

## **Lecture 33- The Dignity of Man and the Glory of God: Reform in Italy**

*Throughout Christian history two forces are distinguishable in constant tension. One is an indigenizing principle, a homing instinct, which creates in diverse communities a sense that the Church belongs there, that it is 'ours.' The other is a 'pilgrim' principle that creates within the Christian community the sense that it is not fully at home in this world, so that it comes into tension with its society from its loyalty to Christ.*

*Andrew F. Walls, The Missionary Movement in Christian History, pp. 53-54*

*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.*

*Psalm 8:4-5*

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity*—Chapters 33, (pp. 346-353) & 34

### **Key Terms**

Renaissance, Savonarola

### **Objectives**

- Understand the influences that affected reform in Italy
- Identify Savonarola and his influence on the reform

### **Class Prayer**

*"Lord, we pray not for tranquility, nor that our tribulations may cease; we pray for your spirit and your love, that you grant us strength and grace to overcome adversity; through Jesus Christ. Amen."*

*Savonarola*

## **The Dignity of Man and the Glory of God: Reform in Italy**

### **I. The Renaissance/Humanism**

#### **A. Burst of intellectual activity in Italy**

1. The classics (*ad fontes*)
  - a. Languages
  - b. Textual criticism (Lorenzo Valla [1405-57])
2. Philosophy (this point is not on the CD)
  - a. Aristotle (via Spain and the Arabs)
  - b. Plato (east)
  - c. Neo-Platonism (west)
3. Rhetoric
4. History (this point is not on the CD)

#### **B. Art and architecture**

1. Pazzi Chapel (built by Brunellesco in 1430)
2. Library of San Marco
3. "The David" by Michelangelo

#### **C. "Humanism" and its relation to the Church/Scholasticism**

1. Diverse expressions
2. Petrarch (1304-74)
  - a. "It is better to will the good than to know the truth. What is required of you is to

try to put into practice what you know, instead of plunging deeper and deeper into laborious inquiries.”

- b. “This prattling of the dialecticians will never come to an end; it throws up summaries and definitions like bubbles, matter indeed for endless controversies; but for the most part they know nothing of the real truth of the things they talk about.”
- c. “I am now living in France in the Babylon of the west. The poor fishermen of Galilee have strangely forgotten their origin. I am astounded, as I recall their predecessors, to see these men loaded with gold and clad in purple, boasting of the spoils of princes and nations; to see luxurious places and heights crowned with fortifications...”

3. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72)—“A man can do all things if he will.”

4. *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

## II. Savonarola (1452-98)

A. The Dominican monk

B. The city of Florence and Lorenzo the Magnificent

• Lorenzo and Savonarola:

Lorenzo “expected to see Fra Girolamo [Savonarola] at the Palazzo Medici on the occasion of the Friar’s election to the priorate of San Marco which occurred in July, 1491. It was customary for a newly elected prior to pay his respects to the monastery’s patron and protector. Lorenzo had waited in vain. ‘See now,’ he said, ‘here is a strange man who comes into my house and will not deign even to visit me!’ The Magnificent bore the discourtesy with dignified forbearance. He went further: he humbled himself by attending a service at the convent chapel. But Savonarola took no notice of him. When the service was over Lorenzo sat down in the monastery garden. The monks informed the Prior that the Magnificent was still about. They urged him to go out and greet him.

‘Did he send for me?’ asked Savonarola.

‘No, but he is evidently waiting for you to join him in the garden.’

‘I shall not go out,’ Savonarola replied.

‘But he brought you to Florence, reverend Father, the monks insisted. ‘It’s a matter of elementary courtesy...’

‘He did not bring me to Florence,’ the Friar spoke back heatedly. ‘God brought me to this city and to God alone I owe an accounting.’

While they were talking, one of the novices ran into the Prior’s cell to tell him that there had been a hundred gold ducats deposited in the collection box that morning. Savonarola ordered the money forthwith sent to the Good Men of St. Martin for distribution amongst the poor. ‘I can neither be terrorized nor bribed by Lorenzo,’ he said.”

• One Sunday morning Savonarola consented to preach in the Palazzo Medici’s private chapel. He “waits until the regular clergy has celebrated mass. Then he ascends the pulpit. Lorenzo occupies a golden chair immediately in front...As he announces his text from the book of Judges, Fra Girolamo looks Lorenzo straight in the eyes: ‘I have a message from God unto thee...’

At once Il Magnifico’s brows contract. He looks away and stares at Gozzoli’s painting representing the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem. The faces of the Magi are those of his own Medicean ancestors.

At the outset Savonarola makes few cautionary remarks. ‘I am aware,’ he says, ‘that today I must speak with forbearance and moderation. I find myself somewhat in the position of my Lord Jesus Christ when he was guest in the home of the Pharisee.’ In other

words: this is not the occasion to touch on controversial subjects, nor to shock anyone with inconsiderate or critical remarks.

No sooner are the words out of his mouth than Savonarola throws all caution to the wind. 'Everything in a *citta* [the word means both city and state] depends on the chief magistrate,' says the Friar looking directly at Lorenzo. 'If the head of a state walks in the straight and narrow path that leadeth unto righteousness, a *citta* may become a reflection of the heavenly kingdom, of the City of God. On the other hand, if the chief of state does wrong, everything goes wrong, and great is his sin.'

'I know a city where the tyrants are incorrigible. They do not walk in the light, but in darkness. They are haughty and vain. They listen to flattery. They do not restore their ill-gotten gain to those whom they have despoiled. Arbitrarily they impose ever heavier taxes on the population...'

*A Crown of Fire*, pp. 94-95

Michelangelo: "O, that voice, that voice! It can never be forgotten!"

#### C. The preacher

1. Grace "Faith is a gift which God bestows on man through grace alone."
2. Repentance

#### D. The reformer

"Rome which should rule the world and impose silence on the evil has herself slipped into the cesspool."

"Florence, Jesus Christ who is the King of the universe stands before the door and He knocks. He wants to come in. He wills to become your king in this very hour. Will you have Him as your king?"

1. Christian constitution for Florence
2. Burning of the "vanities"

#### E. The martyr

1. Burned at the stake on May 23, 1498
2. "Today is the day when I go to meet my Saviour."  
Luther: "Whereas antichrist has damned Savonarola, God has canonized him in our hearts."

#### For Further Study

Eliot, George. *Romola*.

This novel by the famous English writer is set in Savonarolian Florence.

A quote: An old Florentine "had listened in San Lorenzo, not without a mixture of satisfaction, to the preaching of a Dominican friar, named Girolamo Savonarola, who denounced with a rare boldness the worldliness and vicious habits of the clergy, and insisted on the duty of Christian men not to live for their own ease when wrong was triumphing in high places, and not to spend their wealth in outward pomp even in the churches, when their fellow-citizens were suffering from want and sickness. The frate carried his doctrine rather too far for elderly ears; yet it was a memorable thing to see a preacher move his audience to such a pitch that the women even took off their ornaments, and delivered them up to be sold for the benefit of the needy."

Read the sermon by Savonarola, "The Ascension of Christ." Although the text leads Savonarola to discuss the ascension of Christ at the beginning, what is the sermon really about? What is his view of the gospel? How does he use the story of Balaam's ass to preach the gospel? To defend himself? What do you think your response would have been if you had heard Savonarola preach this sermon in Florence?