

DALL'ACCADEMIA NEOPLATONICA FIORENTINA ALLA RIFORMA:
CELEBRAZIONI DEL V CENTENARIO
DELLA MORTE DI LORENZO IL MAGNIFICO
Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1996. 145 pp.

This collection of essays is the result of a conference held in the Palazzo Strozzi in October of 1992 as part of the wide series of scholarly events organized to recognize and celebrate the world of Laurentian Florence. It is a slim volume of five essays followed by a published comment by Giorgio Spini, but the subjects discussed are diverse and engaging. They include: Cesare Vasoli, "Tra neoplatonismo e riforma"; Aldo Landi, "Umanesimo e conciliarismo"; Giorgio Tourn, "Calvino e i fiorentini"; Alfred Schindler, "Huldrych Zwingli e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola"; and Emidio Campi, "'Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa': Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna e Bernardino Ochino."

Vasoli's contribution forms the introduction to the discussion. He notes — quite correctly — that there was a clear continuity between the humanistic thought of the Quattrocento and the currents of the Reformation. Earlier observers, such as Burckhardt, had been too simplistic in emphasizing the divisions caused by the Lutheran and later Swiss reformers. Erasmus may have laid the egg that Luther hatched but Erasmus himself owed a great debt to Lorenzo Valla, for example, whose *Annotationes* stimulated the 1516 *Novum Instrumentum*. The philological, editorial, and linguistic methods developed by the Italians of the fifteenth century largely made the biblical work of the Reformers possible.

Equally, it should be noted that more general Italian humanistic ideals were preconditions of reformed thought. The central role of personal, individual experience that is found in much Italian writing beginning with Petrarch and continuing through the great civic humanists of the Florentine republic, such as Salutati and Bruni, allowed

for reformed concepts of personal communion with God and dynamic new models of community to develop north of the Alps. To separate the Reformation from the Renaissance is, then, an artificial construction. Rather what should be documented are the continued links which will succeed in moving the Renaissance away from the Burckhardian projection of heroic individuals and unbridled egotists into a calmer assessment of scholars working with an ancient tradition which was then passed down to subsequent generations through the publication of their ideas and the disciplines of their schools and coteries. Neoplatonism was one of these disciplines, developed from classical texts but very much in the context of Medicean Florence.

The individual papers delivered at the Palazzo Strozzi are extremely varied. Landi's piece on the relationship between conciliarism and humanism is well argued and intriguing. Using Willibald Pirkheimer as an example, he shows how conciliarist ideas were taught and propagated at the two great universities attended by the German: Padua and Bologna. Not only the tradition of the law faculties but the very methods of textual scholarship link conciliarist ideas to later reformers who often appropriated principles on the place of the Roman pontiff and the authority of the church as the congregation of the faithful to provide an intellectual justification for many of the events of the Reformation. Conciliar principles were powerful and had a rich tradition by the later fifteenth century and these were found not only in the thought of heterodox reformers but in the Florence of the Medici, given the 1439 Council call to heal the schism with the eastern church.

Tourn's contribution to the volume is an exploratory essay on the relationship between Calvin and the Platonic Academy in Florence. He states at the beginning that there is no literature on the subject and he must first begin with a thorough study of Calvin, then review the context of Calvin's work and finally investigate Calvin's rule in Geneva as a model of republican government. There follows much on Calvin's education and methods, his reading of the ancients and his "humanism." Still, the argument is not convincing as a hypothesis because of the passages noted by Tourin in which Calvin attacks the "paganism" of humanist libertines, even though his own debt to Plato grows with each edition of the *Institutes*. What emerges, though, is a relatively deep knowledge of Plato but apparently more from stoic sources, such as Cicero and Seneca, than from the master of the Academy himself.

It is in the area of political thought that Tourin comes closer to

making a connection between the reformer of Geneva and Plato. Republican ideals are common to them both and fundamental principles such as the need for an enlightened patriciate to protect the community against mob rule and tyranny can be found. Nevertheless, at the end of the essay, any connection between Calvin and Florentine neoplatonism appears either laboured or accidental.

The debt of Huldrych Zwingli to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is, however, more clearly and effectively documented by Schindler in his assessment of Zwingli's annotations and marginalia on Pico's printed works found in his library. Here there is an obvious dialogue between the neoplatonic author of the "Oration on the dignity of man" and reformer of Basel. Schindler proves through his analysis of Zwingli's books that he believed Pico to have been an authority and one worth citing, particularly on the questions of the concept of God, the nature of man, and the degree to which non-Christians might have had access to divine truth.

Finally, there is Campi's very long but stimulating article on the inspiration drawn by Michelangelo from Bernardino Ochino in the creation of two drawings for Vittoria Colonna, the "crocifisso" and the "pietà." Through a scrupulous study of the sermons of Ochino, Campi proposes that the unusual iconography of these two drawings results from material found in sermons delivered by Ochino in Italy and published in 1541. At this time, Ochino was still within the bounds of orthodoxy but was moving quickly towards his apostasy, inspired in part by the *spirituale* ideas of Valdès and his circle, a movement which profoundly influenced Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo.

The substance of Campi's argument is that the *spirituali* and Ochino took the late medieval tradition of focussing on the human suffering of Christ on the cross as a means of achieving a deeper understanding of his sacrifice and man's redemption. This human Christ, still alive on the cross, looks up as if at that moment he was asking God, his father, why he had forsaken him. Such images are shown by Campi to have been powerfully developed in Ochino's sermons and in the poetry of the marchesa di Pescara, and in the *rime* of Michelangelo. The *spirituale* text of Benedetto of Mantua's *Beneficio di Cristo Crocifisso* reinforces these links as do references in the writings of Colonna and Michelangelo.

Of the articles in the collection, Campi's is the most convincing and well-developed: it is also by far the longest, taking about half the book.

Still, despite its length, it is unfortunate that there could not have been more discussion of the other members of the *spirituale* circle whose link with heterodox ideas would provide direct connections with the Italian reform movement and humanist values, men such as Reginald Pole, Giovanni Morone, and Pietro Carnesecchi.

Taken together the essays in the volume make a less than coherent assessment of the connections between Florentine neoplatonism and the Reformation. Rather they each make specific contributions to questions which go beyond the theme of the conference but which also illustrate very well the rich areas of research still available in making historical continuity instead of strict periodization a primary objective in intellectual history.

KENNETH BARTLETT

Victoria College, University of Toronto,
Toronto, Ontario