Continuities, then, indeed there were. But it may help us to keep them in proportion if we note, by way of conclusion, how very much they pale in comparison with the continuity manifested so dramatically in the deepening frenzy of the witchcraft craze. The witchcraft phenomenon gathered momentum throughout the fifteenth century, peaked in the sixteenth, and continued on well into the seventeenth. Such fifteenth-century popes as Eugenius IV, Nicholas V, and Innocent VIII doubtless helped fix the categorization of witchcraft as a heresy, but it was clearly a heresy persecuted with no less enthusiasm by the Protestants than by the Catholics. Even in the Age of Reforma-
tion, the ideas about it that were codified in the *Malleus maleficarum* of 1486 (the infamous inquisitor's manual that was preaced by Inno-
cent's bull against witches) seem to have succeeded in exerting a con-
tinuing, widespread baneful but serene ecumenical influence on Protestant and Catholic alike.

CHAPTER 5 · MOVEMENTS OF REFORM: STRUCTURAL, MONASTIC, MORAL, EDUCATIONAL

“A rotten pestilence spreads today throughout the whole body of the Church; the more extensive it becomes the more irreparable is it; the more deep-seated the more peril-
ous...” If these things were said by the Blessed Bernard, so much the more can they be said now, for since then the Church has gone from bad to worse.

—PIERRE D’AILLY (1350–1420)

I cry out, therefore, and publicly affirm... that of all the evils, divisions, schisms, errors, deformities and so on pertain-
ing to and following from the matters I have been touch-
ing upon, the cause and origin, and indeed the root, has been and remains today the neglect and disregard of general coun-
cils.

—JOHN OF RAGUSA (1395–1443)

“From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no health in it,” said Nicholas of Oresme in a sermon of 1363, applying the old biblical saw to the church of his own day. “Everyone knows,” added the preacher at Constance in 1417, “that the reform of the Church Militant is necessary—it is known to the clergy, it is known to the whole Christian people. The heavens, the elements, ... and, with them now, even the very stones cry out for reform.”

of great value in so far as they give us "a picture of the prevailing mood," but they cannot be relied upon to give us an accurate picture of the religious and ecclesiastical conditions of their day. The strictures they heap upon the clerical life of the era may reflect rising standards of expectation as much as declining levels of performance. The constant repetition of those strictures may also reflect the thoughtless repetition of propagandistic stereotypes as much as the stubborn persistence of the alleged abuses being condemned.

Something of this sort, indeed, is suggested by the discovery that the treatise on clerical corruption presented by Matthew Ménage in 1433 to the Council of Basel was nothing other than a plagiarized version of a similar tract written by William Lemaire 120 years earlier for the Council of Vienne. Similarly, although Pierre d'Ailly, like so many other publicists of the conciliar epoch, quoted with approval Bernard of Clairvaux's lamentations about clerical corruption, it should be remembered that the church over whose decay the saint was lamenting was that of the twelfth century. Moreover, d'Ailly's further sense that things since then had gone from bad to worse was itself something of a convention, fostered by the myth of a golden age of apostolic purity. It was subsequently to gain strength in the formulations of such humanist reformers as Giles of Viterbo (1469–1532), whose thinking reveals the influence of that "metaphysics, or metaphistory, of decline" whereby the actual conditions of contemporary religious life were comprehended in terms of "the principle that all reality becomes increasingly weaker and more corrupt the further it departs from its source." 2

The marked tendency among the reformers and publicists of the day to represent the religious and ecclesiastical life of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a pitiable story of progressive decline and to universalize its defects accordingly, with scant regard for the particulars of time and place, should be avoided by the historian. The

3. Delamuelle et al., 1:320 and n. 3.
available evidence, with all its intimations of confusion and decay, suggests instead the outlines of a picture at once more uneven and more nuanced, and understandably, not fully accessible to those living at the time.

Thus, studies of areas as widely separated as Germany and the diocese of Narbonne convey for the fifteenth century a sense not of further decline but of heightened fervor among the people and a deepening intensity of religious commitment. Similarly, the standard of education among the clergy appears to have been rising—though not as rapidly as it was among the inhabitants of the larger towns.5 Even among the monastic and religious orders, perhaps the single segment of church life in which symptoms of decay are most persistently manifest, the more startling cases of decadence and disarray are not to be taken as necessarily representative of the whole. Province differed from province, of course, but one is tempted to conclude that the life of the average monk or friar in the fifteenth century, like that of the Cambridge don in the twentieth, conduced no more to a career of spectacular vice than it did to a life of heroic virtue. Waning convictions, spiritual sluggishness, an unsteady sense of purpose—these, rather than any far-reaching corruption, appear to have been the most widespread defects. Knowles has affirmed that the English monasteries, certainly, “were not notably less observant or more decadent in the fifteenth century than before, but the age was undoubtedly marked by a lack of distinction and by the lack of an absolute standard of excellence.” 6

Some of the more obvious instances of disarray, rather than being generalized, should be correlated with conditions and events specific

5. Moeller, Spätmittelalter, p. 43. Bintz, pp. 538–50, warns of the danger of overstressing the reports of clerical ignorance so frequently found in diocesan visitation records. After thirty years of service in rural isolation, the priest who at ordination had met the requisite standards could well have become one of those denounced in the records. After all, he asks (p. 536): “Que reste-t-il, aux historiens non statisticiens, des connaissances mathématiques exigées d’us au baccalauréat?” Cf. Duggan, p. 55. 6. Knowles, Religious Orders, 2: 164. Hunt comes to analogous conclusions concerning the condition of the parochial clergy in England on the eve of the Reformation; English Parish Clergy, especially pp. 887–90.

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to particular places and times—for example, with the ravages caused by war and foreign occupation in north-central France during the early decades of the fifteenth century, with the more widespread havoc wrought by the Black Death in the middle years of the fourteenth century, with the dislocation and administrative confusion engendered by the schism in the latter years of the same century. This last, indeed, as we have already seen, had a very deleterious effect—throwing into turmoil those dioceses that lay athwart the unstable frontier between the two obediences; shattering the unity of the great international religious orders; emboldening individual religious to pursue, especially at the hard-pressed Roman curia, petitions for privileges that could not but promote the loosening of monastic discipline; and, as it progressed and financial pressures mounted, encouraging that curia to issue such privileges with increasing disregard for their consequences. Thus, lumping together the two privileges “that cut at the roots of the religious life—appointment as papal chaplain and permission to hold a benefice,” only 3 such were granted to English religious during the pontificate of Gregory IX (1371–78). That number rose to 17, however, during the eleven years of Urban VI’s reign (1378–89), and under Boniface IX (1389–1404) the privileges totaled more than 260 in a period of fifteen years. 7

7. These figures are those calculated by Knowles, Religious Orders, 2: 170–71. He notes that with the ending of the schism, at least so far as England was concerned, the practice more or less came to an end. In the fourteen years of his pontificate Martin V (1417–31) issued only two such privileges.
permit ‘sharp financial practices’ with Boniface IX’s systematic resort to what amounted to open simony.8

Dietrich finally turned his back in disgust on the whole administrative machinery he had helped to service, threw in his lot with the conciliarists, and became a vehement propagandist for a program of reform in head and members designed to negate much of the juridicational centralization of the century and a half preceding and drastically to curtail the debilitating curial involvement in the traffic in benefices. ‘The conversion of such an experienced administrator,’ as E. F. Jacob has said, is indeed ‘too striking an event to be passed over.’9 Even more striking, however, is Dietrich’s inability, experienced though undoubtedly he was, to see beyond the abuses promoted by the papal traffic in benefices to the more fundamental evils attending the very existence of the benefices, with its corrupting confusion of the notions of office and property. Its time-hallowed quality, the centrality of its position among the ecclesiastical institutions of the Latin church, the importance of the role it had come to play in the economy of higher education, the indispensable nature of the contribution it had come to make to the financing of royal and princely as well as papal government—all of these factors blinded reformers to the fact that the institution itself lay at the heart of so many of the corruptions they deplored. They focused their complaints instead upon the abuses and inequities apparent in the prevailing modes of preferment, their attention diverted in fact, from what in retrospect appears to have been the obviously questionable nature of the benefice system itself to what they took to be the culpable and remediable defects in its current operation.10

8. See the fine essay “Dietrich of Niem” in Jacob, Essays, pp. 24–43, especially 35–36. Cf. Dietrich, De scholastica, chap. 8, 9, 10, 11; in Niem, pp. 82–87. Note the telling comment (chap. 9, p. 84): “Haec eo tempore omni timore Dei et venatione hominum post posita in tant frequentis erat usa, quod Curales pro majori parte affirmabant talia licite fieri, cum Papa in talibus, ut dicentur, pecare non posset.”


10. Though Nicholas of Clémanges (d. 1317) came closer than most; see his Tractatus de vita et operis ecclesii, chap. 2, ed. Cavielle, p. 135, where he says: “Nuda praemia hodierna die, in assumenda pastoralibus sacris in curaque animarum savelanda, de servicio divino, de subordinarum salute aut edificatione mentis est; de proventuum obturata tantum modo et quantitate quaerunt.”

Given the Avignonese policies of fiscal and jurisdictional centralization, the attention of reformers was focused remorselessly upon the center, upon the administrative mechanisms of the papal curia. And with the onset of the schism and the deepening economic malaise of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the reformers pressed with tiresome and increasing insistence. Agrarian depression, social unrest, successive debasements of coinage, monetary crises—these things had led by then to a marked decline in the revenues from the landed possessions of ecclesiastics as well as noblemen and to a “dis-equilibrium,” perhaps even a “crisis,” in the whole benefice system.11 Benefices had now frequently to be combined in order to produce an income capable of supporting an incumbent, pluralism mounted accordingly, and the weight even of such ancient papal imposts as the annates levied on benefices reserved to the apostolic provision became well-nigh insupportable.

Under such circumstances, a failure to perceive the underlying economic forces at work in no way, of course, dispensed one from experiencing their deleterious effects. The overwhelming tendency was to blame the whole sorry mess on the papacy, to hold the fiscal excesses and voracious needs of the curia “responsible for the economic crisis itself,” and even, in the most shortsighted way, to identify reform of the church with reform of the operation of the benefice system.12 Thus in a very real sense the institution of the benefice was the obstacle on which late-medieval attempts at churchwide reform “in head and members” came to grief.

Reform in Head and Members

The call for reform in head as well as members had emanated from the provincial churches and had been bruited already in 1245 and 1274 at the first and second councils of Lyons. But only in the opening

11. Some areas were very badly hit. Thus by 1419 the revenues of the monastery of Saint-Sernin at Toulouse had fallen from 16,000 to 1,000 francs; see Ourliac in Delaruelle et al., 1:318.

12. Thus Ourliac in Delaruelle et al., 1:306. The whole chapter (pp. 295–313) devoted to “La question benéficiaire” is worthy of attention.
years of the fourteenth century did it begin for the first time to achieve so widespread a credibility and to assume so hostile a tone as to cast into question the whole position of jurisdictional supremacy that the papacy had come to occupy in the universal church. To that position the papacy had attained by virtue of the effective leadership given by popes of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries to both the reforming and crusading movements. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, that type of leadership it had long since ceased to be able to give. The clamor of criticism that William of Ausonia, bishop of Angers, and William Durand, bishop of Mende, raised at the Council of Vienne constituted something more than a straw in the wind.

When the Franciscan Gilbert of Tournai had written his reform tract for the Second Council of Lyons, he had shown considerable circumspection in addressing himself to the role of the papacy. "The supreme pontiff, the successor of Peter, the anointed of the Lord," he contended himself with saying, "we leave to the Supreme Judge. . . . He himself has his own Book of Deuteronomy in the De consideratione which the Blessed Bernard wrote." Less than forty years later, however, when William Durand came to draw up his De modo concilii generalis celebrandi for the Council of Vienne, no similar restraint was evident. Concerned to vindicate the rights of the provincial churches against curial encroachment—and especially against the burgeoning system of papal provisions—William was at pains in acknowledging the divine foundation of papal authority to affirm the similarly divine foundation of the church's whole episcopal organization. If it was the responsibility of the Roman church, as "head and mother of all the churches," to give a lead in reform that the others would follow, it was also its duty to respect the rights of local churches, and to restrain within the narrowest of bounds those damaging privileges and exemptions from the jurisdiction of the ordinary that were undermining the authority of the bishops within their dioceses.

In so arguing, William clearly felt himself simply to be demanding of the pope that he, too, should observe the church's ancient law. He may well have felt, though mistakenly, that he was doing no more than that when he went on to assert that, since "what touches all by all should be approved," a general council should be assembled "whenever a new law was to be established or anything was to be ordained concerning matters that affect the common state of the church (communem statum ecclesiae)." But even he must have been aware that he was introducing something of a novelty when he went on to urge that general councils should be assembled regularly at ten-year intervals.

It is important to be clear as to what precisely was involved here. Only a few years earlier John of Paris—drawing together ideas that had long since become commonplace in the canonistic literature—had argued that a general council, by virtue of the fact that it represented the universal church, could depose an incorrigible pope guilty of abusing his authority. In other words, he had come up with an early and succinct formulation of what we have called the strict conciliar theory. Of this, however, we hear nothing in William Durand's tract—no more, indeed, than we hear anything about reform in John of Paris's Tractatus de potestate regis et papalis. If it were not anachronistic to do so, we might think of William's position as looking forward only to the Constance decree Frenses, whereas John's position looked forward to the more radical Hus sancta synodus. Anachronistic, however, it would be—and in a highly misleading fashion, for in the minds of those who at Constance engineered their passage, Hus sancta and Frenses were clearly related. Nevertheless, we ourselves would be ill-advised to take for granted the association of the demand for reform in head and members with the call to establish the general council as a regularly functioning constitutional mechanism within the structure of church government. Still less should we take for granted the further combination of those two notions with the claims advanced on behalf of the council's authority by those who subscribed to the strict concil-

13. Gilbertus Tomacensis, Collecta de suandis ecclesiis, 52, 36. Cf. Jedin, 1:7 (where, as elsewhere in the English edition, the translator has rendered Jedin's paraphrase of the text as if it were intended to be a quotation).
15. Ibid., Secunda pars., rub. XLI, fol. 165v.
iar theory. For the reforming agitation at Vienne came to nothing. The half-century and more that followed witnessed the energetic consolidation and extension of the pope's fiscal prerogatives and jurisdictional powers. It was only with the onset of the Great Schism in 1378 that an effective cry was raised once more for the assembly of a general council, and with it for a renewed attempt on the problem of churchwide reform. Moreover, only the stubborn persistence of the schism persuaded many among the tentative supporters of the via concilii to be truly committed advocates of the strict conciliar theory. As Jedin has said, "It required the pitiful situation created by the Schism to bring about the alliance of conciliar theory with the demand for reform which determined the fate of both at the close of the Middle Ages." 16

At the start of the schism the overriding concern was to agree upon the precise forum capable of adjudicating the disputed papal election. According to one school of opinion, which came to be represented most powerfully by the cardinals of Clement VII, the college of cardinals, as successor to the original apostolic "college," was the competent judge. To many others, however, including St. Vincent Ferrer, the three Italian cardinals who had remained with Urban VI when the others defected, and also (or so it has been alleged) Pedro de Luna, the future Benedict XIII, the general council was the proper court of judgment.

Endorsement of the latter position, however, did not necessarily mean commitment to any full-fledged version of the strict conciliar theory or to the "alliance" Jedin had in mind. Thus Pierre d'Ailly's cautious advocacy of the via concilii in his Epistola diaboli Leviathan (1381) is simply that; and although Conrad of Gelnhausen, in his desire to vindicate the right of a general council to pass judgment on the disputed election, firmly invokes the central conciliarist principle of the supremacy of council to pope, he is not concerned in the Epistola concordiae (1380) with the problem of reform. That concern, however, is central to the Epistola concilii pacti (1383) of his fellow countryman

This complex combination of ideas was likely to retain its stability only to the degree it could give reasonable promise of opening the way out of the cul-de-sac into which the church of the early fifteenth century, divided and unreformed, had stumbled. That promise, certainly, must have seemed well on the way to fulfillment in April 1418, when the Council of Constance drew to a close. Without the widespread currency to which conciliarist ideas had attained, it would be hard to imagine the council's willingness in 1415 to pass the controversial decree Haeræ sanctæ, which cleared the way for the judgment and deposition of the rival claimants and the subsequent election of Martin V as an undoubtedly legitimate pope. Without the currency of these ideas, too, it would be hard to imagine the council's similar willingness in 1417 to endorse the decree Freguæ, which, by legislating the assembly of future councils at stated and regular intervals, appeared to guarantee both the shift in the balance of the church's constitution for which the conciliarists argued and the completion of the program of reform in head and members upon which Constance itself had already made a start.

The careers of Pavia-Siena and Basel, the two subsequent councils that were assembled in accordance with the provisions of Freguæ after intervals of five and seven years respectively, were to prove such hopes illusory. In retrospect, indeed, the forces that clashed then can be seen to have been active already at Constance, at least from mid-1417 onward, when the council fathers, having finally disposed of the rival papal claimants, began to wrangle over their own future priorities. From one point of view, the first priority had to be the energetic prosecution of the matter of reform, with which two successive reform commissions at the council had busied themselves since 1415, and the enactment, before the election of a new pope, of legislation designed to eliminate abuses at the curia and to limit the pope's exercise of fiscal and jurisdictional powers—especially in the area of reservations and provisions. On this last point, however, the zeal of many of the reformers was undercut somewhat by the fact that they were university men whose very careers had depended on the system of papal provisions. Their ranks, moreover, were split by the very organization of the council and its practice of voting by "nations," which also exposed them to national pressures in a highly concentrated form. Of the temporal rulers, finally, only the emperor Sigismund, who had to cope with the Hussite problem, really appears to have felt that he had a practical stake in reform.

Ranged on the other side, then, were the rulers of France and eventually of England, who had succeeded in coming to more or less favorable terms with the papal system of taxation and prebendary and who, though they might want later to tilt the system still further in their own favor, clearly felt that they had nothing to gain and much to lose by destroying it. Hence their decision to support those at the council whose first priority it was to proceed to the election of a new pope. The outcome was an English-sponsored compromise whereby in October 1417, before the papal election, the council promulgated the five reform decrees to which the conciliar "nations" had already given their approval. Of those decrees, Freguæ was clearly the most important; the others enacted certain provisions for the avoidance of future schisms, required in the future a profession of faith from every newly elected pope, forbade "except for great and reasonable cause" the translation from church to church of higher prelates, and decreed the abolition of "spoils" and procurations. In accordance with the terms of the compromise, it was also decreed that the pope who was to be elected "must reform the church in [its] head and the Roman curia" before the Council of Constance was dissolved, calling for action on a list of eighteen items ranging from the composition of the sacred college, via annates, reservations, and collations, to simony, dispensations, and indulgences.

This represented a promising, if modest, start on the work of reform, but the subsequent negotiations between the newly elected Martin V, the council's third reform commission, and the several conciliar nations (whose concerns differed widely) produced general

18. See Orléas in Delauque et al., 1:310 and n. 1; 249, n. 13.
19. For these decrees, see Alberigo, pp. 444–20. For further reform decrees passed subsequently at Constance, see pp. 423–26.
agreement only on a few further nor very sweeping decrees concerning exemptions, dispensations, simony, and the like. The council also produced the concordats that Martin had negotiated separately with the five individual nations, but those concordats, as we have seen, amounted fundamentally to a division of ecclesiastical spoils between pope and nation. The completion of the work of reform was to await, therefore, the assembly of the next council, which, before dissolving Constance, the pope had decreed to meet in five years’ time at Pavia, in accordance with the provisions of Fregenum.

But even had the newly elected pope been a convinced reformer, the enormous difficulties confronting him and the political and fiscal fragility of his position militated against reform. Because of the depredations of the condottiere Braccio da Montone, Martin was unable to enter Rome until 1424. A year earlier, when the five-year limit had run out on all the concordats except the one with the English, such was his indigence that he went back to the earlier arrangements governing provisions and reservations in so far as the nations involved were compliant and the reform decrees of Constance permitted. Although he struggled hard to reestablish order in the operations of the curia, sponsoring administrative reforms to that end, he clearly hoped to restore the papacy to the position it had occupied before the disastrous years of schism, and he did not sympathize with conciliar reform or the conciliarist sentiments that tended to go with it. The pressure of public opinion within the church obliged him to assemble the Council of Pavia in 1423 and, after the lapse of the stipulated seven years, to summon the next council to meet at Basel. But he never went to Pavia, transferred the council to Siena, and then, frightened perhaps by the radical nature of the reforms proposed in the Acta samenta of the French nation (which wildly underestimated the financial needs of pope and curia) or by the threat of collusion between the conciliarist faction and his enemy, the king of Aragon, hastily dissolved the council before it had passed any significant legislation at all.

20. See Brandmüller, 1:130–52.

When the Council of Basel got under way, then, in July 1431, it was burdened by an enormous freight of reforming expectations—all the heavier because the expiration of Martin V’s concordats had made the question of annates and the papal powers of collation and reservation a matter of renewed debate among reformers and governmental officials alike. All the heavier, too, because demands for reform were included in the electoral capitulation that the cardinals drew up after the death of Martin V in February of that same year and imposed upon his successor. It was also burdened by having as a successor Eugenius IV, who shared all of Martin V’s hostility to conciliar reform but none of the judgment and ability that had enabled Martin to cope with it. Thus his ill-judged, hasty, and abortive attempt to dissolve the council in December 1431 before it had accomplished anything in the way of reform alienated the majority of the council fathers altogether. It set in train the convoluted and sorry sequence of events that led to the pope’s convocation of the rival council of Ferrara-Florence, the renewal of schism, and the creation thereby of a state of affairs that was to render impossible the achievement at the council of truly significant and permanent churchwide reform.

In its early phases the council did succeed, however, in decreeing some very sweeping measures—including the abolition of annates, the prohibition of reservations of bishoprics, and the endorsement of Hunc sancta, Fregenum, and the “constitutionalist” vision that those decrees embodied. In modified form, some of these reforms were put into force, spasmodically at least, in France and Germany in accordance with the terms of the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) and the Acceptatio of Mainz (1439). The credibility of the council itself, however, was progressively eroded—by its own internal disagreements, by its arbitration to itself of judicial and administrative functions that properly belonged to the Roman curia, by its eager immersion, therefore, in the traffic in benefices, by its one-sided interpretation of reform in head and members to mean reform in head alone, by its according willingness to deprive the papacy of such traditional sources of revenue as annates without approving any subsidies to replace them, by the increasingly radical nature of its policies in
general, and by its growing dependence on the princes in those policies. In 1449 the Carthusian Jacob of Juterbog, a one-time partisan of the council, could conclude from the fate of the reform councils that "the doctrine of the Pope's supremacy is only a shield behind which the Italians and their party shelter from reform." But as early as 1438 Cardinal Cesarini himself, who as papal legate had lent strong support to the council's reforming efforts, had abandoned it and gone over to Eugenius IV. In doing so, moreover, he had indicated his own sad conclusion that "the multitude" had prevailed at Basel, opening the way for scandal, schism, and the triumph of the princes, who "will control the pope via the council and subordinate him to their wills." 22

This is precisely the judgment, of course, that is rendered in his Summa de ecclesia by the theologian John of Turrecremata, who had also participated in the council. But he had done so as a staunch supporter of Eugenius IV and there is no mention of reform in his work. 23 It is undoubtedly a much more telling sign of the council's ultimate bankruptcy that convinced conciliarists and advocates of reform such as Cesarini and Nicholas of Cusa (not to mention the future Pius II) abandoned it and rallied to Rome. Under the guidance first of Eugenius IV and then of his successor, Nicholas V (1447–55), the papacy was now able to evade the threat of constitutional change posed by conciliarism, to reassert its own authority, and to ignore or blunt the edges of the Basel reforms—though only at the cost of admittedly damaging concessions to the temporal rulers of Europe and the papacy's own transformation into an Italian principality.

Under the stress of this momentous but ultimately disappointing series of conciliar events running from Pisa and Constance to Siena and Basel, the intricately interwoven complex of ideas that, as we have seen, made up the fabric of conciliar thought began now to unravel. Understandably, the first thread to detach itself from that fabric was also the most marginal—the "oligarchic" strand that had ascribed to the cardinals an enhanced constitutional role in the structure of church government. If Pierre d'Ailly's views on the subject were indeed handed on to future generations, it was to generations of curialists, not conciliarists, and they were handed on not by such later conciliar thinkers as Jacques Almain and John Major, who drew so much else from his writings, but by such papalists and curialists as Domenico de' Domenichi and John of Turrecremata himself. 24 The old curialist oligarchic tradition, therefore, found its home in the late fifteenth century where it had found it before—not among the advocates of the strict conciliar theory but in the Roman curia itself, where the cardinals were engaged in a prolonged and bitter struggle to prevent papal encroachment on their traditional rights and privileges. In this struggle their efforts met with little success. The repeated electoral capitulations, with their private demands but ritual public endorsement of the need for reform and the conviction of a council, were, as Jedin has said, "rearguard actions, not offensive strokes." 25 Nevertheless, those capitulations helped keep alive into the sixteenth century the belief that churchwide reform would come only through a council.

The next strand to detach itself was the strict conciliar theory, with its insistence on the superiority of council to pope and its endorsement, in effect, of radical constitutional change in the structure of ecclesiastical government. The disillusionment of many a would-be reformer with the policies of Basel did not necessarily mean a total distancing from the conciliar theory itself. Nevertheless, though there were exceptions even in the early sixteenth century, such as the Bolognese jurist Giovanni Gozzadini, as the years wore on and as the appeal to the general council became a merely tactical device in the armory of secular diplomatic weaponry, those who subscribed to the belief that the necessary reform in head and members could be

22. See Ourlac in Delamelle et al., 1: 273.
23. Turrecremata, III, chap. 14, fol. 289r.
24. Turrecremata never mentions d'Ailly's name, but he reproduces without acknowledgment much of his argument on the topic; see Oakley, "Almain and Major," pp. 687–88.
achieved only by recourse to a general council increasingly recoiled from advocacy of the strict conciliar theory. At the same time, the advocates of that theory were not necessarily themselves very interested any longer in reform. When a dissident council finally did assemble at Pisa in 1510, reform is hardly mentioned at all in the tracts of its most prominent apologists. And although in its formal pronouncements the council itself strove to give a different impression, contemporaries did not doubt that it owed its convocation to political considerations, that it existed simply to bring pressure to bear on Julius II and to serve the diplomatic interests of the French king.

What survived of the broader complex of conciliar ideas in the century dividing Basel from Trent was the bruised sense that, while the stipulations of Frequens to the effect that councils should now be assembling every ten years were obviously unrealistic, the bland willingness of the Renaissance popes simply to ignore its provisions was no less clearly dangerous and unhealthy. Not, it should be noted, for constitutional reasons, but rather because there survived also the stubborn and fundamental commitment to the notion that the longed-for reform in head and members could be achieved only through the instrumentality of a legitimately assembled general council—though one, this time, in which pope and other participants would work together in harmony to promote that end. That commitment was fortified during the years after Pius III's death by the failure of the pope to give any leadership to the work of reform; its strength was made evident after March 1512 by the enthusiasm with which reformers of the caliber of Giles of Viterbo and Giustiniani and Quirini, men who had shunned the unabashedly conciliarist assembly at Pisa, responded to Julius II's convocation of the Fifth Lateran Council. Not even the abysmal failure of that council to impose effective and thoroughgoing measures of reform succeeded in dimming the fervor of that commitment. Had it done so, indeed, it would be hard to imagine the Council of Trent assembling in 1545.

In order for that council to assemble, of course, innumerable obstacles had to be surmounted, not least of which were the sour memories of Basel and the fears of successive popes that a new council would open the way for the recrudescence of the claim that council was superior to pope, and with it their own humiliation at the hands of temporal rulers capable of manipulating that claim. The threat posed by the dissident Council of Pisa had made it unpleasantly clear that such fears were not illusory. Only the overriding need to meet that threat had steered Julius II, in convoking the Fifth Lateran Council, to put them aside. During the course of the latter assembly, moreover, Leo X had expressed his worry that it might try to reduce his own power and that of his successors to a "merely spiritual" one.24 And without the persistence of similar worries in the minds of his successors it would be hard to explain their fateful delay, after the outbreak of the Protestant revolt, in assembling the general council for which even the most papalist of reformers repeatedly called.

The Observantine Movement

In the absence of a full-scale reformation of the universal church, men had long since begun to turn their attention to the possibilities of reforming particular segments of it. Already at the time of the Council of Pavia-Siena, the Franciscan St. Bernardino of Siena, in a Lenten sermon at Florence, had urged the advisability of concentrating attention on partial reform. During the Council of Basel, the Dominican Johann Nieder had done likewise, confessing that he himself had lost hope in "the general reform of the Church either at present or in the near future," but adding: "On the other hand a partial reform is possible in many countries and localities. We see it gaining ground day by day in monasteries and convents, though God knows amid what difficulties."27

That these particular men should see possibilities for partial reform is wholly appropriate, for neither of them would have been what they were without the progress that reform of that type was making within

26. He apparently told Bernabo and Quirini in 1514 of his fear that "si riducesse l'autorità nostra e di nostri successori ad autorità solo spirituale," cited in Jedin, History, 1:155, n. 3.
some segments of their own orders. During their lifetimes the relaxation and decline into which the monastic houses and religious orders had fallen must have been clearly evident. Certainly, it is evident in retrospect to us—in the overall drop in the number of Benedictine houses, in the declining numbers of monks belonging to some of the greatest houses (from 120 to 60 at Cluny itself during the first quarter of the fifteenth century), \(^{28}\) in the fall-off in vocations that led the Dominicans to open their ranks to “oblates,” sometimes no more than children.

Distressing symptoms of this sort should not be taken to indicate, however, that the monastic urge itself was dying. Despite the division into two obediences occasioned by the schism, and despite subsequent persecution at the hands of Turk and Hussite alike, it was during this period that the Carthusians, the most rigorous of all the orders, underwent their greatest expansion. New houses were added at points as far distant from one another as Danzig and Coventry, Pavia and Amsterdam, so that on the eve of the Reformation the order possessed about two hundred houses spread across seventeen provinces, of which the English province was perhaps the most vital. No other order could match that degree of vitality—certainly not the Cistercians, among whom the symptoms of relaxation and decay were widespread. And yet, in contrast with their Benedictine brothers, the Cistercians added a score and more of new houses during the fifteenth century, and the Belgian province, in particular, contrived somehow to flourish right through the late Middle Ages.

The continuing vitality of the monastic urge is more characteristically evident, however, in two other developments of the era: the foundation of new monastic or quasi-monastic groupings and the appearance within the older orders of the “observantine” type of monastic spirit.

No new great religious order was established during this period. New groupings were nearly all regional in scope, and indeed—with the exception of the Birgittines in Scandinavia (1578 onward), the

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Hieronymites in Spain (from roughly the same era), and the Minims in southern Europe (1454 onward)—they all had their beginnings at least as lay confraternities seeking to carve out some sort of middle ground between the forms of life endorsed by the traditional monastic and mendicant orders and the less formal modes of communal life pursued by the old Beghard and Beguine communities. Of these groupings the most famous and influential were, of course, the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, who had their origins in the late fourteenth century and whom we have discussed earlier.

Other such groupings that had already appeared included the Alexians in Flanders and the Rhineland during the aftermath of the Black Death and in southern Europe the Jesuataes (1360 onward). Like the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, these groups tended to link the striving for personal sanctification with an apostolate of good works toward their fellow Christians. Like them, too, they may often have served as way stations or testing grounds for those en route to the cloister. Unlike the brothers, however, all the others were transformed into full-fledged religious orders, most of them adopting some variant of the Augustinian rule. This was not the case with the latecomer on the scene, the Oratory of the Divine Love, which made its appearance only around 1500. Although the Oratory helped spawn a religious order, that of the Theatines (1524), and with it contributed much to the rise of the Catholic reformation of the sixteenth century, it remained, nonetheless, a lay confraternity, and its roots must be sought in the spirit that had already led to the establishment in many Italian cities of confraternities of laitymen devoted to charitable works.

The monastic spirit being sufficiently alive during this period to sponsor such authentic new departures, it would have been odd if it had not manifested itself also in the stirrings of a concern for renewal. This sense can be observed in the older established orders, especially in the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and even among the Benedictines themselves. The successes achieved, often in the teeth of bitter opposition from the less zealous majority, though real, are no more to be exaggerated than to be ignored. Improvement was piecemeal; the point of departure, in almost every case, was the at-
tempt to identify the ideal of perfection peculiar to the order concerned; the further line of march was the attempt in the particular houses to realize that ideal by the often painful return to the precise and unqualified observance of the rule in all its original rigor. Hence the characteristic preoccupation, among monks and friars alike, with eliminating the intrusions made by private possessions on the commitment to personal poverty; hence, too, the concern to restore a truly common life and, among the monks, to reestablish the strict monastic enclosure.

Thus, among the Dominicans, the years of schism saw St. Vincent Ferrer (1350—1419) recalling his religious brethren in the Avignonese obedience to the ideals of the order as it had been realized in its earliest days. In the Roman obedience, the disciples of St. Catherine of Siena, many of whom were Dominicans, did likewise. Of those disciples, the most prominent was her former confessor, Raymond of Capua, who became master general for the Roman obedience and, starting with Colmar in 1389, established in Germany entire convents of “Observants,” which he placed under the immediate authority of “vicars of the Observance.” In so doing, he hoped that as the friars from the Observant houses were moved around they would disseminate throughout the order a new zeal and commitment to its primitive ideals. Similarly reformed houses were established in Italy by John Domenici, another of St. Catherine’s disciples, who in 1395 was himself named vicar general for the Observants in Italy, and who was later followed in that position by a man whom his own preaching had converted. That man we know as St. Antonino of Florence, and it was under his rule that the convent of San Marco in Florence, destined later to harbor both Fra Angelico and Savonarola, became not only a center of the Observance but also, having acquired the library of the savant Niccolo Niccoli, a focus of humanistic learning.

A comparably powerful reform movement took place in the ranks of the Franciscans, among whom in Italy, the Observance had begun in a small way as early as 1368. Its expansion, however—reaching eventually into France, Spain and Portugal, England, Burgundy, Germany, and even Poland and Hungary—was very much bound up with the efforts of the great preaching friars St. Bernardino of Siena and John of Capistrano. Given the extremes to which the Spiritual wing of the order had gone, it is understandable that the spirit of the Franciscan Observance was distinguished by a careful moderation designed to avoid friction with the “Conventual” majority. This spirit comes out very clearly in the Constitutions Bernardini, which St. Bernardino, as vicar general of the Italian convents of the Observance, gave to them in 1440.

The point of departure of the Constitutions was complete acceptance of the relevant papal decrees as the norm for the Franciscan life; they stated that the evangelical counsels were not to be taken as obligatory; they avoided any statement that might be construed as a censure of their Conventual brethren. At the same time they eschewed dispensations, prohibited the use of money, and evoked the simplicity of St. Francis’s own dedication to holy poverty. It was all very much in the spirit of views that Bernardino himself had been expressing for years—as, for example, in 1425, when he had said that the true hardship involved was not so much the physical privations imposed by “the joyous life of the Friars Minor” as the call to suppress one’s own personality. “One must appallottarsì”—roll oneself up into a ball—he said.

like a beetle’s little ball of dung, which rolls now this way and now that. If you are a proud man, you must become humble, if with a melancholy one, you must be gay. Always, if you see the scales weighted down on one side, put your weight on to the other, to make it even—and this from obedience. You must bear with everyone, as others must bear with you—for we are not alike. Some eat more, some less; some can fast and others cannot; one is apt at contemplation and another not. ... And all must be equal. ... Religion [the life of the professed “religious”] is like a river, in which there are many stones: the stream bears them on.29

Similar stirrings of reform of the Observant type made themselves felt among the Cistercians, among the Augustinian canons (the Win-

desheim congregation representing but one grouping of Observants within that order), and among the Augustinian Eremites—to the Observant congregation of which Martin Luther was himself a member. But the houses most dramatically affected by this type of reform were probably such monasteries as Monte Cassino and Subiaco in Italy, St. Matthias in Trier, and Melk on the Danube, which became centers of renewal within the Benedictine family. For them, as for houses belonging to the other orders, renewal certainly meant an attempt to return to the strict observance of the Rule—but in their case it also meant something further. Until this time, the more individual and affective piety of the type disseminated throughout the church by the Cistercians and Franciscans had found no official foothold in the houses of "black monks" that were still formed within the original Benedictine tradition of "liturgical monasticism." With the coming of the Observance in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, however, side by side with the office a place was made for personal prayer, and recourse was increasingly had to more methodical meditative practices of the type that were to be developed so systematically by the practitioners of the Devotio moderna.

Moreover, to a reformed house that eventually belonged (not all did) to an Observant congregation within the Benedictine family—so that in Germany centering on Bursfeld, or in Spain centering on Valldolid, or in Italy centering on Mount Oliveto near Siena or Santa Giustina at Padua—the coming of the Observance meant the ending of the absolutism that had once characterized the office of abbot and the definitive loss by the individual houses of the local autonomy that had been the tradition of the order, though already much eroded. In this, however, the Observant congregations were simply reviving and extending in modified form the program of grouping individual houses into provinces subject to the jurisdiction of "visitors" elected by triennial chapters, which the Cistercian pope, Benedict XII, had sought to impose on the Benedictines in 1336 as part of his own (largely abortive) attempt at churchwide reform of monastic and religious orders.

This fact deserves emphasis. If the keynote of the various movements of the Observance was the spontaneous stirring of the reforming spirit within the orders, it must not be supposed that they owed nothing to the efforts of external authorities. Thus, for example, it was the Council of Basel that appointed John Rode, abbot of the Observant house of St. Matthias, as visitor of the Benedictine houses of southwest Germany and charged him with the task of reform. And it was to Martin V, again, that Rode owed his position as abbot of St. Matthias, for, at the petition of the archbishop of Trier, Martin had relieved him of his vows as a Carthusian and placed him in charge of the Benedictine house. Similarly, it was because of the initiative taken by Albert V, Duke of Austria, that the Observance came to Melk, making that monastery a center of renewal not only for Austria but also for Bavaria.

Councils, popes, secular rulers can all claim some part, direct or indirect, in the spread of the reform among monastic and religious orders during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their efforts, however, like those of the individual reformers themselves, were fragmentary and piecemeal. It was doubtless the creation with papal consent of Observant congregations that was to assure for the monastic and religious life an honored place within the boundaries of the pruned and purified Catholicism of the era of Counter-Reformation. But it is also the conspicuous absence of the type of consistent central leadership that could have come only from Rome that helps account for the uneven geographical distribution of Observant houses and for the sorry fact that no one order succeeded entirely in reforming itself before the onset of the Reformation. And that despite persistent and sometimes heartbreaking reforming efforts in the teeth of opposition emanating from the unreformed houses. Rather than being the leaders or consistent supporters of such reforming efforts, the popes took the more typical role of adjudicator between the competing claims of Observant congregations and Conventual or unreformed provinces. Thus it was characteristic of the papacy's indirect type of involvement in the reform that the squabble among the Augustinian Eremites, which brought Luther to the Roman curia as representative of the German Observant congregation, should have been occasioned by the attempt
the willingness of Georges d’Amboise to resort to military force to impose his reforms, despite wholly extraordinary powers over the French church wielded by Amboise as the king’s chief counselor and papal legate. 30

From among the numerous attempts at various kinds of local or national reform—institutional, jurisdictional, moral, educational—we must confine ourselves with selecting for brief examination only three. The first, an example of papally sponsored reform, is connected with Nicholas of Cusa’s legatine mission to Germany and the Netherlands in 1451–52. The second is that sponsored at Florence by Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) during the last decade of the same century, a striking illustration (in its weaknesses as well as its strengths) of the type of moral and spiritual regeneration that under certain conditions an inspired and prophetic preacher might prove able to promote. The third, testifying to the supportive contribution to reform concerned and sympathetic monarchs could make, is the great renovation of the Spanish church in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, in which Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros (1436–1517) came to play a distinguished role. All three cases illustrate, though in differing fashion, the growing dominance of the political factor in the arena of religious and ecclesiastical reform.

Coming after the triumph of the papacy and the demise of the Council of Basel, Nicholas of Cusa’s mission is of particular interest. It was the most sweeping of several that the newly elected pope, Nicholas V, initiated in 1450. The papacy had turned back the threat posed to its prerogatives by the conciliarist program of reform in head and members; now it remained to be seen what credence could be

30. Renauter, especially pp. 290–365, 437–62. Even less fruitful for reform was the similarly dictatorial authority wielded by Cardinal Wolsey over the English church from 1518 to 1529 by virtue of his combined offices of papal legate and lord chancellor of England.
given to its own alternative conception of the manner in which reform should be achieved—namely, "as an effect of papal power operating through legislative acts, such as papal Bulls, or through the decrees of papal legates and vicars in parishes."31

On the face of it, it seemed, quite a lot could be expected from that approach to reform. Among other things, the pope charged Nicholas with responsibility for "the reformation of individual churches . . . secular as well as regular, exempt and non-exempt alike," in Germany, the Netherlands, and Bohemia.32 And in order to facilitate the discharge of this onerous task, the pope conferred upon him the high rank of legatus a latere, urging him to proceed with prudence, employing such traditional instrumentalities as visitations, sermons, the issuing of reform decrees at provincial councils, but permitting him also, in extreme need, to call upon the coercive sanctions at the disposal of the temporal power.

Armed with these instructions, Nicholas set out from Rome on December 31, 1450; by April 1452, when his mission officially ended, he had made his way through the sprawling ecclesiastical provinces of Salzburg, Magdeburg, Mainz, Cologne, and Trier, holding four provincial councils and several diocesan synods, issuing some thirteen reform decrees (including an outright prohibition of the traditional cult of the "bleeding hosts" at Wilsnack), conducting more than eighty visitations, preaching more than fifty sermons, attempting to mediate jurisdictional squabbles, persuading, admonishing, suspending, deposing, and increasingly, as the legislation wore on and local resistance stiffened, resorting to ominous threats—of excommunication, of interdict, of the sanctions wielded by the secular arm. All in all, an extraordinary effort, which took him in fifteen months over an itinerary of some 2,800 miles and all the way up to the North Sea coast of the Netherlands and back.

Because of the heroic scope of the mission and the stature of the man who undertook it, there has been an understandable tendency among historians to attribute to it much more success than the available evi-

often more prone to use their spiritual authority to promote their temporal interests than the reverse, occasionally bellicose warriors willing to use armed force as well as the penalties of excommunication and interdict in order to collect their debts or harass their dynastic rivals.\textsuperscript{35} Other obstacles and disappointments experienced by Nicholas, however, reflect the degree to which it is simply unrealistic, under the turbulent conditions still prevailing in the wake of Basel, to expect the popes to exert the kind of sustained pressure on the clerical leadership that was clearly required to achieve enduring reform. Thus, though he undoubtedly was concerned to promote reform, Nicholas V had to face the fact that the very notion of a papally imposed reform was bitterly opposed even by some of those most convinced of the need for thoroughgoing reform. Thus, in Germany, such a bird-core conciliator as Carthusian Vincent of Aegidshagen could snort that “the loss of a thousand talents caused by the neglect of the Council is to be made good with a gratuity of treachery,” and could call instead for a new withdrawal of obedience and the spontaneous assembly of the new general council that alone would be capable of sponsoring a thoroughgoing reform in head and members.\textsuperscript{36} Or again, in a reaction specifically to Cusa’s mission, the author of the anonymous memorial that was given to him at Mainz claimed that the reform of the members would follow readily enough when once the head had been reformed, and, pointing out the similarity between some of Cusa’s reform decrees and those of Basel, argued that if they were accepted on his authority as legate, then that authority “would seem to be higher than that of a general council. Which would not conform to the truth.”\textsuperscript{37}

At the same time, Nicholas V was caught up, like Eugenius IV before him, in the disabling process of attempting to establish a secure base for the papacy by transforming the papal states into a consoli-

\textsuperscript{35} Hence the decree promulgated by Nicholas at Magdeburg forbid bishops to use the interdict in order to collect their personal debts; see Sullivan, p. 402; cf. pp. 405, 413.


\textsuperscript{37} The memorial is printed in Walch, ed., 1, fasc. 1, 103–110; see pp. 103–4.

\textsuperscript{38} Burckhardt, 2: 450.

\textsuperscript{39} dated Italian principality, while trying to reassert an increasingly tenuous papal authority in the church at large—at the price, if need be, of damaging concessions to the temporal rulers of Europe. And in Germany that meant concessions to the prince bishops, among others. Hence, or so it must be surmised, his crippling exemption of the archbishops and bishops from Nicholas of Cusa’s legatine authority, despite the fact that their total cooperation was essential if Cusa’s mission was to succeed. Hence, too, his repeated unwillingness, once appeals from those affected were lodged at Rome, to stand behind his own legate’s sentences and condemnations—as, for example, in the case of Cusa’s prohibition of the Wilsnack cult, which the bishop of Havelberg had simply refused to enforce.

For Nicholas of Cusa himself, therefore, it was in many ways a “no-win” situation. His legatine mission can be taken to represent the type of papally sponsored reform envisaged and (less frequently) engaged in by the popes of the era of restoration, it was a reform hampered by the entanglement of pope and church in the political life of the day. It was also a reform that turned out to depend, for whatever limited success it enjoyed, less upon the vigorous exercise of papal leadership than upon the conscientious cooperation and support provided in the localities by such men as Archbishop Frederick of Magdeburg or the members of the Bursfeld and Windesheim congregations, who were already committed to the work of partial reform.

Though it also reveals the degree to which the complex interplay of political and religious factors could be determinative even in matters pertaining to morality and spirituality, the story of the brief ascendency of Savonarola at Florence forty years later is vastly different; it is treated less often, in fact, as a striking phase in the history of late-medieval religious reform than as a bizarre episode in the history of Renaissance culture—the inexplicable conversion of a worldly city to a moment of puritanical zealotry, or, at best, a classic manifestation of the phenomenon to which Burckhardt referred as “the periodical upheaval of the Italian conscience.”
igious life in the Dominican priory of San Domenico in Bologna, a house that, even within the Observant congregation of Lombardy to which it belonged, enjoyed a reputation for strict observance of the rule. During the years of his ascendency at Florence, moreover, the only official positions he held were those of prior of San Marco (1491–98) and, from 1493 on, of vicar general of a new congregation centering on San Marco and separated from the Lombard congregation in order to facilitate that even stricter observance to which he was committed. During those years Savonarola strove also to impart the urgencies of his reforming zeal to those outside the cloister, excoriating in his sermons the corruption of clergy and curtailed alike. And it, for a while, he succeeded in converting Florence to his vision, that city itself succeeded before the end in converting him into a powerful exponent of the Florentine millenial myths and civic religion.39

The point of departure of Savonarola’s reform was the Observantine movement of monastic reform that had earlier achieved considerable success in Italy and within his own order. By his time something of a falling off from earlier high standards had again occurred, probably within the Lombard congregation as a whole and certainly at his own priory of San Marco. For that house, after the plague of 1448 had reduced its numbers, no less zealous a person than St. Antonino had found it necessary to obtain papal permission to own property and enjoy a regular income, as the priory could no longer subsist on the alms of the faithful. Savonarola’s initial rise to prominence was as the compelling and ascetic reformer who restored strict observance first to San Marco, which quickly began to attract a growing membership, and then to the convents at Fiesole, Pisa, Sassolo, and Prato, which were now attached to his new congregation; a reformer who strove always, as a contemporary admiringly wrote, “to introduce into their studies and way of life an almost divine order.”40

Savonarola’s success in reforming San Marco, to which the sons of leading Florentine citizens were now beginning to flock, and the degree to which the convent was becoming a focal point in the artistic and literary life of the city (Accademia Marciana, it came to be called) seemed to enhance his reputation and to heighten the respectful and fearful attention large numbers of Florentines were already paying to the prophetic sermons he had been preaching; first at San Marco and then, from Lent 1491 on, at the cathedral itself. The burden of the message he preached to the Florentines was at first traditional enough.

A good deal harsher in tone, it does not appear to have been altogether unlike the message conveyed in the eschatological preaching of St. Vincent Ferrer, whose memory was venerated at San Marco, where Fra Angelico had left a portrait of him. He made a sweeping attack on the corruption of the church and of society and gave a terrifying apocalyptic warning that “the sword of the Lord” was poised over the earth.41 God was preparing a “mighty scourge” that would cleanse the church in Italy amid universal tribulations before the onset of the last days, he warned; now was the time, before it was too late, for them to repent of their sins and purify their lives.

In all of this there was nothing, Weinstein has argued, about any unique, providential role to be allotted to the city of Florence. That was to come later, during the critical months of November and December 1494, when Florence trembled before the approach of the victorious army of Charles VIII of France, which had crossed the Alps and, advancing on the city, was scattering all opposition before it. In a sermon two years earlier, it seems, Savonarola may have linked the tribulations whose impending arrival he consistently prophesied with the descent from the Alps of a new conquering Cyrus whom none would be able to resist. And now, to the horror of his trembling listeners, he sought to remind them of that fact, identifying Charles with that Cyrus and the French army with the divine scourge he had foretold and urging them with redoubled fervor to repent. The apparent vindication of his prophecies gained for him enormous authority among the Florentines; after the collapse of the Medici regime, his further success as one of the chief negotiators of the treaty with Charles

39. This is the thesis advanced with sustained force and a wealth of detail by Weinstein. Much of what follows depends on his fascinating account.
40. Cited by Ridolfi, p. 76.
41. “Ecce gladius Domini super terram, cito et velociter”: see Ridolfi, pp. 48–49.
VIII that secured not only the safety but also the freedom of Florence
don for him the reputation as savior of his city.

On those grounds alone, one might well expect the grim appeal of
his message of repentance to have grown. During those same critical
months, however, Savonarola began to sound in his sermons a new and
more optimistic note, envisaging himself "as the man sent by God,
not only to warn Italy of the tribulations which had now come, but
also to lead her out of the abomination of desolation." And Florence
he now heralded as the "city of God," the "beloved of Christ," "the
center and the heart of Italy," the city that, having reformed and re-
constituted itself as a truly Christian republic, would become even
"more glorious, richer, more powerful than ever before," for she was
destined by God to be the New Jerusalem, the center from which the
reform of the church and the regeneration of social and political life
would spread out across the whole of Italy.42

Though it was remarked neither by himself nor by his eager hur-
ers, the new note betrays a fundamental shift of emphasis in Savonaro-
la's prophetic discourse. He moved from a more universal message of
repentance and doom to a millenarian vision focused specifically upon
Florence, echoing "the particular variety of millennial fantasy" that
was very familiar to the Florentines, who had long since cultivated
"the myth that celebrated Florence both as the New Jerusalem and the
New Rome in a dual mission of spiritual and political leadership."
The atmosphere of public piety and fervor that characterized the years
of his ascendency, the realignment of festivals, the burning of vani-
ties, the great processions led by the public organization of younger
boys (the fanciulli) at once both "propitiative and celebratory," the
very collective nature of so much of the frenzied religious activity—
these things reflect the degree to which Savonarola, "celebrating the
city as the Lord's chosen . . . , had penetrated to the religious core of
Florence's civic patriotism." He thus released energies untapped by
the eschatological preoccupations that informed so much of the pepul-


lar preaching of the day and had shaped his own original message.43

It may be argued that the adjustment of Savonarola's previously
universalist religious vision to the urgencies of the Florentine civic
religion and millennial myth accounts for the momentary triumph of
his reform at Florence. It must also be noted, however, that the depth
of his own engagement in the political destinies of Florence accounts
also for his own downfall amid the wreckage of that reform. For his
great offense in the eyes of Alexander VI (or of those who surrounded
him) appears to have been less an unambiguous challenge to the
spiritual authority of the papacy than his crucial role in aligning Flo-
rence with Charles VIII and against the anti-French league that the
pope had formed with Milan, Venice, Aragon, and the Emperor
Maximilian. Even in his own hour of direst need, after all, Savonarola—Thomist and papalist to the core—decided against the
appeal for a general council that, for a while at least, he had considered
making to the secular rulers of Europe. Before his death at the stake,
he accepted the pope's benediction and plenary indulgence. After his
death, his writings were admired and he himself was venerated by
such stalwarts of Catholic Reformation spirituality as St. Philip Neri
(1515–95), founder of the Oratorians, and the Dominican Observant
Luis de Granada (1504–88), author of "the most important manual of
prayer which Spain produced in this era," the Libro de la oración y
meditación, which appeared in 1544.44

In Spain, however, the entanglement of church reform with politi-
cal life had already proved to be at once more direct and more benign
in its effects than in either the Germany of Nicholas of Cusa or the
Italy of Savonarola. The long-drawn-out crusade to drive the Muslims
from the Iberian Peninsula had promoted an identification of religious

43. See Weinstein, pp. 114–17, 146–47, 368–69, 238–39. For the ritual sig-
nificance of the fanciulli and their processions, see Richard C. Trexler, "Ritual in
Florence: Adolescence and Salvation in the Renaissance," in Trinkaus and Obertman,
44. See Batallon, Evangelio y España, pp. 592–97; cf. his "De Savonarola a Luis de
Gredos." Louis was only the most illustrious product of the extremely rigorous
Dominican reform that drew clear and direct inspiration from Savonarola.
and national ideals to a degree unparalleled in Latin Christendom. After the union of the crowns of Aragon and Castile in 1479, Ferdinand and Isabella had been able to bring the national church effectively under royal control. Already in 1478 Sixtus IV had permitted the establishment of a new inquisitorial tribunal in Spain, which, unlike its forerunners, was a strictly national institution under royal control. In 1482 the two monarchs had secured from the same pontiff the right to nominate to the most important ecclesiastical offices in their kingdoms, thus establishing their control over the hierarchy. That control they certainly used to advance the process by which their royal power was being extended, but they used it also to promote the cause of reform in the church.

This is clearly evident in the positive way in which Ferdinand responded to the convocation of the Fifth Lateran Council, appointing a committee of bishops, theologians, and diplomats to draw up a reform program to be submitted to that council, and himself while calling for the formal repudiation of the Constance decree Hæc et non, urging nevertheless that it was in the interest of the universal church that the principle behind Fugititas be respected and that general councils be assembled every ten to fifteen years. The same concern with reform, but on the national level, is evident in the support both monarchs gave to the forces of renewal within the Spanish church itself.

Those forces are not simply to be identified with Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros or those immediately associated with him. The Spanish church of the period produced more than one able and energetic bishop, and reform of the Observantine mold gained ground among the Benedictines, Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans—in the last case, it seems, partly under the inspiration of Savonarola’s reformed Congregation of San Marco. In all of this monastic reform, the evidence currently available permits us to ascribe a definite role to Ximénez only in connection with the Franciscans. But there the nature and extent of his contribution is clear, as it also is in relation to the secular clergy. And those contributions justify our ascribing to him the dominant role in the wide-ranging reform of the Spanish church, which placed it in the forefront of the Catholic Reformation as it gained momentum in the mid-sixteenth century.

Ximénez’s period of ascendancy came comparatively late in his life and covered the years from 1492, when he became confessor to Queen Isabella, to 1517, when he died. During those years he became successively archbishop of Toledo, primate and therefore chief minister of the queen (1493), cardinal and inquisitor general (1507), and twice served also as regent. He had entered the Franciscans only in 1484, after some years as a secular priest; when he did so, he chose to join the more rigorous branch of the order, which he came in 1494 to head as vicar general for the Observant Franciscans of Castile. When he came to lead the reform of the order, he understandably chose the traditional tactic of trying to spread the Observance—though in pursuing that tactic he displayed a limitless energy, an implacable zeal, and a ready willingness to resort to coercive measures that were far from traditional. His reform has been described as consisting “essentially in taking their monasteries, for good or ill, away from the Conventuals and installing the Observants in them.” Confronted with this impending fate, the Conventuals naturally fought a strong rear-guard action, marshaling support among their noble patrons as well as at the Roman curia itself. But Ximénez induced the queen to take a personal interest in the struggle, and as a result by 1497 he had received from the pope the full powers he needed to bring the more outragedly recalcitrant to heel. By 1517, when he died, the Conventuals had lost most of their influence in Spain, though the claim that they had disappeared altogether is incorrect.

45. Doussinague, app. 50, p. 539.
46. See Ricard’s useful discussion in Aduenas and Ricard, pp. 299–311.
47. Baratillon, Ensayo y Espafia, p. 4, n. 11, stresses: “The study of the reform of the
Ximénez showed similar vigor and persistence in pursuing the reform of the secular clergy. Even as archbishop of Toledo, he continued to live a life of Franciscan simplicity and poverty, seeking also, though without success, to impose a communal life on the canons of his cathedral. He had greater success in inducing the Catholic monarchs to use their power to appoint to the episcopate men worthy of their high calling and spiritual responsibilities. He convoked synods at Alcalá (1497) and Talavera (1498), at which were promulgated a series of decrees addressed not only to the customary task of rectifying disciplinary abuses such as clerical concubinage but also to the less frequently pursued goal of restoring the dignity and renewing the pastoral ministry of the diocesan priesthood. Thus priests were to be obliged to reside in their parishes, to keep decent parish records of baptisms and the like, to go regularly themselves to confession, to exude to their flocks on Sundays the Gospel of the day, to make sure that the children of the parish were given religious instruction, and so on. To help them with the last task, Ximénez published a simple catechism. Moreover, his establishment in 1502 of a printing press at Alcalá made possible the wide dissemination of other types of instructional religious literature, including St. Vincent Ferrer’s *Tractatus de vita spirituali* and a Castilian translation of Rudolph of Saxony’s *Vita Christi*. His broader educational activities reflect a related concern to produce for the future a body of clergy better equipped by education than their predecessors for the urgent tasks of doctrinal formation and pastoral care that confronted them.

He used the income of his archbishopric to help endow the new university of Alcalá, the ecclesiastical bent of which is evident in its first constitutions, which were promulgated in 1510. Its central focus was the theological college of St. Ildefonso (founded 1498). There was no faculty of law, and the faculty of arts functioned to prepare the students for a program of theological studies that embraced, in addition to scholastic theology, scriptural and patristic studies in the original languages. There was, accordingly, a strong stress on Greek and Hebrew as well as Latin, and a marked interest in Arabic and Syriac as well. 49 Ximénez’s gradual assembly of a distinguished team of linguists eventually included the Cretan Demetrius Doucas, who filled the prestigious chair in Greek; the converted Jew Alfonso de Zamora, who in 1512 began the teaching of Hebrew at Alcalá; and the distinguished humanist Antonio de Nebrija, who conferred considerable renown on the chair of rhetoric.

All three of these men were involved, in varying degrees, in the great project of scriptural research that had long preoccupied Ximénez and that led eventually to the production at Alcalá under his direction of the great six-volume Complutensian Polyglot Bible—an extraordinary achievement in the history both of printing and of biblical scholarship. The volume including the Greek, Aramaic, and Vulgate texts of the New Testament, along with a critical apparatus, was printed in 1514. The remaining five volumes included the Old Testament in parallel Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts, the Aramaic Targumin, and a triple lexicon for the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. They were completed before Ximénez died, but the whole massive work went into circulation only after 1520, when it received Leo X’s approbation. It has been pointed out that in all of this activity Ximénez’s concern was comparatively conservative. Unlike Erasmus, he did not set out to make a new Latin translation but rather, through a painstaking comparison and analysis of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts, to reconstruct the correct version of the traditional Vulgate. Nonetheless, the whole project, along with the educational ethos Ximénez imparted to his new university at Alcalá, signals the advent of something new, the fertilization of scriptural and theological studies of the traditional mold by the newer scholarly and educational concerns of the Renaissance humanists. In this respect, therefore, it may be regarded as one particular manifestation of that discrete current of reform already in full flow elsewhere in Europe, which reflected a religious ideal that one may label, though not without a certain nervousness, as distinctively humanistic.

49. And not without reference to the relevant provisions of the Council of Vienne; see *Clem.*, V, 1, c. 1; ed. Friedberg, 2:1179.
The Problem of the Humanist Contribution

The way in which one understands the humanist contribution to reform depends very much on the way in which one understands Renaissance humanism itself and the nature of its relationship to the religion and the theology of the day. If one sympathizes with the recent tendency to emphasize rather than to minimize the degree to which the Italian humanists were concerned in their writings with religious questions — to stress, indeed, the importance of their contributions to the history of Christian thinking — then one may well be inclined to understand Renaissance humanism and Orthodox nominalism as sharing some common tendencies, as being "two parallel modes of asserting a repudiation of preceding thirteenth-century scholastic efforts to forge a unity between revelation and reason." One will tend, as a result, to accord a good deal of significance to the quasi-fideism and emphasis on primacy of the will evident in the earlier humanists Petrarch (1304–74), Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), and Lorenzo Valla (1405–57). One may even be tempted, brooding about the obvious voluntarism of these men, to remark the "pessimistic estimate of the human condition" evident in their writings and in those of other humanists, and, via an intriguing line of argument, conclude with the suggestion that the great Protestant Reformers in general, and Luther in particular, "met the religious needs implicit in the new culture of the Renaissance, and in ways largely consistent with its fundamental assumptions." 50

No one who feels the urge to probe for underlying unities in late-medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation patterns of thought (and what church historian does not?) is likely to be altogether indifferent to the vistas that open up before such approaches. But it is hard to overlook the formidable obstacles that lie in the way. If one follows the


latter suggestion about the affinities between Renaissance and Reformation, one must be prepared to ignore, or to bracket as untypical of the Renaissance, the highly optimistic (indeed, semi-Pelagian) view of the freedom and dignity of man expressed by such later humanists as Gianozzo Manetti (d. 1459) and Pico della Mirandola (d. 1494). Furthermore, despite the centrality of his position in the current of reform to which we are addressing ourselves, we must also be prepared to bracket Erasmus, or at least to ignore the degree to which he himself, fervent moralist but no systematic theologian, left himself open to Luther's charge that he was guilty, willy-nilly, of "Pelagianizing." And yet, according to Huizinga—Erasmus's formal protestations to the contrary — there was something to that charge. 52 And if Huizinga was correct on this matter, we may glimpse therein the underlying theological premise that made it logical enough for Erasmus, with all his prudence and traditionalism, to place his emphasis so insistently on the moral dimension of Christianity, on the formative role of scriptural reading and patristic commentary, on the educative responsibility of an enlightened pastoral ministry, rather than on the sacramental mediation of a sacramental hierarchy.

However beckoning the vistas disclosed by these more recent approaches, then, prudence dictates that we pass them by—particularly given the exigencies of our concern with currents of religious and ecclesiastical reform. In that context especially, a particular force attaches to the sobriety of Kristeller's continuing "refusal to define humanism in terms of any particular philosophical or theological doctrines" and his "attempt to define it instead through a set of intellectual concerns or scholarly disciplines." A similar force attaches to his insistence that, whatever their individual predilections, the humanists were not concerned "as a group" with philosophical or theological questions at all, many of them, perhaps, being "nothing but grammarians or rhetoricians." 53 The only qualification called

53. I quote here and below from his recent reassertment of the position he has long since made familiar: Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Role of Religion in Renaissance Humanism and Platonism," in Trinkaus and Oberman, eds., pp. 567–70.
for—if qualification it be—pertainst to the words “nothing but” which could well be taken, though improperly so, as intended to evoke the pejorative overtones so often conveyed by the expression “mere rhetoric.” For that “pursuit of eloquence,” which, it has well been argued, “united humanists of all shades,” involved something more than a concern with the elegant manipulation of external rhetorical devices. It involved a concern to match “language and form to subject and ideas,” with the object not simply of illuminating the intellect in scholastic fashion by logic but also of moving the will by persuasion, so that men might be actively impelled to live that life of virtue for which, or so they believed, it was the primary duty of education to equip them.54

In assessing the humanist contribution to religious and ecclesiastical reform, it would seem appropriate to take as one’s point of departure Kristeller’s testimony that he finds much of the contribution of humanism to “the religion and theology of its time” to lie “in the style of writing, in the scholarly and critical treatment of religious texts such as the Bible and the Church Fathers, in the critical treatment of Church History, perhaps also (though the point is most difficult to prove) in the preference for certain problems.” Starting from this point, we can feel little temptation to focus too exclusively on the northern Renaissance. For it was in Italy itself that we first find humanism placed at the service not simply of religious ends in general but of reforming goals in particular. One has only to recall the labors of Ambrogio Traversari (d. 1439), general of the Order of Camaldoli and capable Greek scholar, whose humanist fascination with antiquity, wedded to an ecumenical concern to foster reunion with the Greek church, turned his attention to the Greek fathers and prompted him to translate works of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzen. Or the layman Gianozzo Manetti, who hoped to contribute to the renewal of theology by producing a new translation of the Bible, becoming in the process the first humanist fully to master Hebrew. Although he never completed his project, he did produce a new Latin translation of the Psalms from the Hebrew and of the New Testament from the Greek—all in all, enough to justify according him a place among the pioneers of biblical scholarship.

Manuscripts of some of Traversari’s translations had made their way in mid-century as far as England;55 and translations of the Greek fathers by other Italian humanists were later printed by northern presses. But it was not the pioneering efforts of Manetti as biblical translator and commentator that were to exert an influence beyond the Alps but rather the Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum of Lorenzo Valla, which Erasmus discovered in 1504, a half-century and more after they were written, and published in 1505. By that time, as we have seen, Ximénez and his associates in Spain were applying the philological skills of the humanists in an effort to purify and restore the text of the Vulgate. Only a few years earlier, John Colet, later dean of St. Paul’s in London, though no Greek scholar, had attempted in his Oxford lectures on the Pauline epistles, by breaking with the scholastic techniques of the past and applying the humanist method of historical criticism, to recover a lively sense of the historical circumstances under which Paul had written and to evoke from the text the very spirit that had moved the apostle. A similar intention (though welded to a piety of more mystical flavor) informed the roughly contemporaneous work of Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (d. 1536) in biblical editing, translation, and commentary. Indeed, “the highest ambition of the intellectual elite of the time was to be able to read the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew.”56 With this end in view and while still a layman, the Venetian Quirini, later to become a Camaldolese monk, had set himself the task of mastering both languages. When he and Giustiniani came to address their reform program to Leo X, they endorsed the growing sense that a knowledge of the Scriptures was to be regarded not as an attribute of the professional theologian alone but as a necessary part of the formation of the ordinary priest in the dioce-


55. See Weim, pp. 93–95.

san pastoral ministry; they proposed, accordingly, that ordination be refused to anyone who had not yet made his way through the entire Bible. 57

It was in Valla's Annotationes that Erasmus found an endorsement of the application of humanist philological skills to the correction and improvement of the biblical text bold and thoroughgoing enough to sustain that protracted endeavor of his own that in 1516 resulted in the publication of his Novum Testamentum—or Novum Instrumentum—as he entitled the second edition of 1519.

The appearance of that work, containing the first complete edition of the Greek New Testament to be published, along with Erasmus's new Latin translation and accompanying notes, caused a great sensation. Although other humanists and many churchmen of more traditional intellectual formation greeted it with enthusiasm, theologians of more conservative bent reacted with indignation and dismay to his implied downgrading of the Vulgate. Though Erasmus can hardly be described as untroubled by the attacks of the latter, he was not moved to modify his position. In the preface to the Novum Instrumentum, which he addressed to the "pious reader," he had registered a vehement dissent "from those who do not wish the divine Scriptures to be translated into the vulgar tongue and read by the unlearned, as though Christ taught in so obscure a manner as scarcely to be understood by a few theologians, or as though the safeguard of the Christian religion lay only in its being unknown." 58 In 1519 he expanded the preface into a separate essay entitled Ratio seae methodos compendio perueniendi ad veram theologiam. Here he restated his position, bolstering it with an attack on the sterile dialectic and impious Aristotelianism of the scholastic theologians and an exhortation to return to the "ancient theology" (practa illa theologia) so deeply informed by Scripture and so nobly expressed in the writings of the Greek and Latin fathers from Origen to Augustine. 59

57 Ibid., pp. 157-58.
58 In Novum Testamentum Praefationes, in Holborn, pp. 139-74 at 142.
59 Printed in Holborn, pp. 177-305.

In this work and in his editions of so many of those fathers, he was pursuing a program of educationally and pastorally oriented reform, in which such other humanists as Colet, Sir Thomas More, Ximénez, Lefèvre, and the German Hebraist Johann Reuchlin (d. 1522) certainly shared, but which in the fullness of its inspiration was so much his own as to merit the title "Erasmian." That program certainly reflected the enduring humanist pursuit of eloquence as a means of moving the will by persuasion to the active pursuit of the good. Further, it embodied the more recent humanist concern to sponsor a moral and spiritual regeneration of the present by an historically informed penetration of the great documents of Christian antiquity through to their clarity and simplicity of spirit. But the program owed something also to the simple, affective piety focusing on the life and humanity of Christ that we associate quintessentially with the Devitio moderna, but which in Erasmus invigorated his pastoral and educational concerns, imparting to them no little of their freshness.

Thus, as the Erasmian program of reform found expression in his biblical and patristic scholarship, it found expression also in the tireless preaching of that gospel which he himself (in what appears to have been a conscious refurbishing of a patristic phrase) labeled the philosophia Christi. 60 That gospel received its most complete and influential formulation in his Enchiridion militii Christiani, a manual of piety or "compendious guide for living," as he himself described it, written, significantly enough, for the layman. The burden of that particular version of the good news is that the embattled Christian has two fundamental weapons at his disposal with which to fight against "the whole troop of vices" that besiege him. Those weapons are "knowledge and prayer"—knowledge, above all, of Christ as he is mediated to us through an assiduous perusal of the Scriptures, one illuminated by the commentaries of the fathers; prayer that finds exp-

60 Spitz, German Humanists, pp. 26 and 204, points out that it was a phrase used before him by Peter Abelard and by the German humanist Rudolf Agricola, and that Traversari had referred to the Greek Fathers as "philosophers of Christ." Before him, as Trinkaus notes (Images and Likeness, 1: 422-43), Petrarch had used the latter expression of St. Augustine.
pression not in the obsessive pursuit of ceremonial or external religious practices but in a lively inward piety and bears its fruit in the full appropriation of Christ's teaching and the faithful imitation of his example. Overall, the impression conveyed is of a practical Christianity, which, although by no means antitheological or antisacramental in its ethos, is certainly markedly ethical and sacramental in its orientation, hinging less on Christ's ultimate redemptive sacrifice than on his lived moral example.

As such, it turned out to have enormous appeal to the educated and committed laymen of the day, many of whom were convinced that the Erasmian program was destined to bring about at last a renewed Christianity and a reformed church. As a result, during the three decades or so following its publication in 1503, the Ecclesiarum came to enjoy a growing and, in the end, a spectacular popularity, running through no fewer than twenty-three editions in the years 1515–21 alone, and being translated during those decades into Castilian, Czech, Dutch, English, French, Italian, and Portuguese.

The Erasmian program of reform eventually proved too fragile a vessel, however, to ride out the ideological tempest that burst upon Europe in the wake of Luther's revolt. By the time of Erasmus's death in 1536 it was already foundering in troubled waters; by the end of the century, though it had touched the lives of Protestant and Catholic reformer alike, it had long since been smashed upon the rocks of Protestant militancy by the waves of a post-Tridentine Catholicism to whose dogmatism it was fundamentally alien. For a few years after 1525, it is true, it had found calmer waters and a receptive harbor in the Spain of Charles V, where the appropriate channels had long ago been buoyed by the reforming works of Ximénez, and where it was well sheltered by the official protection of the imperial court. But Erasmus himself always remembered with wistful affection the formative years he had spent on English soil in the company of Colet and More, Fisher and Mountjoy. And there is congruity as well as justice to the claim that it was there, among the churchmen and humanists who shaped the Henrician religious compromise and in the enduring legacy they

in turn bequeathed to the moderation of the Anglican religious settlement, that Erasmianism was at last to find those permanent moorings that the drift of the times and the direction of the tides had elsewhere conspired to deny it.61

61. Referring here to the claim so powerfully advanced by McConica.