.

Cosimo built his huge following and solidified the admiration of the Florentine people by assiduously maintaining the appearance of complete republicanism. He lived simply but spent lavish sums on rebuilding Florentine churches, most notably San Marco, and on supporting the arts and artists. Cosimo was not a humanist, but he insured that his sons received excellent humanist educations. Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine humanist, became a favorite of Cosimo as a young man. Cosimo sent him to school and later financed Ficino's work on Plato. The humanist's Platonic Academy was organized at Careggi, the Medici's country villa. The relationship between Ficino and the Medici family is extremely important in considering the humanist's attitude toward Savonarola. To follow the friar wholeheartedly meant that Ficino would have had to disregard a lifetime of patronage -- a step which the humanist was not prepared to take.

Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici, preeminent citizen of Florence whether in wealth or prudence or authority or power, died on the first day of August, 1464, around the twenty-second hour, aged a little less than 76 years, in his villa called Careggi. The next day, putting aside the customary pomp of funerals of great citizens, with little display, as he wished, accompanied only by the priests of San Lorenzo and the friars of San Marco and the Abbey of Fiesole, churches he had built, and a few citizens who were relatives and friends walking behind the corpse, he was buried in San Lorenzo in a low tomb in the ground under the tribune.

Even in death, Cosimo maintained his show of republicanism.

Piero, Cosimo's son, succeeded to the leadership of the

family, and his assumption of the preeminent role in city politics was considered as nothing less than a hereditary right. Although Piero was not the leader his father was and in ill health, Medici supporters hoped he would maintain his leadership of the party until Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo, was old enough to assume power. When Piero died in 1469, Lorenzo was not yet twenty-one. The first ten years of Lorenzo's ascendancy were not without problems, but he succeeded in maintaining the family's prominent role in government. Continuing his father's and grandfather's system of patronage, Lorenzo built an impressive list of political allies while enhancing the Medici's standard of living. At his death in 1492, Lorenzo had amassed a collection of Greek manuscripts and Renaissance art which was the envy of Europe.

The most serious attempt to rid Florence of the Medici prior to Savonarola occurred in 1478. The Pazzi were a wealthy noble family who had been excluded from political participation when the guilds came to power in the mid-fourteenth century. Ironically, Cosimo was instrumental in permitting the Pazzi to reenter Florentine politics, but the inclusion of the magnate family only heightened their desire for more power and increased their resentment of the Medici. During high mass in the cathedral, members of the Pazzi family and their hired assassins attacked Lorenzo and his brother, Guiliano. Lorenzo was stabbed in the neck but

managed to escape to the sacristy behind the altar. Guiliano, however, was stabbed to death. By nightfall, the bodies of three Pazzi conspirators and the archbishop of Pisa were hanging upside down from a window in the Palazzo Vecchio. Lorenzo composed verses to be placed underneath their heads and commissioned Botticelli to paint the scene for posterity. Before the purge ended, seventy men had been executed, and Lorenzo had solidified his power in Florence.

According to Francesco Guicciardini, Florence could not have had a better tyrant than Lorenzo.¹⁸ Although he did not live as simply as his grandfather had, Lorenzo continued the facade of republican beliefs. Because il Magnifico was in command so solidly after the Pazzi conspiracy, he did not have to be as careful in concealing his political maneuvering, but he took great care not to disturb traditional Florentine institutions. The Commune was summoned regularly, although their function was merely to confirm decisions already made. As is obvious from Guicciardini's statement, Florence knew Lorenzo was a tyrant, but his iron fist was cloaked in a velvet glove. Lorenzo was a masterful politician who kept wooing his constituency.

Florence's attitude toward its leaders and particularly its tyrants seemed to be inconsistent but was actually based in a deep civic pride and more than a little arrogance. The city wanted its leaders to realize that even tyrants ruled

with the consent of the people, and the people could take away that consent. Cosimo and Lorenzo succeeded because they never forgot that; Piero, Lorenzo's son, failed because he openly proclaimed what no one in Florence wanted to hear: the Medici were the ruling family of Florence, and what the "people" thought made little difference.

In his History of Florence, Niccolò Machiavelli recounted how the Duke of Athens, who rose to power in Florence in 1342 by pitting the nobility and the commoners against each other, lost his hold on the city because of his attitude. In the 1340's, Florence was at war with Pisa for control of the city of Lucca. The Council of Twenty, formed especially to direct the war effort, had asked Robert, king of Naples for assistance, and in response, the King sent Walter, Duke of Athens as a military advisor. The Duke used the nobility to help him seize power, then betrayed many of his allies to secure the favor of the commoners. In 1342, he was elected as leader of Florence for life. The tyrant, however, became obsessed with his own power and was oblivious to plots to overthrow him. On July 26, 1343, the major political groups in Florence--the nobility, the plebians, and the middle class--united and overthrew the Duke's government.¹⁹ The description of the Duke given by Machiavelli gives great insight into why the Florentines found him so objectionable.

This duke . . . was cruel and avaricious, difficult to speak with, and haughty in reply. He desired the service of men, not the cultivation of their better feelings, and strove rather to inspire them with fear than love. Nor was his person less despicable than his manners; he was short, his complexion was black, and he had a long, thin beard.²⁰ He was thus in every respect contemptible.

Apparently, Florence expected its tyrants to be attractive, as well as republican-minded. Machiavelli's attitude toward the Duke also exemplifies standard European as well as Florentine prejudices. Europeans associated darkness with evil, and Florence was wary of any outsiders, considering them inherently inferior.²¹ Although Savonarola cannot be considered black, he was definitely an outsider, and yet, he became the spiritual leader of Florence. The city responded to him not just because he prophesied great things for it, but because he melded with the city's philosophical heritage. The greatest scholars in Florence regarded him as having a superior knowledge of philosophy, and Savonarola was no scholastic. He did, however, attract representatives from both Florentine schools of thought: scholasticism and humanism. Savonarola became Florentine in mind as well as in spirit.

When Savonarola returned to Florence and San Marco in 1490, he did so at the request of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Since his first stay in Florence in 1482, he had preached in several small towns in Tuscany, gaining a reputation and increasing his expertise as a revivalist preacher. Pico,

having first met Savonarola in 1482, believed that Florence would respond to the friar's message, and persuaded Lorenzo to ask for his transfer. Pico was regarded as the leader of the young Laurentians and would not have been attracted to Savonarola, nor would he have recommended him to Lorenzo if the friar had been only one of many moralistic Dominican preachers. In 1490, Savonarola had not yet developed the oratory which would gain him his later audiences, so the only aspect of Savonarola's reputation which could have attracted Pico must have been his learning and his piety. Perhaps Pico believed that Girolamo had discovered a way to resolve all conflicts between the philosophy of reason and the theology of faith, and therefore could contribute to the enhancement of both.

Although Lorenzo fancied himself a humanist, he was probably indifferent to Savonarola's philosophical bent as long as Girolamo could be controlled. When Cosimo, Lorenzo's grandfather, paid for the renovation of San Marco in 1434, he established himself as its patron, even reserving a cell in the cloisters for his personal use. Although Cosimo did not openly direct the affairs of the convent, tradition and politics dictated that the Prior of San Marco pay close attention to the wishes and "advice" of the Medici patriarch.

When Savonarola became Prior in 1491, he immediately antagonized Lorenzo by refusing to make the traditional

courtesy call on the Medici patriarch. Furthermore, Girolamo severely criticized Lorenzo in his sermons, attacking his control of Florentine politics. When his attempts to shame Savonarola into meeting with him failed, Lorenzo sent five leading Florentine citizens to persuade Girolamo to abandon his attacks on the Medici. Domenico Bonsi, Guidantonio Vespucci, Paolo Antonio Soderini, Bernardo Rucellai, and Francesco Valori could not convince Savonarola that they had come on behalf of the city, not Lorenzo, and Girolamo sent them away. "Lorenzo was at last convinced that this was not the right soil in which to plant vines."²²

In 1492, Savonarola was basing his sermons on the imminent scourge of the Church. The belief that the world was hopelessly corrupt which had prompted his entry into the monastery had not faded. As early as 1486, he had predicted that God would scourge his Church soon, and with the simonic election of Rodrigo Borgia as Alexander VI, Savonarola held little hope that the reform of the Church would come from Rome. Girolamo was not completely pessimistic, however. Apocalypticism presupposes that the time for reform is past. The faithful cannot repent, only endure.²³ Savonarola began a program of internal reform as soon as he became Prior, and his sermons contained, along with the fearful prophecies, exhortations to repent. Such pleas for reform would have been unnecessary if Armageddon was immediately unavoidable.

The desire to effect reform suggests that Man is capable of affecting his own destiny and includes more than just a belief in free will. Although Savonarola never wavered in his belief in an omnipotent God nor did other humanists, he did believe that Man could change. His belief that God would reward Man's best efforts was very medieval but also very Catholic. Pico nor Ficino believed in predestination, in fact, Ficino's neo-Platonism and Savonarola's belief that outward observance must be accompanied by inward faith were very similar. Ficino's quest for the "higher good" was an inner struggle which ultimately relied on faith to achieve its purpose.

We seek the highest summits of Mount Olympus. We inhabit the abyss of the lowest valley. We are weighted down by the burden of a most troublesome body. . . . How, then shall we reply to a contradiction of this kind? On the one hand, the argument promises the greatest ease; on the other, experience shows in an equal degree, the greatest difficulty. Only²⁴ the law of Moses will solve this conflict for us.

In 1493, San Marco separated from the Lombard Congregation and became independent. Once Savonarola became Vicar General of new congregation and was no longer responsible to the hierarchy of the Lombard Congregation, he was free to implement his full program of reform. Although his reforms were severe, for example, the friars were required to relinquish all illuminated manuscripts and jewel-laden crucifixes, Savonarola apparently did not censor the works in the library. He had no objection to the study

of ancient manuscripts as long as those who studied them were intelligent enough to understand what they were reading. He divided the duties of the friars into three groups. Those with skills in painting, sculpture or manuscript illumination were to sell their work to support their brothers who were engaged in more scholarly pursuits. Friars with minimal academic talent were responsible for confessional and other pastoral duties, and those with the most talent received advanced instruction in theology and philosophy to prepare them to preach. The higher studies were reserved for a small elite, but that group had access to the greatest public library in Italy. The San Marco library not only housed many ancient manuscripts which had been donated by Cosimo but had attracted some of the greatest scholars in Italy. For example, Sante Pagnini, the great Hebrew scholar, studied at San Marco with Blemmet, and Savonarola himself made some progress in the knowledge of Hebrew. All friars engaged in higher academic pursuits studied Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean; however, Savonarola had no intention of promoting the study of languages merely for academic purposes; the conversion of the infidel depended on speaking the appropriate language.²⁵

The presence of a magnificent library and a coterie of the best scholars in Florence do not automatically make Savonarola a humanist, or more specifically, a Burckhardtian humanist. Admitting, however, that there is more to

humanism than the paganism and materialism which Burckhardt described allows room for a fuller understanding of both Girolamo and his humanist scholars. If the piety and deep religious feeling among the humanists is regarded as real, rather than superficial, then the philosophy of humanism can be reconciled with the reformist tendencies of Savonarola.

Among the humanists, Pico della Mirandola was the closest to Savonarola. Unfortunately, Pico died in 1494 so it is impossible to predict how he would have reacted when Florence turned against its prophet. In 1486, Pico published his nine hundred theses in which he attempted to show the similarities between all ancient philosophies and Christianity. His intention was not to reduce Christianity to a series of previously discovered truths but to enhance the veracity of the Christian faith by proving that although some truths had existed prior to the advent of Christianity, its central uniqueness--the birth, death and resurrection of Christ--remained unaffected by attempts at universalism.

The standard interpretations of Pico's life suggest that his humanism suffered because of his involvement with Savonarola.²⁶ When Girolamo first met Pico in 1482, however, he was impressed by both the humanist's learning and piety. Pico was impressed by Savonarola's ability to reconcile his faith and his reason without sacrificing either. Pico did not become religious because of his association with Savonarola, but he came to regard Girolamo

as a spiritual mentor who could channel the humanist's great capacity for knowledge in a direction which Pico found comforting.

Scholars in the fifteenth century were faced with the same dilemma as their predecessors. The pursuit of scholarship often meant a retreat from the world; however, the civic attitudes of Renaissance Italy, and particularly the deep-seated republicanism of Florence, persuaded many humanists to become increasingly involved in the affairs of the world. Reform could not be achieved through words alone, and the humanists believed that their presence and participation in the affairs of state could facilitate such reform.

Savonarola had spoken often about the scourge of the Church. With the invasion of Charles VIII of France, he was able to combine his goals for reform with Florentine legend. Giovanni Villani first recorded the legend of the special destiny of Florence in the fourteenth century. Recounting a much older oral tradition, Villani stated that Florence was rebuilt by Charlemagne, and the city would realize her ultimate destiny when a new "Charlemagne" came and reunited Christendom from Florence. By adding a religious element to the legend, Villani contributed to the growing belief that Florence alone would achieve both secular and spiritual greatness.²⁷

Charles apparently did not know the Florentine legend,

as he originally made no attempt to present himself as anything but a conqueror. When Piero de'Medici capitulated to all of Charles' demands, including giving away a Florentine stronghold which Charles would have had great difficulty taking, the Signoria looked elsewhere for someone who could unite the Florentines against Charles. When Savonarola agreed to speak to Charles, he said he would ask Charles to spare the city, but he would not intercede on behalf of any individual. His mission was to save the city, not safeguard personal interests.

When Charles agreed to leave Florence at the end of November 1494, the Signoria began work on a new constitution. Florence's rediscovered determination for true republicanism, however, did not preclude factional struggles from arising. Old grudges against the Medici and their followers resurfaced as the anti-Medici faction sought to punish anyone who had allied themselves with the overthrown dynasty. The true meaning of republicanism seemed to be lost amidst a series of new power struggles. Throughout the turmoil, Savonarola maintained a reasonably low profile until the struggles for power threatened to destroy the revolution.²⁸

Because Savonarola had been so successful in hastening the departure of Charles VIII, the Signoria sought his help in formulating a new constitution for Florence. Girolamo did not assume, however, an active role in governmental

reform. Preaching his Advent sermons during the debate and writing of the constitution, he remained above faction and spoke of governmental changes only as part of a larger program of reform. By maintaining a conciliatory position and combining the reform of the government with the fulfillment of Florence's destiny as the city of the elect, Savonarola established broad-based support which included humanists and non-humanists, aristocrats and commoners.²⁹

The one element of Florentine history which could unite all the citizens of the city was the belief in the special destiny of Florence as the chosen city of God. This belief imbued Florentines with a particular arrogance which caused them to be suspicious and perhaps disdainful of foreigners. This simple fact, so often overlooked by historians who state that Savonarola established a de facto dictatorship in the city, precludes any idea that Girolamo could have led the Florentines in any direction they did not want to go. After Piero de' Medici and his faction were overthrown, Florence had the opportunity to recreate its republic, but the Medici exile also produced a leadership vacuum. In September 1494, Piero Parenti expressed the feelings of many Florentines when he said that Piero was a disgrace, but they had no one with which to replace him. By evoking the millennialist vision of Florence, Savonarola was able to inspire the city to a new attempt at republicanism while solving--theoretically, at least--the problem of

leadership.³⁰

Savonarola was no brilliant innovator as a political theorist, but neither did he merely restate old solutions to new problems. He believed absolute monarchy was the best form of government if the ruler was good, but it was the worst if the ruler was a tyrant. While he did not totally disallow the idea of an absolute ruler who could use power wisely, he was skeptical that Man could remain uncorrupted by power. Pure democracy, in most cities, could not work because government depended on well-qualified men being elected to run it. Florence, however, had the best chance of achieving democratic government because the Florentines were more intelligent than most. Also, in Florence, a well-established tradition of civic humanism existed. Those who were well-educated felt a duty to use their education and expertise for the public good. Savonarola made use of this attitude in appealing to both humanists and non-humanists.³¹

Savonarola's great contribution to the new constitution was the creation of the Great Council. In order to keep government appointments and benefices out of the hands of an elite few, he proposed a council of citizens who would pass strong legislation to stabilize the government, make sure that tyranny did not reoccur, and ensure that the system was administered effectively on a daily basis. Although the Great Council had the appearance of being completely democratic, Savonarola had no intention of allowing just

anyone to participate. "Perhaps the plebians would want to get into the government, which would quickly lead to disorder."³² The council should be large enough to represent all interests, but only those with a knowledge of the workings of government should participate. Although the Council would distribute appointments and make major decisions, a small bureaucratic core would handle administrative duties. The larger group would meet on a regular basis, and attendance would be mandatory. Members of the Council who did not attend, without a valid excuse, would be replaced.³³ Savonarola hoped that strict requirements for participation would deter those who were not particularly interested in serving in government, while keeping power out of the hands of an elite.

But it is clear that bad government by many departs from the common good less than does bad government by one, for if those who usurp the common good and divide it among themselves, that is, the city's opportunities and honors, nonetheless being given to more than one, the common good remains to some extent common.³⁴

By appealing to Florentine patriotism and civic duty, Savonarola was able to combine governmental and spiritual reform and strike a balance between monarchy and democracy. Although he never specifically identified God as the monarch of Florence, he implied that the new government would work if its citizens feared God, loved the common good, loved each other, and practiced impartial justice. God made government imperfect, Savonarola said, so that Man, with God's help, could perfect it.³⁵ In exhorting the

Florentines to use their intellect and free will and with his belief that government could be perfected, Savonarola expressed a basic belief in the dignity and worthiness of human beings. If earthly life was to be a mere travail of tears in preparation for eternity, there would be no purpose in perfecting human institutions. Although good government, particularly in Florence, was ordained by God, He deliberately made it imperfect, an act which would suggest that the Supreme Being had confidence in the ability of Man.

Humanism expressed the basic tenet that Man, through the use of his intellect, could change the world. The belief assigned Man a pivotal place in God's creation because he could sink to the level of the animals or rise to an angelic tier.³⁶ Savonarola's belief in the citizens of Florence was no different than that expressed by Pico in "On the Dignity of Man." The impetus for change was on Man, not God. Savonarola did not regard human beings as worms, in Luther's sense, but as valuable allies in God's work on earth.

The greatest problem in most humanist plans for reform was the elitism of their programs. Although Savonarola partially addressed this with the advent of the Great Council, most office holders would have still been chosen from a well-educated elite. By giving the common people a stake in his reform, however, he created a practical, broad-based support system which eluded most humanists. Through

his sermons, Savonarola reached the citizens of Florence emotionally; through his writings, he reached them intellectually.

The way in which Savonarola influenced Pico is well-documented. His relationship with the dean of the Florentine humanist community, Marsilio Ficino, is less well-defined. The two men did not correspond, and no record exists of a meeting between them. Ficino was a well-known astrologer, and Savonarola condemned the pseudo-science in Triumph of the Cross and his sermons. Although Ficino used astrology, his attitude toward it varied. In 1477, he attacked the pseudo-science in Disputatio contra indicium astrologorum only to speak favorably of it in De Vita twelve years later. When Pico wrote his attack on astrology in 1494, Ficino agreed with his conclusions. In spite of his vacillations, Ficino believed that the stars controlled part of human existence. "The heavens do not move our will through instinct of nature, but they do move our body."³⁷ Higher entities influence lower entities, according to the humanist, and although the human mind is superior to the stars and therefore cannot be influenced by them, the human body is inferior and as such is subject to the influence of all higher entities.³⁸

Savonarola and Ficino became inextricably linked when several of Ficino's disciples became followers of Savonarola. Giovanni Nesi, a longtime correspondent and

student of Ficino, became a leading advocate for the Savonarolean movement. Paolo Orlandini and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci were also involved in the affairs of San Marco. Vespucci was one of the leading Greek scholars in Italy, and one of six men whom Ficino asked to revise his translations of Plato.³⁹ Although some of Ficino's disciples became involved in Savonarola's work, Ficino himself did not comment on the friar or become involved in Florentine affairs after Charles VIII left. The philosopher had been under the patronage of the Medici since he was a child, and Girolamo's condemnations of Medici tyranny probably made Ficino extremely uncomfortable. Moreover, Ficino was not a civic humanist. Although he was a member of the Chapter of Florentine Canons, having been nominated by Lorenzo de' Medici in 1484, he rarely spoke in public. He devoted his life to the translation and annotation of ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts. Savonarola, conversely, attracted intellectuals not only because of the magnificent San Marco library, but because he was able to translate humanist goals into concrete programs of reform. Although Ficino may have been somewhat jealous of Savonarola's success, his letter to the College of Cardinals which was written after Savonarola's execution in 1498 was not that of a disillusioned disciple or sworn enemy. Rather, Ficino's assertion that Savonarola had deceived the Florentines sprang from the desire of an old man to safeguard his

position and live out the rest of his life in peace. He was in ill health, and perhaps he believed that the Pope would seek revenge on anyone who had seemingly aided Savonarola.⁴⁰

The philosophies of Ficino and Savonarola were very similar. Although Marsilio could be considered as more Platonic while Girolamo was more Aristotelian, they both attracted scholars from both disciplines, most notably Pico della Mirandola. The two men did not see the similarities in their beliefs, but their disciples did. Giovanni Nesi stated by means of a dream-like narration in Oraculum de novo saeculo that Savonarola was the fulfillment of all neo-Platonic dreams. The Florentine millennium, which Savonarola prophesied, would result in the neo-Platonists receiving the ultimate knowledge they sought.⁴¹ Indeed, Savonarola sounded very much like Ficino in his "Treatise on Moral Philosophy."

The ultimate end of man is undoubtedly beautitude, the which does not consist, as natural philosophers would have it, in the contemplation of speculative science, but in the pure vision of Deity. In this life we can have only a distant image, a faint shadow of that beautitude, in the next life alone can we enjoy its fullness and reality. And although this beautitude is not obtained by our efforts alone, yet man must strive for it by a motus ad beautitudem that will endow him with the disposition required for its reception. God alone is in Himself blessed; man has need of many efforts; motibus multis, and these consist of good works, which are also called merits, because beautitude is the prize of virtuous deeds.⁴²

Savonarola believed in the same mind-body dualism

expressed by Ficino and Pico, but he placed greater emphasis on God's role in drawing the soul toward him. The soul reaches up while the body prevents it from attaining its ultimate goal until the soul is separated from the body. Moreover, he made clear that the soul is a form of the body, thereby refuting the Averroist belief that human intellect is part of a greater intelligence. Savonarola's view of the relationship between the soul and the body was virtually identical to that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who denied the Averroist view because it rendered useless the Christian concept of reward and retribution.⁴³

For a philosopher, the epitome of all study was the comprehension of all knowledge, which could come only after death. For a devout Catholic, death brought eternal peace after an unspecified time in Purgatory to pay for sins committed in life. For Ficino, Pico, Savonarola and other Florentine intellectuals, the goals of Catholicism and philosophy were not in conflict, but the means by which one could achieve those goals were. If a philosopher could only know all truth after death, might he not be tempted to hasten his own death? Suicide, however, was anathema to all Catholics, and indeed, no Catholic philosopher, humanist or otherwise, ever openly considered suicide as a way to achieve all knowledge. A certain mysticism also pervaded Renaissance theology. A holdover from the Middle Ages and transmitted through the Renaissance by the Brethren of the

Common Life, mysticism taught that contemplation enhanced self-knowledge and the knowledge of God, through which Man could approach perfection. This method of seeking perfection included attempts to imitate Christ, and such imitation might ultimately include martyrdom.

When Savonarola returned to the pulpit in February of 1498 in defiance of the excommunication, he effectively sealed his own doom. In August of 1496 in an attempt to control Girolamo by appealing to his ambition, Alexander VI had offered him a place in the College of Cardinals. As was his practice, Savonarola informed the papal envoy, Fra Lodovico da Ferrara, that he would give his answer in his sermon the following day. From the pulpit, Savonarola, who had listened carefully and agreed to consider the offer of the previous day, thundered an impassioned refusal, "I want no hats, no mitres great or small: I only want the one which Thou gavest to Thy saints: death. A red hat, a hat of blood: this is what I want."⁴⁴ Savonarola's later actions seem to indicate that he did want to become a martyr. All of his actions from February to April of 1498 show him to be either extremely naive or determined to die for his beliefs. He was certainly not naive, and his shrewdness was evident in his habit of giving public answers to private queries, thus assuring him of the opportunity to present his version of the conversation. While he attempted on several occasions to reconcile with the Pope, he did not

fall into the trap which Alexander set for his enemies. By staying away from Rome, Savonarola forced Borgia to deal with him on his terms. Alexander would not be able to silence Savonarola quietly by simply making him disappear into the dungeons of Sant'Angelo; he would have to give Savonarola a public martyrdom and risk giving the prophet more power in death than in life.

Given the choice, humanists would choose life over death, therefore, any consideration of Savonarola as a humanist must deal with his contradictory actions from February to April, 1498. When Girolamo began his sermons on Exodus in February, 1498, he was issuing a direct challenge to the Church hierarchy. He also knew that Rome had secular as well as spiritual allies, and Florence was standing alone in its alliance with the King of France. Not only had Savonarola denounced Alexander VI from the pulpit, saying he was not the true Pope, but he had written to the crown heads of Europe asking that a Concilium be called to dispose Rodrigo Borgia on the charge of atheism.⁴⁵ Perhaps Savonarola saw himself as a lone warrior fighting the forces of Satan or perhaps his mysticism increased as he became aware that he was in a situation he could no longer control. The possibility that Girolamo was insane must also be considered. Of the three possible explanations, the last is the least probable. There is no record that Savonarola changed in his personal dealings with the brothers of San

Marco, and none of the contemporary accounts of his life, whether favorable or unfavorable, label him as insane.⁴⁶

Most likely, Savonarola knew that he was in an untenable position. The time for compromise had passed, and Girolamo and his reforms would either succeed or fail unconditionally. When Florence began to disobey the excommunication, Alexander threatened the city with a interdict. The city could save Savonarola and lose its trade or sacrifice Savonarola in the interests of economic stability. Conciliatory letters which Savonarola had sent until October of 1497 had produced no permanent change in Alexander's attitude, and Girolamo's call for the Pope's removal only increased the Pontiff's desire to be rid of Savonarola at all costs. In his sermons on Exodus, on which Machiavelli astutely comments, Savonarola made a last attempt to unite all his Florentine enemies against his Roman ones. His only chance of success was to present the Pope with a united Florence; however, the Florentines were more concerned with the economic consequences of a Papal interdict than with a symbolic show of strength. The "city of the elect" still had to deal with earthly problems. After Savonarola had been convicted, one of the members of the Signoria, Bernardo Rucellai perhaps expressed the view of many Florentines, "Let us lay the evils of the city on the friar, and rid ourselves of them all."⁴⁷

Once it became clear that he had become a liability,

rather than an asset to Florence, Savonarola chose not to abandon his principles of reform but to follow them through to their conclusion. While this single-mindedness may be regarded as suicidal, it merely shows Girolamo's strong belief in what he was trying to accomplish. When principles conflicted with survival, he chose principles.

Of all his fellow humanists, Niccolò Machiavelli expressed the most uncertainty about Savonarola. Unfortunately, Machiavelli's History of Florence does not include the Savonarolean era, so the only references to the friar are somewhat brief. Apparently, Machiavelli did not comment on Savonarola until March of 1498. In a letter to Ricciardo Becchi, Florentine ambassador to Rome, Machiavelli recounted the effect of Girolamo's sermons on Exodus. The capacity crowd in the Duomo was spellbound, he said, as Savonarola assailed Rome for thwarting his reforms. Girolamo was well-aware of his enemies, Machiavelli said, as he used his sermons to try and frighten them into leaving him alone. He also tried to unite his enemies in Florence by pitting them all against Rome. The civic humanist gave Savonarola credit for being a shrewd politician who knew when he had to switch sides to stay in power. Because of this shift in position, Machiavelli believed that Savonarola was a liar who had used prophecy to establish and maintain his hold on the Florentine people.⁴⁸

Later in his life, Machiavelli was equally uncertain

about the friar. In 1521, in a letter to Francesco Guicciardini, Niccolo was very satirical about the present state of the Church and commented on the best qualities a friar or priest should have. The people, Machiavelli said, want a priest who is "prudent, blameless and true," but they would be better served by one who is "craftier than Savonarola and more hypocritical than Frate Alberto." The more wicked a priest is, the more able he would be in teaching his followers, by example, the road to Hell. His followers, then, would be able to avoid it.⁴⁹ His attitude toward Savonarola in The Prince was equally cynical.

Savonarola could not maintain his power in Florence because he did not use force, and "unarmed prophets" cannot keep the loyalty of the faithful or convert nonbelievers.

Machiavelli's discussion of Savonarola was consistent with the attitude of his treatise on statecraft. He ridiculed the vacillations of the Florentine people who were willing to put aside allegedly deeply held religious convictions when they became burdensome.⁵⁰

In the Discourses, however, Machiavelli showed great respect for Savonarola's ability to capture the hearts of the Florentine people. "The people of Florence do not consider themselves ignorant or uncultured; nevertheless, they were persuaded by Brother Girolamo Savonarola that he spoke with God." Machiavelli did not make a judgment on the validity of Savonarola's prophecies, but he said that

"of such a man as this one must speak with respect. . . ." ⁵¹
Machiavelli probably never really believed in Savonarola's prophecies, but he seemingly had a restored faith in the Florentine people. In spite of his sarcasm, Machiavelli admired Savonarola's faith as well as his political shrewdness.

Savonarola was successful in Florence because he brought humanism to the masses. The common people comprised the bulk of the Savonarolean movement, and until they turned against him, Savonarola remained effective. The movement, however, was by no means devoid of intellectuals. Many of the Florentine intelligensia were frequent visitors to San Marco, taking advantage of the library and the opportunity to discuss theology with Girolamo. Savonarola's personality, his medievalism, mysticism, and religiosity provide, in microcosm, an example of the complexities and contradictions of Renaissance humanism. The humanists were in a very real sense medieval men and devoutly Catholic. They believed in the power of the intellect, but they also believed in signs, oracles and prophecies. Villari states that Savonarola's great originality lay in his reconciliation of faith and reason. ⁵² Actually, Girolamo was never able to reconcile the two. He believed in his visions precisely because he could not explain them rationally. Believing that the natural and the supernatural exist in two different realms does not make Savonarola a

medieval anachronism, but rather, it suggests the medievalism of the humanists. Much of humanist criticism of the Middle Ages was rhetorical, not substantial, as humanist philosophy suggests that the influence of medievalism was still very strong.

Humanism, furthermore, was not opposed to Savonarola's moralism. As previously noted, humanist schools, such as Guarino's in Ferrara, were heavily moralistic, and a major reason for humanist involvement in politics was to help improve the character of government. This moralism, which mixed with mysticism, has led historians like Burckhardt, among others, to accuse the humanists of reducing Christianity to a list of moralistic platitudes. For Savonarola, morality was an important part of a personal religion, and he expected those who said they believed to behave as they believed. Furthermore, the Church existed for the benefit of those it served, not vice-versa. No humanist could have wanted more.

NOTES

1. Gene A. Brucker, The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 14-15.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 39-46.

4. Ibid.; Niccolò Machiavelli, History of Florence and of the Affairs of Italy, with an Introduction by Felix Gilbert (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 19, 66-70.

5. Brucker, 39-46.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 50-51.

10. Ibid., 80-81.

11. Ibid., 250-51.

12. Ibid., 251-52.

13. Ibid.; Lauro Martines, Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 387-90.

14. Brucker, 271-72.

15. J.R. Hale, Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 13.

16. Ibid.

17. Mark Phillips, The Memoir of Marco Parenti: A Life in Medici Florence (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 8.

18. Guicciardini, 76.

19. Machiavelli, 90-101.

20. Ibid., 101.
21. Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 6-20. Jordan concentrates primarily on English attitudes toward darkness; however, his thesis holds true, to a lesser extent, for all Europeans. Northern Italians considered light skin a sign of beauty, and therefore, considered themselves superior to darker-skinned southern Italians. When Lorenzo de'Medici was ready to marry, his mother wrote of Clarice Orsini, the chosen bride, that she was "fair-skinned," an attribute which Lucrezia de'Medici considered very important. Hale, 52.
22. Pseudo-Burlamacchi, La Vita; quoted in Villari I, 130.
23. Heiko A. Oberman, Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 12.
24. Marsilio Ficino, "Five Questions Concerning the Mind," in Renaissance Philosophy of Man, 209.
25. Ridolfi, 127.
26. Paul O. Kristeller, "Introduction to Pico's 'On the Dignity of Man'," in Renaissance Philosophy of Man, 216.
27. Weinstein, 38-39.
28. Ibid., 128-29.
29. Ibid., 292.
30. Ibid., 32-34, 128. For a view of Savonarola's spiritual "dictatorship" of Florence, see Myron Gilmore, The World of Humanism (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 179.
31. Baron, 437; Roeder, 132-33.
32. Girolamo Savonarola, "Third Treatise on Government" in Humanism and Liberty: Writings on Freedom from Fifteenth Century Florence, ed. Renée Neu Watkins (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1978), 252-53.
33. Ibid., 253.
34. Girolamo Savonarola, "Second Treatise on Government," in Humanism and Liberty, 239.

35. Savonarola, "Third Treatise," in Humanism and Liberty, 253-54.

36. Pico, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," in Renaissance Philosophy of Man, 225.

37. Marsilio Ficino, Disputatio, p. 209; quoted in Paul Oskar Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino (Glouster, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 311.

38. Weinstein, 191; Kristeller, Marsilio Ficino, 309-11.

39. Weinstein, 193-94; Marsilio Ficino, Letters of Ficino, Vol. 2, with a Preface by Paul O. Kristeller (New York: Gingko Press, 1985), 111-12; Ficino, Letters, Vol. 3, 132.

40. Kristeller, Marsilio Ficino, 17; Weinstein, 185-91. Weinstein states that Ficino initially believed in Savonarola but became bitter over Savonarola's denunciation of the Medici. He believes that Ficino's apology to the College of Cardinals was that of a disillusioned man who believed he had been deceived.

41. Weinstein, 194-97.

42. Girolamo Savonarola, Compendium of Moral Philosophy, book 1, 25; quoted in Villari I, 101.

43. Girolamo Savonarola, The Triumph of the Cross, trans. Odell Travers Hill (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1868), bk. 1, chap. 14, 44-7; Thomas Aquinas, Saint, On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists, trans. Beatrice H. Zedler (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), 47.

44. Ridolfi, 171.

45. Ridolfi, 231-33.

46. Even Machiavelli, who wavered in his opinion of Savonarola, never expressed the view that Savonarola was insane.

47. Ridolfi, 266.

48. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Letters of Machiavelli, trans. Allan Gilbert (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 85-89.

49. Ibid., 198.

50. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, with an Introduction by Christian Gauss (New York: Mentor Books, 1952), 55.

51. Niccolò Machiavelli, The Portable Machiavelli. trans. and ed. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 210.

52. Villari I, 108.

CHAPTER 4

SAVONAROLA'S PHILOSOPHY OF FAITH IN THE TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

Savonarola's public career and the sensational nature of his prophecies have overshadowed his theological writings. Although he proposed no startling revelations, Savonarola's theology was well within the confines of Renaissance thought. He combined Thomist theology with humanist inflections, and his moralism, undoubtedly the center of his thought, united medieval mysticism with the humanist life of virtue. Like his contemporaries, Savonarola upheld the dignity of Man and believed that Man should use his intellect to perfect the world. He dealt with the mysteries of the Christian faith on both an intellectual and a spiritual level, but he did not attempt to carry reason into areas of revelation. For Savonarola and other humanists, human reason stopped at the doctrine of the Catholic Church. For example, the mystery of the Trinity was true not because it was rational, but because it was Catholic. Nothing in Savonarola's theology indicated a dissatisfaction with Catholic doctrine; Savonarola was concerned with reforming the Church, not destroying it.

The Triumph of the Cross was written in 1496 to serve two divergent purposes. In the midst of his troubles with

the Papacy, Savonarola hoped to assuage his critics by proving that he was a devout and loyal Catholic. In letters to the Pope, he referred to the impending publication of the book which he believed would prove his orthodoxy.

Savonarola's other intended audience was the intellectual community of Florence. He was quite aware that his substantial following among the common people discredited him with the elite, and he sought to prove that he was equally capable of presenting a rational argument, supported by all the appropriate sources, in defense of the faith which he espoused from the pulpit.¹

As he opened Triumph of the Cross, Savonarola presented his readers with a mystical vision which was to guide them through the rest of the work. The crucified Christ, with arms outstretched, rode in a chariot. He carried His cross in His left hand, and in His right, the books of the Old and New Testament. Above His head, three suns shined, representing the Trinity. Preceding the chariot and perhaps symbolically pulling it, marched the apostles, patriarchs, prophets and all Old Testament saints. Martyrs and "the holy doctors with their books open in their hands" surrounded the chariot.² The parade also included all believers: "Jews, Greeks, Latins, barbarians, learned and ignorant, of every age, applauding the triumph of Christ."³ Savonarola, however, did not neglect the enemies of Christ whom he equated with the enemies of the Church. Outside the

triumphal gathering were the secular rulers who sought to destroy the Church, philosophers, heretics and the wicked. Nearby, a giant bonfire was consuming the relics of false religions and heretical books.⁴

Savonarola's theology was clearly based on the Christocentricism of a thousand years of Catholic heritage. Although Christ was the center of Savonarola's universe, He was borne up by all Catholic tradition and indeed, by the Church itself. Enemies of the Catholic Church were enemies of Christ, a position which Savonarola further substantiated in citing the Petrine doctrine as his answer to all heresies.⁵ For Savonarola, there was only one Church and only one Christian faith, and a belief in one necessitated a belief in the other.

Savonarola's theology was not devoid of reason. Actually, he placed such preeminence on reason that he believed it preceded faith as "every intellect will be compelled to recognize that the Christ crucified is the true God; for if a single proof will not suffice, all the proofs united will have the power to convince every man who is not foolishly obstinate."⁶ His reasoning, however, was faulty in that he assumed that even non-believers believe in Christ.

There is scarcely any region in the world where one will not meet some monument of Christian Churches, and one will scarcely find any place in the universe where Jesus Christ is not already or has not been formerly adored; or, at least, where

they do not know that He is adored by the Christians as a true God just as even, the infidels call him "the God of the Christians".⁷

Although Savonarola placed philosophers among the enemies of Christ, he did not believe that the works of pagan philosophers were totally without merit. He credited the ancients with learning as much as they could without the revelation of Christianity, and he used the ideas that he believed valid. Relying on Plato's realism, he espoused a system of morality based on the efficacy of seeking God. Humanity "participates, to a certain degree, in the action of divine providence," and God, by virtue of the divine spark placed in Man, directed him "toward that desirable goal which has been marked out for him."⁸

For Savonarola, the contemplation of divine things was the ultimate end of Man. In an argument which could have been written by Pico, Ficino or even Aquinas, Savonarola stated that "as nature proceeds gradually from less perfect to more perfect, they [ancient philosophers] have successively advanced in the discovery of the truth."⁹ Thus, he continued, "the most excellent philosophers have established upon solid reasons that the end of human life is the contemplation of Divine things."¹⁰ This activity, which "unites God to Man" was facilitated through the growth of moral virtue. By contemplating the perfect, Man perfected himself which allowed for a greater understanding of God.

By beginning with the Platonic doctrine of

participation, Savonarola ended with a mysticism reminiscent of Thomas à Kempis. Learning which was not directed toward salvation was not true learning.

All perfection in this life is accompanied by a measure of imperfection, and all our knowledge contains an element of obscurity. A humble knowledge of oneself is a surer road to God than a deep searching of the sciences. Yet learning itself is not to be blamed, not is the simple knowledge of anything whatsoever to be despised, for true learning is good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a holy life are always to be preferred.¹¹

In Savonarola's mind, since philosophy was not bad in and of itself, it was not accidental that he used the word "philosophy" when embarking on his discussion of Christianity. True philosophy, and indeed all learning, must have a purpose. Philosophy without faith was the handmaiden of theology; philosophy with faith became theology. When Savonarola said that "no comparison can be instituted between morality and religion, or Christianity and philosophy,"¹² he meant that simple morality without a faith in Christ was useless outside the natural world, and philosophy without Christianity was an exercise in futility because the philosopher had no hope of attaining the ultimate knowledge which was his goal.

While remaining essentially Thomist, Savonarola differed with Aquinas in his approach to the contradictions of Plato and Aristotle. While Aquinas did not deliberately try to "Christianize" Aristotle, he tended to use only those portions of Aristotle which he believed were true and

consistent with Christianity. Savonarola, however, emphasized the contradictions to show the superiority of a simple Christian in matters of the faith. Aristotle and Plato were quite correct when they dealt with the visible, but they, being pagan, could have no true knowledge of the invisible. In spite of the ancients' limited knowledge, however, Savonarola saw no contradiction between the revealed truth of Christianity and the natural truth of the ancients. Christianity was not opposed to philosophy because "it gathers to itself what is good and true in all books and doctrines."¹³

Savonarola's view of ancient philosophy was contradictory, however, when compared to his belief in the rationality of Christianity. He had difficulty explaining why men like Plato and Aristotle, who were so rational otherwise, failed to arrive at a pseudo-Christian faith prior to the birth of Christ. Compounding the problem, Savonarola placed persons, including Jews and Greeks, of all ages in the triumphant parade of Christ. Savonarola was not a universalist nor did he worry excessively about the fate of pagan philosophers, as for example, Petrarch did when confronted with Cicero's fate. Although he never explained why traditional non-believers should be included in his very Catholic processional, he attempted to solve the problem of pagan philosophers by denying them free will. Although he did state that the ancients' non-belief was partially a

result of their own blindness, he made a stronger and more eloquent argument suggesting that the ancients could not have written divine truth because God had not ordained it.

Now the works of Christ and the Church are pure and Divine . . . and the pagans were profane and impious; so that it was not suitable that God should make use of them to write his words. . . . They would have filled their books with falsehood, and corrupted with impurity the source of truth.¹⁴

In spite of his denial of free will for pagan philosophers, Savonarola did assert that humans have free will. The contradiction was one found throughout Catholic writings, and although many writers tried to resolve it, no one did. If God is omnipotent and knows all things simultaneously, and if everything that happens is the will of God, then Man can do nothing contrary to that will. Hence, Man has no free will. Conversely, Man exercises free will at the moment of decision since time exists for Man, but not for God. Even in his assertions of free will, it is unclear if Savonarola believed that Man only has free will when he succumbs to the will of God or if he exercises free will in submitting to Divine Providence.

But as God conducts all beings by their proper laws, and as the interior law of Man is His [sic] free will, God conducts him only by liberty; and, if Man will not oppose his liberty to the action of God, he will most certainly arrive at the consummation of life by the most suitable means.¹⁵

Although Luther echoed a similar belief in his treatise on Christian liberty, Savonarola cannot be considered a precursor to Luther on the subject of free will. An internal

and external morality permeated all of Savonarola's theology, and such an adherence to the belief that a moral life is efficacious for a good Christian could not be upheld without a firm belief in free will.

The nature of grace and justification were equally bound up with morality, according to Savonarola. God would not deprive anyone who had truly sought knowledge of Him, and who had led a pure life. As "all men have naturally a desire for that which endures forever," Savonarola believed, "they will immortalise [sic] themselves by their race and their works."¹⁶ To the knowledgeable person, the absence of another life would cause great sorrow at death.

Let us conclude, then, that without the belief in a future life there is nothing more wretched and sad than Man. . . . Shall all other beings attain to their end, and Man, arrested by a thousand obstacles, in spite of his cares, his efforts, never arrive at it? Or, after having obtained the prize of his exertions, his time, his watching, shall he lose it without remedy? Down with a doctrine which assigns such a fate to the noblest creature of God!¹⁷

For Savonarola, the purpose of all theological speculation, and indeed, of all life was the enhancement of moral virtue. "In fact, a Christian advances in virtue in proportion as he progresses in faith, and he recoils from the way of virtue in proportion as he recoils from faith."¹⁸ No amount of study could detract from a life of virtue if the approach was correct. When Savonarola divided the duties of the friars at San Marco and limited theological

studies to those who were the most capable, he defined capability in two ways. Obviously, intellectual ability, including a knowledge of languages, was important, but equally valuable was an attitude of virtue. This attitude would then be enhanced by further study.

Savonarola believed that "if the interior worship in Christianity be true, manifestly the exterior worship which is its expression, produces or signifies the truth."¹⁹ The interior worship, or faith in Christ, was the only justification which God required for "without faith it is impossible to please God."²⁰ Because faith was required for justification, Savonarola did not believe that a mere observance of the rules propelled anyone to salvation. Christians, however, were more likely to achieve salvation because he believed the Christian faith was the only avenue to blessedness.

By the religion they profess, Christians are more in the way of arriving to that goal [salvation], whence it issues that the Christian religion is preferable to all others. If, then, Christians in such a religion be frustrated in their hopes, the blessedness itself could have no existence, but must be regarded as a fable and a falsehood.²¹

Justification, then, was granted to all true Christians, but unlike Luther, no uncertainty existed. If humans did their part, God would do His.

Just as interior faith justified exterior worship, an inner morality produced an outwardly virtuous life. Morality began, however, with the cultivation of the soul.

Reiterating Pico's view that Man can rise or fall depending on the use of his intelligence, Savonarola more closely defined the nature of the soul and its capacity for upward or downward mobility. The soul had a dual nature, being the "highest of natural forms, and the most noble of immaterial forms."²² This distinction united the soul with the body, on the one hand, and separated it from the body on the other. The dual nature not only united Man to God, but placed part of God in Man, and was "the tie which in nature binds things superior to things inferior."²³ As intelligence was comprised of reason and comprehension, Savonarola could have made no clearer statement regarding his belief in the dignity of Man. A being with an incorruptible intelligence could not be defined as inconsequential, and although Savonarola recognized that Man's quest for knowledge in this life was uncertain at best, no amount of learning could corrupt an intelligence which he had already defined as incorruptible.

Savonarola united the immortality and incorruptibility of the soul to its perfection which "consists in a certain separation from the body. The more it rises to the immaterial and incorruptible, the more it perfects itself."²⁴ Although the soul could not reach ultimate perfection until after death, Savonarola was not implying that the soul was inherently a prisoner of the body. Although "divine contemplation requires a perfect nature"

and "there are very few men who can find here that repose so necessary to attain to their end,"²⁵ Savonarola left open the possibility that the soul could reach great heights if one was not led astray by senses and imagination.

Man, from the weakness of his mind, is deceived in a thousand ways, even in the order of nature. Often it is the senses, the sources of our knowledge, which lead us into error. Often it is the imagination, which induces clouds over the intelligence, so that it appears difficult to many to believe that there are spiritual substances.²⁶

Savonarola, however, did not mean that final happiness could be achieved in this life for "the true happiness of Man cannot be on this earth."²⁷ Moreover, true happiness required a state of complete rest and as long as the desire for knowledge existed, complete rest was impossible. Although Savonarola never referred to any of Marsilio Ficino's works, Savonarola's neo-Platonism was not unlike that of the Florentine humanist. The final end of Man, according to Ficino, was "eternal life and the brightest light of knowledge, rest without change . . . and everywhere perfect joy."²⁸ Both arguments, however, stemmed from the same source: the neo-Platonism of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, the end of every intellectual being was to understand God, and "the last end of Man . . . is called happiness or beatitude."²⁹ If Ficino and Savonarola were rivals, they certainly did not disagree philosophically. Perhaps their animosity stemmed from a more mundane source: they were battling each other for control of the

intellectual community of Florence.

Savonarola believed that divine contemplation was the surest avenue to perfection, and asceticism was the purest form of divine contemplation. Calling ascetics "angels and demi-gods upon earth," he believed that those who retreated into the desert were "living proof that Jesus Christ is the veritable wisdom of the Eternal Father."³⁰ Having said that, he stated that abstinence alone did not produce a perfect life, instead "purity of soul, ardent charity, virtue in fortune, or reverse, humility in glory and opulence, and patience in misfortune and poverty."³¹

Savonarola's view of asceticism placed him in direct opposition with the later views of Luther. Monks and hermits, for Luther, were "inventions of Satan" and, therefore, "a solitary life should be avoided as much as possible."³² Men chose the monastic life, according to Luther, not out of faith and love, but because of "avarice, pride, [and] vainglory," and unfortunately, among members of members of religious orders, "there is no more arrogant class of people."³³

The theme of charity was found throughout Savonarola's writing. Although Savonarola did not believe that good works alone merited salvation, he stated that humans better themselves through charitable activities, and God would not disenfranchise nor ignore them. Believing that while good works did not make a Christian, a Christian did good works,

Savonarola attempted to avoid Luther's later qualification that a non-Christian's "good works" became evil. For Savonarola, the fact that Christianity produced goodness signified that it was true. Because "good cannot come from evil, nor falsehood from truth," the Christian faith would not have survived, nor would it be capable of greatness, if it were not true.³⁴

Savonarola's strong belief that Christianity was rational, even in its irrationality, stemmed from his rigid adherence to absolutes. Stating that a rational discussion was impossible with "those who deny principles," he confused philosophical and historical absolutes with theological ones. Starting with the historical interpretation that Christ was crucified by the Jews, he stated as absolute that "He is recognized and adored as a God by the greater portion of all nations."³⁵ Savonarola was basing his "absolute principles" on faulty knowledge, which in effect, rendered the absolutes useless. According to the knowledge and belief systems of the time, Christ was crucified by the Jews, a belief which justified a rampant anti-Semitism, and although Christ was perhaps recognized in the greater part of Savonarola's world, He was by no means revered as a God by all peoples. His insistence that the friars at San Marco learn languages to facilitate conversion indicated that he was not wholly provincial, but he mistook knowledge of Christianity for belief. Savonarola, for example, knew

of the prophecies of Mahomet, but he never would have entertained a belief in Islam. Yet, he assumed that a knowledge of Christianity by a non-Christian proved the absolute truth of Christian faith because, for him, it was absolute. Savonarola's absolutes, then, were the products of his time and his Catholicism. Moreover, his strong belief that Christianity was rational, and therefore, any thinking person who did not accept Christianity was explicitly rejecting it, further clouded his judgment and prompted an intolerance of other faiths which branded their adherents as not only infidels, but irrational beings.

Savonarola used his "absolutes" to refute Judaism and Islam. The Jewish faith was wrong because the Jews had broken their covenant with God by refusing to accept the Messiah He had sent them. Their subsequent problems resulted from God's curse for betraying the covenant, and those problems would continue until Judaism accepted the Deity of Christ.³⁶

Islam, Savonarola branded, as completely irrational. Mahomet was also ignorant, "or he would not have composed the Koran in so confused a manner that no one can restore it to order."³⁷ Islam was contrary to Christianity, Savonarola believed, because it was irrational. He then made the next logical step.

If a new religion should appear in the world better and more perfect than Christianity, whether it depended on reason alone or had issued from supernatural light, it could not be contrary to

Christianity. Then, since truth is in accord with truth, a religion coming³⁸ from God could not be opposed to Christianity.

Savonarola probably did not believe that any religion could supercede Christianity, but the humanist overtones of that statement cannot be ignored. The influence of Pico was obvious. According to Pico, if Christianity was the compilation of all that was true, then a future evolutionary step was not beyond the realm of possibility. Judaism was true until the Jews betrayed God; Islam was never true; Christianity was true because it came from God; therefore, Savonarola believed that any religion that came from God, and remained faithful to God, was true.

Throughout Triumph of the Cross, Savonarola belied his debt to Giovanni Pico. Although he never acknowledged Pico's influence, many of his arguments held out the possibility that Pico's knowledge of philosophy was incorporated in Savonarola's thought. The view that Christianity, being the ultimate truth, took to itself all previously discovered partial truths was at the center of all of Pico's thought. After the two men first met in 1482, they held numerous discussions on philosophy and its relationship to theology, and Savonarola acknowledged Pico's mastery of ancient thought. Pico, for his part, drew much of his theological inspiration from Savonarola.³⁹ The mere fact that Savonarola, whose faith in Christianity was absolute, should consider, even in passing, that a new, more

perfect religion might supercede Christianity without contradicting it, is evidence that the relationship between Pico and Savonarola was not a student-mentor relationship, but a dialogue between equals.

Savonarola's relationship with Ficino was strained because of the former's outspoken criticism of astrology. Savonarola placed astrology among superstitions, although he said that the astrologers wished to be known as philosophers. Therefore, using reason, Savonarola proposed to show that "celestial bodies have no influence upon the deeds of the intellectual or moral order."⁴⁰ According to natural order, superior things move inferior things, and intelligence had the highest nature when separated from the body. The stars, then, "cannot be the cause of intellectual and moral acts."⁴¹

Savonarola was very careful to use only recognized philosophical principles in his refutation of astrology. Although he strongly condemned the pseudo-science, he did not launch forth in a fanatical diatribe. Astrology was false because it was philosophically unsupported, not because it was anti-Christian. His placement of the chapter on astrology among other "adversaries of the Faith," however, indicated his true feelings. As with everything else, Savonarola belied a Thomist heritage. Equating truth with reason, what was rational must also be Christian; what was irrational was not.

Savonarola reserved his strongest criticism for heresy. Perhaps he was seeking to prove to the Church hierarchy that he was as intolerant of heretics as anyone, and therefore, should be considered a good Catholic. More likely, his strong stand on heresy was prompted by his unwavering belief in the truth of the Catholic Church. He refused to refute the heresies individually, saying that "they have been well refuted by the orthodox fathers,"⁴² but he dealt with the general tenet in all heresies: that there could be no more than one true Church.

Comparing the Church to secular governments and the order of nature, he said that, in all cases, the many are ruled by the one. All governments, from those of humans to those of bees, base their societies on allegiance to one. The Church, then, should have a government with one temporal head.⁴³ In defending the validity and oneness of the Catholic Church, Savonarola was applying reason to the temporal as well as the spiritual tenets of the Church. In essence, the Church became part of Savonarola's view of natural order, and opposition to the true Church, then, became more than mere heresy, it became an aberration of God's divine law.

Savonarola seemed to be contradicting his entire political philosophy regarding the regeneration of Florence, but he was basing his argument on the assumption that the single ruler was good. Although he believed monarchy was

the best form of government, the person on the throne was too prone to abuse his power. Hence, he believed in democracy, but only if the citizens of the democracy was intelligent enough to handle it. His faith in the Florentine people was so complete that he believed they alone could handle such a democracy because Florence would replace its tradition of solitary secular rulers with one spiritual ruler: God. The root of Savonarola's disagreement with the Papacy also stemmed from same logic with which he defended the Church. The single ruler was only advantageous if he was good. An evil ruler was anathema to God and society; therefore, the Pope was only the Vicar of Christ as long as and insofar as he upheld the letter and the spirit of the Catholic Church.

Savonarola's Biblicism became more apparent in his answer to heretics. Quoting Biblical passages which referred to the one Church united under one head, he closed the argument with a reassertion of the Petrine doctrine.

Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. . . . I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.⁴⁴

The heretics were also wrong because they always lost. God would always uphold his true Church.

Savonarola's explanation of the mysteries of the

Christian faith was seemingly contradictory, but he apparently did not see the paradox. Although he stated prior to his discussion of Catholic theology that "what remains now is above human reason,"⁴⁵ he remained convinced that Christianity was rational. Savonarola differentiated between those things that are rational for God and those that Man is capable of understanding. "If God could make Himself Man, He could also cause Himself to be born of a virgin" ⁴⁶ Man is rational because God is rational, and as Man is inferior to God but has the desire to seek God, then it follows that Man's rationality is but a dim vision of God's rationality. Christianity is based on God's reason, and must be accepted because it is God's, not because it is understandable.

Savonarola's approach to the Sacraments was equally Catholic. Believing that the Sacraments "draw all their virtue from the suffering of Christ,"⁴⁷ he did not believe that any sacramental act was merely symbolic. By taking the efficacy of the Sacraments out of human hands, however, he seemingly reduced the role of the priest in transforming the Eucharist. He did not, however, fall into the heresy that the Sacrament was invalid if delivered by a bad priest. The character of the priest was less important than the character of the individual receiving the Sacrament, but neither rendered the Eucharist invalid. Savonarola, however, did not believe in a "priesthood of believers" in a

Reformation sense, as he believed that priests, by virtue of their special role in the Church, should set a very high standard. Throughout his career in Florence, Savonarola reserved some of his harshest criticism for the Tiepidi, or lukewarm priests. The clergy, however, should not presume to possess more power than they had.

Savonarola devoted the third book of Triumph of the Cross to an exposition of Catholic doctrine. His statements were orthodox, and his faith in Catholicism was absolute. In upholding all seven Sacraments, the veracity of Canon law, and the Church's theological beliefs, he clearly believed that the problem was not in the Church's spiritual foundation but in its temporal manifestation.

Although Savonarola preached no innovations in Catholic doctrine, the question remains whether his theology was more medieval or humanistic. Following the example of his predecessor, Thomas Aquinas, Savonarola's thought can best be described as synthetic. He varied little from his Thomistic approach to religion, but he deliberately wrote in humanist prose.

As we address ourselves to the learned of the times, who generally disdain familiar language destitute of ornament, we shall on their account abandon for a little our usual simplicity.⁴⁸

As Savonarola was well-acquainted with scholasticism, having been trained in it at Bologna, his selection of a humanistic format rather than a scholastic one was not inconsequential. Savonarola hoped that Triumph of the Cross would be of value

to the general public as well as a scholarly audience. Like his sermons, the book was published first in Latin, then in Italian, and by making the work available in the vernacular, Savonarola exhibited a common humanistic trait. By taking scholarship out of the monastery and into the streets, he confirmed a great belief in the native intelligence of the common, yet educated person. Savonarola may have had other reasons, however, for wanting a quick Italian edition. His opposition was growing, and he may have seized the opportunity to try and strengthen his base of support. No evidence suggests, however, that the publication of Triumph of the Cross changed any minds in Florence or in Rome.

Triumph of the Cross emphasized the inherent contradiction in Savonarola's life and career. The book contained no prophecies; his sermons contained little else. Although he discussed the rationality of other mysteries of the faith, there was no chapter on the rationality of prophecy. It would not have been inappropriate for him to have included prophecies and visions under those things which Man cannot understand, but he did not. Perhaps the reason lay in his own uncertainty. Savonarola certainly believed his visions were real, but he could not say with absolute certainty that visions included nothing contrary to reason. Yet, Savonarola believed his visions must have been divinely inspired because he could not explain them.

Savonarola may have excluded a discussion of prophecy

because he wanted his prophecies to carry more weight. A common, ignorant street preacher could be easily dismissed as a fanatic or a lunatic, but Savonarola's steady, reasonable exposition made it clear that he was neither. Savonarola intended Triumph of the Cross to give credence to his prophecies without mentioning them. Nothing in Triumph of the Cross is outlandish nor deliberately provocative, and yet some historians have expressed the view that Savonarola may have been deluded.⁴⁹ It seems odd that none of that "delusion" showed up in Triumph of the Cross.

Savonarola used Triumph of the Cross to present a philosophical and theological case for a moral society. If the humanists are accused of reducing Christianity to a set of moral precepts, a view which is arguable at best, then Savonarola must be seen as sharing that failing. It was not enough that one should believe, but one must act according to that belief. Simple morality without faith will be thwarted at death; morality inspired by faith will be rewarded with the ultimate knowledge of all things.

Triumph of the Cross was an exposition of the intellectual and spiritual value of Christianity. In combining the mind of Man with his spirit, Savonarola attempted to present a blueprint for the humanistic attitude toward life and knowledge. The explanation of philosophy, presented in elegant, yet simple prose, belied Savonarola's humanistic training. His defense of the dignity and

importance of Man showed that he was affected by the changes around him, and his strong belief that Christianity must be personal as well as institutional proved that his work can be rightly placed among the humanist literature of the fifteenth century. He used classical as well as Christian analogies, and his syncretism was that of Pico, and his neo-Platonism, that of Ficino. The complete exposition of the humanist life of virtue, however, belonged to Savonarola. The prophet had become a humanist.

NOTES

1. Girolamo Savonarola, The Triumph of the Cross, trans. Odell Travers Hill (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), bk. 1, 3. All notes in this chapter will refer to Triumph of the Cross unless otherwise indicated. For this chapter only, references to Triumph of the Cross will be indicated by book, chapter and page as applicable.

2. Book 1, Chap. 2, 6.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 6-7.

5. Book 4, Chap. 6, 238-39.

6. Book 1, Chap. 2, 5.

7. Book 1, Chap. 3, 11.

8. Book 1, Chap. 12, 35.

9. Ibid., 36.

10. Ibid.

11. Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, 2nd ed. trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Dorset Press, 1986), 31.

12. Book 2, Chap. 7, 71.

13. Book 3, Chap. 13, 180-81.

14. Book 1, Chap. 4, 14-15.

15. Book 1, Chap. 12, 37.

16. Book 1, Chap. 13, 41.

17. Book 1, Chap. 13, 41-42.

18. Book 2, Chap. 7, 67.

19. Book 2, Chap. 6, 64.

20. Book 2, Chap. 7, 67.

21. Book 2, Chap. 6, 65.
22. Book 1, Chap. 14, 46.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Book 1, Chap. 13, 38.
26. Ibid., 39.
27. Ibid., 40.
28. Ficino, "Five Questions Concerning the Mind," in Renaissance Philosophy of Man, 212.
29. Thomas Aquinas, The Summa Contra Gentiles, 3.25 in Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologica, The Summa Contra Gentiles, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 432-33.
30. Book 2, Chap. 14, 117-18.
31. Book 3, Chap. 8, 158.
32. Luther's Works, ed. Helmut T. Lehman, vol. 54, Table Talk, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 268.
33. Luther's Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 25, Lectures on Romans, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), 491-92.
34. Book 2, Chap. 7, 68.
35. Book 1, Chap. 3, 10.
36. Book 4, Chap. 5, 223-36.
37. Book 4, Chap. 7, 241.
38. Book 4, Chap. 8, 252.
39. G. Pico Della Mirandola: De Hominis Dignitate, Heptaplus, De Ente Et Uno, e scritti vari a cura Eugenio Garin. Edizione Nazionale dei Classici del Pensiero Italiano (Firenze: Vellecchi Editore, 1942), 79-81.
40. Book 4, Chap. 3, 205.
41. Ibid.

42. Book 4, Chap. 6, 237.
43. Ibid., 238.
44. Ibid., 239.
45. Book 1, Chap. 14, 48.
46. Book 3, Chap 8, 157.
47. Book 1, Chap. 2, 8.
48. Book 1, 3.
49. de la Bedoyere, Roeder and Erlanger all mention this as a possibility.

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: THE LEGACY OF SAVONAROLA

When Savonarola's ashes had been thrown into the Arno, Florence and Rome believed their troubles with their "unarmed prophet" had ended. The threat of interdiction no longer cast a disturbing shadow over the merchants of Florence, and Alexander VI was now free to continue his plans to increase Papal power in Italy and Europe. Life seemed to return to normal. Savonarola's influence, however, did not end with his death. The desire for reform, while no longer overt, remained intact, and the Florentine republic which Savonarola had helped establish continued until 1512 when the Medici returned and reestablished their control of the city. Five years after Savonarola's political legacy ended in Florence, his spiritual legacy, his dream for a united, reformed Catholic Church, ended in Wittenburg. Rather than leading a reformation of Christianity, the Catholic Church found itself reacting to one, and both sides in the battle for Christian truth claimed Savonarola as a precursor. As with other Catholic reformers, however, Savonarola's goals were not Luther's, and Savonarola's failure did not lead to Luther's success.

Some historians draw a causal link between Savonarola and Luther by referring to certain similarities in their

theology.¹ They base their arguments on Savonarola's denial of the Pope; his belief in a kind of predestination and the concept of the elect; and his insistence that the Catholic Church was corrupt. The similarities between the two men, however, were more semantic than substantive. Luther did not pick up the banner Savonarola dropped, nor would Savonarola have approved of Luther's actions. In a sense, they were fighting the same war, but they were on different sides.

Martin Luther did not regard Savonarola as a precursor, although he was impressed by the latter's piety. Calling Savonarola "a godly man" who was not a heretic, Luther used him as an example of the corruption in the Papacy, which destroyed goodness to satisfy evil. Alexander VI, according to Luther, fulfilled the prophesy of the Anti-Christ in burning Savonarola.² The reference to Alexander as the Anti-Christ should not be taken to mean, however, that Savonarola and Luther had similar ideas about the papacy. They did, however, agree about Alexander VI. When Savonarola charged that Alexander was an atheist and must be deposed, he was speaking of one specific pope. Alexander, in his corruption, had separated the temporal Church from its spiritual roots. The roots, however, were not damaged. For Luther, the institution of the papacy was the problem, not any one pope. The corruption in the Church, according to Luther, was rooted in a deep misunderstanding of the word

of God; therefore, the temporal corruption was a manifestation of a spiritual corruption which rendered Catholic doctrine invalid.

Savonarola, too, was concerned with internal and external corruption, but he remained firm in the belief that the Catholic Church was the only true Church. In spite of all the abuse, the spiritual roots, stemming from Christ's charge to Peter, had not changed. For Savonarola, the corruption in the Church stemmed from the failure of Church leaders to obey the will of God. For Luther, the decay of the Roman Church was the will of God.

Savonarola did believe in predestination, but only because he believed in the omnipotence of God. God could do anything He wanted, according to Savonarola, and as time does not exist for God, He knows who will be saved or damned without affecting Man's free will at the moment of decision. Free will was perhaps the key difference between Savonarola and Luther because of its implications. Morality formed the center of Savonarola's theology, and all human actions were directed at achieving ultimate blessedness through the perfection of moral virtue. By cultivating his "divine spark," Man felt the need for God, and God would respond. According to Savonarola, if the covenant was broken, Man broke it, not God. With God's help, Man could achieve perfect rest.

Conversely, Luther's theology left Man in a permanent

state of uncertainty. Man remained a lowly worm when compared to the majesty of God, and he could do nothing to affect his own salvation. Because Man could not even ask for salvation because he did not know how, grace became a free gift from God, bestowed on the undeserving and the unsuspecting. The major difference between Luther and medieval Catholicism, according to Steven Ozment, was the status of Man after salvation. Man remained in a "viator-status," that is, united with Christ but still sinful.³ For Luther, any attempt at perfection was sheer arrogance.

Savonarola's prophecies, his sermons, and his blueprint for a new moral society in Florence, all contained the exhortation to repent. Such exhortations presumed that Man could repent. This attention to morality clearly separated Savonarola from Luther. Although both men wanted a society based on law, Savonarola believed that the good Christian was capable of reforming a non-Christian society. For Luther, the combination of the secular and the spiritual was impossible. Luther's morality centered on an attention to duty. Parents must teach their children correctly, the rich should help the poor, and the congregation should support the church. Most importantly, rules were to be followed. If the society and the church were run well, everything else would take care of itself.⁴

Certainly, Savonarola believed in the education of children. Most of the derisive comments about

Savonarola's control of Florence stemmed from his incorporation of children into his reform plans. He believed, however, that understanding the meaning of the catechism was more important than memorizing every word. Savonarola rejected religion by rote which was the invention of the scholastics. He kept the doctrine and abandoned the method. Luther kept the method and abandoned the doctrine.

By combining the Florentine dreams of greatness with his moral society, Savonarola proposed his own concept of the elect. For Savonarola, all good Catholics were the elect, and proof of their salvation lay in the goodness of their society. In this, Savonarola was perhaps closer to John Calvin than Luther, but again, differences existed between Calvin's Geneva and Savonarola's Florence. Savonarola had no intention of creating a theocracy. In 1495, he was undoubtedly the most powerful man in Florence, yet he never held public office. All those living within the city walls were eligible for public office, although newcomers were not as readily appointed as native Florentines. If Savonarola had been as ambitious or as devious as some claim, he probably could have been elected to the Signoria. After all, the Florentines were masters at controlling so-called democratic elections. Savonarola participated in politics only to achieve his reform goals and probably did not desire anything further. Savonarola's city of the elect was a community of visible saints who

lived good lives, whether in the secular or spiritual world. The Church, however, did not control the state.

At the heart of the Reformation was the attempt to return to the primitive Church. By stripping the Christian faith of all its later additions and returning to Scripture as the ultimate and only guide, Luther was disavowing every decretal and interpretation made in a thousand years. Likewise, Savonarola wished to return to the Bible as the ultimate source of knowledge, but he upheld a firm belief that the best Catholic interpretations were also the truest. His knowledge of Canon law was almost unsurpassed, and his contemporaries regarded him as an outstanding Biblical scholar. If for Luther, the Word worked, then for Savonarola, the Word worked best for those who were the best equipped to understand what was being said. Savonarola did not mean that only the educated could be saved, but an educated, moral priesthood was essential in spreading the true word of God. In this, Savonarola was perhaps more a precursor to Erasmus or Thomas More than to Luther.

Christian humanism has always been associated with Northern Europe, not Italy. In a sense, all humanists were Christian humanists, but Savonarola's devotion to Biblicism has been used to indicate his medievalism or make him a harbinger of the Reformation. If Savonarola had a legacy beyond Italy, perhaps he can best be placed among the Christian humanists. Certainly, he was not as timid as

Erasmus, but he died for the same principles, although in different circumstances, as More. Martyrdom was unusual for humanists, but not totally foreign to them. Even Valla pointed out the contradiction that men who are willing to die for their country should be no less willing to die for God.⁵

After Savonarola's death, the Church banned his works and the Dominican Order forbade any mention of his martyrdom. Although many of Savonarola's followers dispersed, many continued the veneration of their prophet in secret. Cults, whose purpose was to venerate all Christian martyrs, assumed a new identity in Florence. Even before Savonarola's death, cults were formed for the veneration of specific Florentine martyrs. Surprisingly, one of these was a cult for Lorenzo the Magnificent, and his cult would form the basis for the Savonarolean cult.⁶

Originally, Lorenzo had associated himself with existing martyr cults by celebrating his birthday on the Feast Day of St. Stephen, December 26. After 1481, a new martyr cult surfaced to continue the veneration of the Medici. When the Pazzi conspiracy claimed the life of Guiliano, Lorenzo's brother, the Medici now had its own martyr, who had died for Florence, thus insuring that the cult would continue after Lorenzo's death. Once Florence had established the precedent of venerating those "martyrs" peculiar to the city, the foundation for a Savonarolean cult

was created out of the cult of the man whose family he helped overthrow.⁷

The Savonarolean cult would survive to influence the Counter Reformation. Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, one of Florence's leading citizens and a close associate of Ficino, had become one of the leading advocates of the Medici cult, and in his will witnessed in 1499, he instructed his heirs to continue a cult commemorating the martyrdom of Savonarola. Later, he made the same charge to the consuls of the wool guild. As Vespucci had joined the Dominican Order and no longer had wealth of his own, he asked the consul to continue the commemorative feasts in return for Vespucci's donation of sixty Greek and Latin manuscripts. The consul accepted, and in spite of Church protestations to the contrary, Florence now had a Savonarolean cult.⁸

When the Catholic Church was forced to respond to the growing Reformation in central Europe, Savonarola's name once again resurfaced. Gianfrancesco Pico's biography of Savonarola was published in the 1530's, and calls came to canonize the "heretical" friar. By this time, however, the Reformation had also adopted Savonarola. Triumph of the Cross was published in a German translation, with Luther providing the introduction.⁹ Later, Savonarola was portrayed in art and sculpture, along with Jan Hus and John Wyclif, as the Catholic precursors to Luther and Calvin.

The greatest irony of Savonarola being associated with

the Reformation is that he would have considered Luther and Calvin heretics, as he considered Hus and Wyclif heretics. Even at the time of his trial and execution, Savonarola's "heresy" was a ploy to cover up the true reason for his execution. Savonarola had become a political liability for both Florence and the Pope.

Savonarola's legacy was to have his work split between the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. His moralism was taken up by the Counter Reformers, but his belief in a Church based more on Scripture than on decretals and interpretations formed a basis for Luther's thought. Although Savonarola would have been horrified at the thought that he was considered a precursor of Martin Luther, the fact that so many former Catholics followed Luther out of the Church may indicate that either they misunderstood Savonarola or that they misunderstood Luther. Given Savonarola's attention to morality, it is unlikely that Luther misunderstood him as the reformer gave no indication that he considered Savonarola a precursor. Perhaps the clearest explanation of the difference between Savonarola and Luther was summed up by Leopold von Ranke. "Luther wished chiefly a reformation of doctrine; Savonarola, a reformation of life and government."¹⁰

Savonarola suffered the same fate as all other Christian humanists. The reformation of the individual and society would occur not within the Catholic Church but by

an obscure German monk who shook Christianity to its core. With Luther, the Catholic Church was not leading the fight for a reformation of Christian Europe but reacting to one. Given the deeply personal reasons which prompted Luther to challenge Church doctrine, the Church probably could not have prevented Luther, but it might have prevented the Reformation.

Myron Gilmore believes Savonarola failed because he failed to consider philosophical changes of the fifteenth century.¹¹ Actually, Savonarola failed in spite of his adaption to the fifteenth century. Unlike other humanists, Savonarola was able to combine the goals of the educated elite, humanist and non-humanist, with the aspirations of the common man for a voice in his own destiny. His close relationship with Pico indicates that he was not adverse to the new philosophy of humanism. If Savonarola gave Pico religion, as some historians have suggested, then perhaps Pico gave Savonarola humanism.

Humanism sought to personalize religion, largely through an attention to religious education and the enhancement of moral virtue. The humanists, however, were not relativists. They did not believe that individuals could adopt their own moral codes, if those precepts were inconsistent with standard mores. Humanist morality was as absolute as their belief in God and just as pervasive. Perhaps the strongest evidence that Savonarola was a

humanist centers on the fact that his humanist contemporaries regarded him as one of them.

As Prior of San Marco, Savonarola could have purged the San Marco Library. He did not. Instead, he continued the tradition of scholarship which had begun when Cosimo de'Medici renovated the convent. When the famed Medici library was threatened in the revolution, Savonarola authorized the Convent to go into debt to buy it. The library did not contain only religious documents, but a collection of ancient manuscripts which was the envy of Europe. No evidence exists to suggest that Savonarola purged the library, and as Florence was full of faithful chroniclers, both pro- and anti-Savonarola, it is extremely unlikely that such an event would have gone unnoticed.

Savonarola's political activity was not unlike that of other civic humanists. They believed they had to abandon the contemplative life and enter public life to put their goals for a better society into action. Politics, however, could not take the place of contemplation, and Savonarola felt the same conflict as other civic humanists. When he was preaching, he preached to exhaustion and lamented that the demands on his time left him little time for writing and meditation. During his forced exile from the pulpit, however, he discovered that he drew his strength from his sermons. His return to the pulpit in February of 1498 in defiance of the excommunication was motivated as much by

his longing to preach as it was by the need to respond publically to the excommunication.

Savonarola's political philosophy was not revolutionary, but then most humanists did not contribute much to political theory. He drew much of his inspiration from the Thomist theory of government, that is, while the Church must remain separate from the state, the same principles believed by the Church must be applied to the government. Savonarola's suggestion of the Great Council which would provide greater political participation for the masses showed his allegiance to republicanism, but he was also practical. By keeping the daily running of the government in the hands of professionals, he showed that he knew the difference between democracy and anarchy.

For Savonarola, the government as well as the Church should facilitate the growth of moral virtue. In this, he echoed the desires of other humanists. By combining his goals for Florence with Florentine dreams of the millennium, he attracted civic humanists in two ways. He appealed to their humanism with a more humane, representative government, and he appealed to their pride as Florentines by prophesying future greatness for Florence.

Savonarola's humanism, however, was revealed most fully in The Triumph of the Cross. In the work, he proposed that Christianity could appeal to the intellect as well as the spirit, and he did not neglect philosophy in attempting to

prove the inherent truth of Christianity. In believing that no rational religion could be contrary to Christianity, he belied an openness not usually associated with someone considered a fanatic moralist. His moralism was based as much on the neo-Platonic idea of participation as on a Biblical mysticism. His rhetorical style and even his orthodoxy support the view that Savonarola had indeed learned a great deal from the philosophy of the fifteenth century.

Savonarola, however, was contradictory, and those contradictions cannot be ignored in any consideration of his work. Although he evidenced a great knowledge of ancient philosophy, he was extremely critical of Plato and Aristotle. Rather than relying on the standard argument that paganism could take the ancients only so far, he attempted to prove that the ancients had no free will. Trying to rely exclusively on his reason, his argument sometimes failed when he attempted to argue supernatural articles of faith based on natural reason. Much of this problem, however, was caused by his determination to prove that he was not an ignorant fanatic.

The contradictions in The Triumph of the Cross, moreover, were simply indicative of the paradoxes in Savonarola, the man. He believed in his visions precisely because he could not explain them rationally, but the absence of any discussion of prophecy in Triumph of the

Cross did not mean that he knew his prophecies were false. When he was in prison, his visions ceased, and he temporarily lost his faith. For Savonarola, the frequency of his visions took on a rationality of their own, and he came to believe that they too were rational because they came from God. When they ceased, he began to wonder if he too had been deceived. This uncertainty, together with the severity of the torture, would account for his vacillations during his trial.

The paradoxes in Girolamo Savonarola are not solved by calling him a humanist, but neither are they eliminated by making him a fanatic or an anachronism. The "Burning of the Vanities" and the "Ordeal by Fire" were not the acts of a humanist, but Triumph of the Cross was not the work of a fanatic. Even his sermons, long considered as proof of Savonarola's fanaticism, were paradoxical in themselves. Even among humanists, the scholastic format was the standard form of oration. It was also dull. Savonarola disliked scholastic sermons because he believed they did not impact the average listener. His sermons, fiery though they were, attracted large audiences. If he was overdramatic, that was not a fatal flaw. More likely, however, he wanted religion to be personal, and preaching to 15,000 people did not allow for subtle oratory.

Savonarola's humanistic training was also clear in his attention to teaching. Even as Prior of San Marco, he

continued conducting lessons for those who wanted to come. These lessons were not structured recitations, but conversational exchanges between the teacher and his students, and as evidenced by his syncretism in Triumph of the Cross, Savonarola learned as much as he taught. If his prophecies changed as the result of the influence of Florence, it is not unlikely that his philosophy changed as well.

Girolamo Savonarola was a man of his times. His paradox of his life was a microcosm of the paradox of the Renaissance. The struggle to understand both reason and revelation, the desire to reform the Church without destroying it, and the need to create a moral society even if it meant sacrificing the contemplative life so highly valued were all tenets of Italian humanism. When Savonarola died on the Piazza del Signoria, the Renaissance was not killing the Middle Ages.¹² Florence was executing a man who had become a political impediment. If his death meant anything, perhaps it meant that Florence, for all its claims of being the center of the Renaissance, preferred to keep humanism an abstract philosophy. Perhaps the Renaissance was not ready for itself.

NOTES

1. Ridolfi, 272; de la Bedoyere, 221; Roeder, 251.
2. Luther's Works, ed. Helmut T. Lehman, vol. 32, Career of the Reformer II, ed. George W. Forell (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1958), 87-88.
3. Steven E. Ozment, "Luther and Medieval Theology", in The Reformation in Medieval Perspective, ed. Steven E. Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 151.
4. Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 351-52.
5. Bainton, Early and Medieval Christianity, 239.
6. Richard C. Trexler, "Lorenzo de' Medici and Savonarola: Martyrs for Florence," Renaissance Quarterly 31(1978): 302-3.
7. Ibid., 301-2.
8. Ibid., 304-5.
9. Roeder, 251. Several of Savonarola's biographers mention Savonarola in connection with Luther. I cannot find, however, any mention in Luther's works that he actually wrote the introduction or even read Triumph of the Cross. Considering the Catholic Church's reluctance to openly adopt Savonarola's reforms, it seems likely that the Church itself believed that Savonarola influenced the Reformation.
10. Clark, 143.
11. Gilmore, 210.
12. Roeder, 295. He and I differ slightly in our interpretations of Savonarola's death. He believes that in executing Savonarola "one generation was trying another." This interpretation assumes that Savonarola was an example of the medievalism Florence hated. I believe that Savonarola was a microcosm of the same paradoxes which existed in the Renaissance, and with his trial and execution, Renaissance Florence was putting not only its medievalism but its humanism on trial.

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