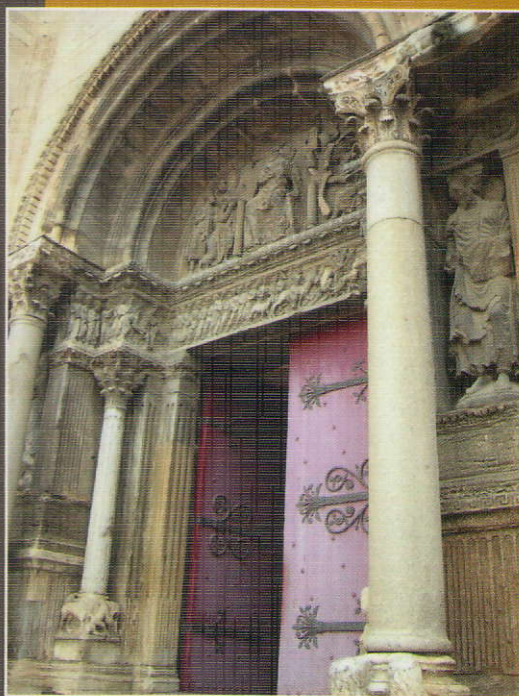


STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Where Heaven and Earth Meet

*Essays on Medieval Europe
in Honor of Daniel F. Callahan*



Edited by

Michael Frassetto, Matthew Gabriele
& John D. Hosler

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On the cover: Doorway, West front of the twelfth-century abbey church of Saint-Gilles, France. Photo by Rachel Gabriele.

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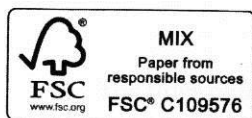
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Contents

Contributors VII

Introduction 1

Matthew Gabriele

PART 1

Temporal Concerns

1 Gregory the Great's Gout: Suffering, Penitence, and Diplomacy in the Early Middle Ages 11

John D. Hosler

2 The Missing *Mancus* and the Early Medieval Economy 33

Richard Ring

3 Ademar of Chabannes as a Military Historian 42

Bernard S. Bachrach

4 Were Nicholas V and Pius II Really *Renaissance* Popes? 63

Lawrence Duggan

PART 2

Spiritual Concerns

5 Insular Latin Sources, "Arculf," and Early Islamic Jerusalem 81

Lawrence Nees

6 "Customs Confirmed by Reason and Authority": The Function and Status of Houses of Canons in Tenth-Century Aquitaine 101

Anna Trumbore Jones

7 Ademar of Chabannes and the Peace of God 122

Michael Frassetto

8 The Liturgy, Its Music, and Their Power to Persuade 138

James Grier

9 Female Religious as Collectors of Relics: Finding Sacralty and Power in the "Ordinary" 152

Jane Schulenburg

10 Heresy and the Antichrist in the Writings of Ademar of Chabannes 178

Daniel F. Callahan

Index of Modern Authors	227
Index of Sources	229
Index of Names	231
Index of Subjects	235

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Were Nicholas V and Pius II Really *Renaissance* Popes?

Lawrence G. Duggan

Thanks in good part to Daniel Callahan as the chair of the search committee, I was hired in 1970 to teach Renaissance and Reformation history at the University of Delaware. I was not, however, and am not, a mainline historian of the Renaissance or the Reformation in the usual sense of these terms. My dissertation and first book were on the cathedral chapter and the governance of the Rhenish bishopric of Speyer in the late Middle Ages, and the subsequent topics of my research have been disparate and even eccentric—the clergy and armsbearing in Western history and canon law, art as the “book of the illiterate,” ecclesiastical moneylending in later medieval Germany, fear and confession on the eve of the Reformation, compulsion and conversion in early Christianity, sense and nonsense about Machiavelli, and so on.

Having responsibility for teaching separate courses on Renaissance and Reformation Europe, however, I have been forced from the outset to deal with the “party line” or conventional wisdom about both fields as they have evolved over time and come to be embedded in our common cultural programming. Thus, for example, the most abiding legacy of “the” Renaissance with which we are still encumbered is the tripartite division of (Western) history into ancient, medieval, and modern. Although in the last two centuries medievalists have successfully assaulted this simplistic scheme and shown the great dynamism of the so-called “Middle Ages” and the many “renaissances” and “renascences” that occurred in it,¹ they have also inadvertently reinforced the model by subdividing medieval history in tripartite (or Trinitarian) fashion into early, high (or central), and late—and with considerable controversy over the dating of each subdivision. No one has yet devised an alternate model which does away with the “Middle Ages” entirely, although a few recent textbooks are largely skirting the issue.

There is certainly nothing natural or inevitable about the term “Middle Ages.” Oddly enough, during the Middle Ages people did not know they were

1 E.g., Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Boston, 1927); Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York, 1960), and many other titles since then.

living in the Middle Ages, but rather in the Roman Empire. The Romans encouraged them to think so (as Walter Goffart has shown²), and with the coronation of Charlemagne as Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in 800 the Roman Empire was *legally* revived in the West—a specifically legal and political “Renaissance.” Medievalists unwittingly obscure this fact by calling it the Carolingian Empire, and most textbooks on Western Civilization compound the error by speaking of Charlemagne’s coronation as Holy Roman Emperor. The Renaissance of the study, teaching, and application of Roman law as a living body of law from the eleventh century onward only accentuated this way of thinking, and we see it reflected in the Roman nomenclature used in the spoliated institutions of the towns developing everywhere (senates, consuls, the adaptation of the Roman acronym SPQR, etc.)—particularly in the area of the “Empire” proper running from the Baltic down to the Mediterranean.³ At the same time, the whole movement of “medieval” civilization, despite various other revivals of antiquity (Suetonius, Terence, Aristotle, the Greek natural philosophers, etc.), was more and more away from the classical world. Thus, in their struggles with the popes, the Roman Emperors from Frederick Barbarossa onward (1152–90) were willing to tinker with the nomenclature of empire to raise it to parity with (and implied independence of) the Holy Roman Church. By 1254 the Roman Empire became officially the Holy Roman Empire, and later the phrase “of the German Nation” was added.⁴

Small wonder, then, that as he looked about the ruins of Rome Petrarch (1304–74) concluded that the Roman Empire was very dead indeed. In fact, he came to think that the thousand years between Constantine and his own age constituted a period of unrelenting darkness (*tenebrae*). Although later humanists modulated this harsh view by speaking of a “middle age” (*medium aevum*) and some thinkers (like Giorgio Vasari) recognized that the darkness had in fact had a few bright spots, Petrarch had crucially introduced the notion of a sharp break between periods. Although since the late Roman Empire thinkers like Boethius, Gregory of Tours, and many others since then had been intensely aware of cultural decline—an awareness which again and again

2 Walter Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, A.D. 418–584. The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980) and *Barbarian Tides. The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006).

3 See P.J. Jones, *The Italian City-State. From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford, 1997); D.J.A. Matthew, “Reflections on the Medieval Empire,” *History* 77 (1992): 363–90. Thus one sees, for instance, “SPQB” emblazoned in gold letters on the façade of the city hall of the Hanseatic city of Bremen.

4 See L.G. Duggan, “Empire,” in *Medieval Germany. An Encyclopedia*, ed. John M. Jeep (New York, 2001), pp. 200–02.

inspired a desire for renewal, restoration, and rebirth across the centuries—Petrarch's influence was such that his seminal idea of a sharp break (between antiquity and the Middle Ages and especially between the Middle Ages and “the” Renaissance) grew steadily over time into the reflexive assumption of that “vs.” made by every educated person in Western civilization all the way down to the present. It runs parallel to two other reflexive antitheses that have also developed in the last two centuries: politics vs. religion, and science vs. religion. Again and again, one has to work very hard to recognize these insidious assumptions for what they are and then somehow get beyond them.

This wattle of assumptions developed slowly over time. Petrarch and later humanists thought that they were witnessing very specific Renaissances in their own age in the visual arts and in letters. When they wrote in Latin about “renaissance” or “revival,” however, it is not clear whether they meant “a” or “the,” since Latin has neither definite nor indefinite articles. Later generations would come to understand it as “the,” which in turn only reinforced the dichotomous view of the Middle Age as uniformly dark. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century added a new layer of oversimplification in their relentless vilification of the “superstitious” medieval church, propaganda which continues to inform the writing of textbooks as well as popular attitudes. In the eighteenth century Voltaire saw the origins of the Enlightenment of his own age in The Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth, a conflation which one finds again and again in the standard bromides thrown out by students in their essays and papers. The Romantic reaction which set in against the Age of Reason in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ironically perpetuated this dichotomous thinking by contrasting the glorious medieval Age of Faith vs. the nefarious Age of Reason which began with The Renaissance. Furthermore, by then “The Renaissance” had grown from the original limited understanding of particular rebirths in the visual arts and letters into an omnivore embracing all aspects of life and culture. It arguably reached its acme in 1860 with the publication in German of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, who among other things assumed that because The Italian Renaissance was A Good Thing women then enjoyed equality with men (an astonishing thing on many levels for a Swiss male to have imagined in the middle of the nineteenth century). The influence of Burckhardt's treatment has been such that no one thought to doubt his contention about women until the (re)birth of the feminist movement in the 1960s. In fact, Burckhardt continues to be widely available in various translations and paperback editions, and I know of no other field of historical scholarship (or of scholarship in general) in which a book published over 150 years ago continues to command such authority. As a whole, scholars of “The

Renaissance” do not wish to let go of the received party line or to hear much, if anything at all, about the Middle Ages. Instead they continue to speak and write about Renaissance society, economy, politics, technology, etc., as if they were something wholly different from and of course superior to any comparable medieval. And from a practical point of view, “modern” historians so outnumber medievalists that it is extremely difficult to change the content of textbooks in ways which run counter to the received wisdom of the age. And so the received old dichotomous bromides survive, sometimes explicitly, often in some kind of covert form just beneath the surface (and hence all the more insidious): medieval vs. Renaissance, faith vs. reason, clerical vs. lay, collective vs. individual, noble vs. bourgeois, Italian vs. northern European, pagan vs. Christian, immoral vs. moral, etc., etc., etc.⁵

The reality as revealed by careful historical study is quite otherwise. In terms of fundamental structures and novel features, there was no such thing as “Renaissance society,” which would be much better understood if we labeled it “late medieval,” whether it happens to be Italian or, say, German or English. So, too, with the economy or with politics or with technology—“late medieval” invariably fits better than “Renaissance.” At every turn there is much more continuity than discontinuity between “The Middle Ages” and “The Renaissance,” but the dichotomous tendency in our reflexive, culturally programed response is so ineradicable that we are again and again forced or urged to choose one label or the other, which in turn perpetuates and implicitly validates the anti-theoretical way of thinking about the Middle Ages and The Renaissance.

In fact, however, if there was any sharp break or caesura between “The Middle Ages” and something else, it was instead in two broad developments rooted in the sixteenth century: in Europe, the Protestant Reformations, the permanent shattering of the ever more tenuous unity of medieval Christianity, the near-destruction of the Roman Church (saved largely by the loyalty of the Habsburg and Wittelsbach families), the end of the papal monarchy and the full emergence of real sovereignty, and the sharp and permanent decline of the clerical estate in authority, power, and numbers; and beyond Europe, the “discovery” of the Americas, the creation of overseas European empires, the first globalization, the bypassing of the Mediterranean and of the world of Islam, and the emergence of Roman Catholic Christianity as the first global religion.

All these developments make the two originally distinctive features of “The Renaissance” pale by comparison, especially since they, too, are organically

5 On this large subject, Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought. Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston, 1948), is still highly useful.

deeply rooted in the Middle Ages rather than embodying a sharp break after a thousand years of gloom. The first was in the visual arts and took place in two interconnected stages: the resurgence of “naturalism” and of the Greco-Roman dictum that “art imitates nature” (*mimesis*) from the thirteenth century onward, and the more specific revival of neo-classicism in architecture and in the subject matter of the other arts from the fifteenth century onward (in which classical subjects came to supplement, not displace, traditional religious subjects). These two layered patterns then dominated the artistic tradition of Europe and its colonial offshoots down into the nineteenth century. Yet thanks largely to the flood of Italian writing about Italian achievements in the visual arts, the impression was created and persists to this day that it was the Italians who did it all and then shared this beneficence with the rest of Europe. In fact, however, if one but looks dispassionately at the evidence in much the art of the “High Middle Ages” (manuscript illuminations, capital decoration, tomb sculpture, stained glass windows, cathedral portals, etc.), one sees here, there, and everywhere signs of growing concern with accurate re-presentation of things and creatures as they actually appear to the human eye. Where did this concern come from? Certainly it had something to do with the simultaneous revival of Aristotle and the Greek natural philosophers, all of whom drilled into the heads of their learned medieval admirers the truth that art imitates nature.⁶ The sculptors who wrought the fine figures of Naumburg cathedral, the Church and the Synagogue at Strasbourg, or facial details of the tomb of the first Habsburg emperor, Rudolf I (1273–91), needed no illumination or instruction from Italians in their passion for verisimilitude.

So, too, with the movement in the world of letters and education popularly known as “humanism,” and widely misunderstood as “secular humanism” and as embodying the “revival of Antiquity” (as Burckhardt put it in one of the six divisions of his nefarious work), notions which are largely distorted when not downright nonsensical. Attempts to revive selected facets of Antiquity (including Judaeo-Christian antiquity, not merely Greco-Roman) went back at least as far as Boethius’ aspiration to translate all of Plato and Aristotle into Latin, a project which would have altered greatly the cultural history of the West had it not been abruptly ended by his execution around the age of forty-five. The Carolingian “Renaissance” witnessed not only the legal rebirth of the Roman Empire in the West, but also the recopying of a huge percentage (upwards of

6 For this pivotal but little studied topic, see Lynn White, “Natural Science and Naturalistic Art in the Middle Ages,” (1947), repr. in his *Medieval Religion and Technology. Collected Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), 23–41.

90%) of the classical Latin heritage. The “Renaissance of the Twelfth Century” saw the rebirth of Roman law, Aristotle, the Greek natural philosophers, and various other Roman authors. It also saw the genesis of universities, of a learned culture called Scholasticism dominated by logic and its rules, and an obsession with theorizing and model-building with little concern about the relation of learning to life—all of them decidedly unclassical developments. Another such departure was the growth of writing in the vernacular, which had begun with the translation of the Bible into Gothic by Ulfilas (+c. 384), “Apostle to the Goths,” and was followed by translation of various parts of Scripture into all manner of vernacular tongues all through the Middle Ages (e.g., King Alfred’s translation of around fifty of the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon in the ninth century). Written literature in the vernacular tongues began to blossom as well, with Italian and English as relative latecomers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, respectively. Latin had in fact experienced what Nicholas Ostler calls its “first death” already in the eighth century, by which time it had ceased to be the primary language learnt by anyone at home (and therefore since then has been an artificially sustained language).⁷ Beginning with the writing down of the laws of the Anglo-Saxons in the vernacular after c. 600 (the only Germanic people to do so initially, for on the Continent they did so in Latin), the vernaculars in the High Middle Ages made spectacular leaps forward in the High Middle Ages as languages of law and administration as well as literature, so much so that one might speak of another crisis of Latin in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁸ While Latin remained the language of the Church, the universities, and diplomacy, it was losing out to the vernaculars in administration and law. Even churchmen were shifting away from it. In doing dissertation research long ago on the bishops of Speyer, for example, I had noticed that they had moved over from Latin to German in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. In this connection, one should note the widespread misconception that it was Martin Luther who created a common German language with his translation of the Bible, whereas Luther himself knew the truth of matter and remarked on the creation of a common German language in the chanceries of Germany (and especially of his native Saxony) in the fourteenth century: “I have no special language of my own. I use the common German language, so that both High and Low Germans may

7 Nicholas Ostler, *Empires of the Word. A Language History of the World* (New York, 2005), 315–22.

8 See Armin Wolf, *Gesetzgebung in Europa, 1100–1500. Zur Entstehung der Territorialstaaten* (2nd ed., Munich, 1996), although one has to exercise care in using this compilation, for sometimes a law code in the vernacular might have a Latin title, or vice-versa.

understand me equally well. In speech I follow the Saxon chancellor which is imitated by all the princes and kings of Germany.”⁹

Seen from this perspective, the movement we call “Renaissance humanism” was a profoundly reactionary one—against the decay of Latin into medieval barbarism and a corresponding desire to restore Latin to its Classical purity; against the triumph of logic in the university world at the complete expense of rhetoric, the traditional core of ancient and early medieval education, and a desire to restore rhetoric to its rightful place; and, finally, against not only the incursions of the vernacular vis-à-vis Latin, but the elevation of the vernacular over Latin by no less a figure than Dante. Bestriding both worlds as a vernacular poet who also wanted in the Scholastic manner to understand his enterprise rationally, Dante sought to create a common Italian literary language for the composition of poetry by studying what he discerned to be approximately twenty-two dialects of “Italian” in which poets were writing. He then wrote in Latin a treatise (unfinished) *On the Eloquence of the Vernacular* (*De vulgari eloquentia*), in which he wrote these words about Latin and the vernacular: “Of these two kinds of language, the more noble is the vernacular; first, because it was the language originally used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciations and using different words; and third, because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial.”¹⁰ Whether he meant to be provocative or not, Dante precipitated what one might call the late medieval (or, if one insists, Renaissance) debate about language, especially by calling the vernacular “natural” in a cultural world in which that word was highly charged and, by implication, calling Latin artificial and even unnatural. Petrarch found these words infuriating and with his influence made it unrespectable for decades for a man of true culture to write in the vernacular. In Florence Coluccio Salutati and his followers sustained this animus against the vernacular, supported from another direction by Lorenzo Valla’s *De elegantia linguae latinae*, who pronounced Latin the greatest surviving gift of the Romans and proceeded to sketch out the first history of the Latin language. The first person to follow Dante and take up the cudgels on behalf of the vernacular was someone with the credentials to do so: Leon Battista Alberti, architect, theoretician of painting and architecture,

9 This little-known passage, rarely cited, is quoted by Philippe Wolff, *Western Languages, A.D. 100–1500*, trans. Frances Parkridge (London, 1971), 218, and F.R.H. DuBoulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 1983), 4.

10 Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. S. Botterill, Cambridge Medieval Classics 6 (Cambridge and New York, 1996), 3. This seminal work is rarely discussed in texts on Renaissance history.

author of *Five Books on the Family* (in Italian), and author of the first known grammar of Italian. Thereafter it was again possible for learned men to write in the vernacular as well, but with the significant proviso that as “humanists” they would be judged *only* by the quality of their Latin. The animus against the vernacular continued with Erasmus (who famously wrote about Latin and Greek that “almost everything worth learning has been set forth in these two languages”¹¹) and all the way down to the nineteenth century, when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow fought in vain to introduce the academic study of Dante at Harvard College; the reverend faculty would have none of it. Outside the academy, Latin did not fare so well. Leonardo famously poked fun at the pretentious “humanists” by writing backwards in Italian in his *Notebooks* that “I am a man without letters” (*Sono uomo senza lettere*), and in the world of religion the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century threw out Latin as the language of the Bible and of public worship and replaced it with the vernacular, while Rome stuck to its guns until the 1960s.

Our understanding of the medieval roots of the complex phenomenon we call “Renaissance humanism” has been deepened in recent decades by various scholars, including R.W. Southern, who argued that there had been medieval humanism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹² More recently, Ronald Witt has explored in two prodigiously learned volumes the wondrously tangled roots of humanism in medieval Italian culture.¹³ Yet even he errs in seeing humanism as a distinctively lay movement in Italy, and in particular in underestimating the role of the Church and above all the papacy in promoting both humanism and humanists. This brings us to the subject of this essay, Popes Nicholas V (1447–55) and Pius II (1458–64) as *Renaissance* (as opposed to “medieval”) popes. It is habitually asserted that these two men are the first humanists to ascend the Throne of St. Peter and that with them we have the beginnings of “the Renaissance papacy,” particularly the restoration of the city of Rome and of the papacy itself to its former glory. But what does that mean? And does it make any sense?

Few historians have sufficiently appreciated and underscored the long-standing central role of the papal court in advancing the concerns and values

11 Erasmus, “On the Method of Study,” trans. Brian McGregor, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1974), 24:667.

12 R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism* (New York, 1970), and *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe* (Oxford-Cambridge, MA, 1995).

13 Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation thought 74 (Leiden-and Boston 2000), and *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (New York, 2012).

of the humanist movement, especially the preeminence of rhetoric, Latin, and the highest-quality Latin in both speech and writing. One of those scholars is Peter Partner, who established himself early on as a foremost historian of both the medieval and early modern papacy.

The relation of the papacy to the new humanist learning of the Renaissance period was central to the papal mission. The hegemony of the Roman church in Europe was essentially that of a cultural elite. It was dependent on literary communication and on the effective transmission of ideas as well as on the preservation of popular religious and cultural patterns. Overlaid though it was by all sorts of accretions, late-antique Latin culture was still in a sense *the* culture of the Roman Church. The revival of late-antique culture was bound to affect the transmission of the message of the church. In the papal court the secretaries were using the humanist literary idiom in some papal letters almost as soon as such an idiom can be said to have existed. From the beginning the papal court was one of the great centres of humanist learning. Even in fourteenth-century Avignon the role of the papal court had not been negligible for the great humanist poet Petrarch. When Pope John XXIII moved from Bologna to Constance in 1414 to preside at the Council that was to deprive him of the papacy, he was accompanied by the best humanists and men of letters of his time. It was inevitable, given the clerical control of medieval education and culture, the financial and cultural resources of the papal court, and the professional needs of the papal bureau, that humanists should find patronage and employment in Rome. The popes were the patrons and employers of humanists from the moment that such a term can be used, and for centuries they remained so. When the young John Milton visited Rome in 1638 he came as a humanist to one of the great European centres of humanism, which had never ceased to be so from the beginnings of the "revival of letters".¹⁴

One might add by way of fuller explanation that this was so because the papal court was the most important court in all Europe from the eleventh century down to the Reformation. Canon law touched everyone in some way or other (especially the law of marriage), and the pope was also the supreme appellate judge in all Europe. All manner of impetrators came before the papal court, which was therefore the most intensely political place in Europe. At the

14 Peter Partner, *Renaissance Rome 1500–1559. A Portrait of a Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976), 13.

same time, since “the church” was everywhere in many different forms, the papacy early on realized the importance of delegation of authority and the maintenance of connections and thus developed the most advanced diplomatic service in all Europe.¹⁵ And everywhere, behind the law, rhetoric was central, as Partner recognized. The ability to express oneself in speech and writing in fine Latin, with the ability, if necessary, to say absolutely nothing beautifully or even to appear to be saying one thing while in fact meaning the opposite—this is what made a humanist and made humanists indispensable to the workings of politics in Europe. If this sounds overly cynical, one need only remember from Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* that Folly herself underscores the necessity of folly and of a certain measure of charitable duplicity for human existence.

And it was in this world of the Roman Curia and of the Latin Church that the future popes Nicholas V and Pius II made their way, especially in the service of cardinals (Niccolo Albergati and Domenico Capranica, respectively). Given their interests and abilities, it is fair to call them the first two humanist popes, but their differing significance reveals how equivocal that word is. Tomasso Parentucelli, unlike Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, did not leave behind a corpus of neo-Latin writings which might earn him the esteem of other humanists, but he was enormously important in both defining and promoting this movement. Vespasiano da Bisticci, the Florentine bookseller and chronicler of famous men of the fifteenth century, tells us that the future pope was pivotal in helping Cosimo de’Medici and other patrons of humanism organize their libraries, but he gives us no indication what Parentucelli’s organizing principle was. Twenty years ago Benjamin Kohl pointed out that the phrase *studia humanitatis* had been floating about in Italy since 1369, but no one had specified precisely what those studies were. It was only around 1438 that when Cosimo de’Medici, the godfather of Florence, wanted to establish a library to atone for his sins, he asked Parentucelli, secretary to Cardinal Albergati, both of whom were very much involved in the ecumenical council then meeting in Florence, what kinds of books he should obtain for his library.¹⁶ Father Parentucelli then enumerated the basic five disciplines which quickly came to define the humanist agenda: grammar, rhetoric, (ancient) history, poetry, and

15 Here again we see the pernicious influence of The Renaissance in Garrett Mattingly’s much-lauded *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston, 1955; repr., New York, 1988).

16 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates. The Vespasiano Memoirs. Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. W. George and E. Waters (New York, 1963), 38, 218–19.

moral philosophy.¹⁷ Almost overnight, “humanism” came to have definite shape. When Parentucelli was then elected Pope Nicholas V in 1447, he determined to “found” the Vatican Library—or so the story goes, one sometimes attacked by some scholars. Part of the problem here is terminological. The popes had always had a library, but until the Great Schism they had customarily resided at the palace adjacent to their cathedral seat, St. John Lateran. With their gradual removal to St. Peter’s and the Vatican in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was need of a new basilica, palace, and library. Nicholas’ enthusiasm for scholars and manuscripts was probably unprecedented, doubtless animated in part by rivalry with Florence and Cosimo de’Medici. Aside from buying lots of texts, he also attracted Greek scholars, thereby entering into competition with Venice as well. And to cap it all off, he granted a place at the papal court to the greatest scholar of his age—Lorenzo Valla. Even though Valla had finally demonstrated that the so-called Donation of Constantine was a forgery, that the so-called Apostles Creed was misnamed, and that the received text of the Vulgate was shot through with errors, in recognition of Valla’s monumental contributions to scholarship Pope Nicholas granted him not only a papal secretaryship, but also a canonry in the cathedral of St. John Lateran—where Valla is buried.

There is no doubt whatever that Nicholas dreamt on a grand scale about the restoration of Rome to its rightful place as the center of the Christian world. Whether he was the first to do so is unknown, but for all practical purposes he was the first pope in nearly four-hundred years to be in a position to do so. Consider the following facts about the papacy and Rome from Nicholas II (1059–61) to Nicholas V. In 1059 Nicholas II issued a decree centering the election of popes in the College of Cardinals. Unfortunately, the idea of any sort of majority principle had now yet been born in the West, and as a result in the period 1059–1179 there were two popes for no fewer than seventy-five out of one-hundred-twenty years (62.5% of the time).¹⁸ In 1179 Alexander III sought to resolve the conundrum by stipulating that that man is pope who is elected by two-thirds of the College, a law that has (with ever so slight modifications since 1965) obtained all the way down to the present and worked remarkably well nearly all of the time. It is therefore legally incorrect to speak of antipopes before 1179 (no matter what the Holy Roman Church or erring historians may say). Furthermore, because of these schisms as well as recurrent troubles with

17 Benjamin G. Kohl, “The Changing Concept of the *studia humanitatis* in the Early Renaissance,” *Renaissance Studies* 6 (1992):185–202, at 186, 198–99.

18 R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1970), 155.

the Roman people as well as the emperors, in the period 1100–1304 the popes spent only eighty-two years in Rome out of two-hundred-four (only 40% of the time).¹⁹ This absence of bishops from their cathedral cities was not at all uncommon in Europe at the time. The archbishops of Canterbury took up residing principally at Lambeth Palace from the thirteenth century onward, and most German prelates left their cathedral cities about the same time and lived elsewhere until the end of the ancien regime.²⁰ The removal of the popes to Avignon from 1309 to 1376 was therefore scarcely unusual, no matter how bad it was for business in Rome and infuriating to a few people like Petrarch and Catherine of Siena. Ironically, the return to Rome in 1377 helped to precipitate the return of division the following year, for the pressure of the violent Roman mob outside the Lateran gave cardinals a good reason to repudiate their election of Urban V and elect Robert Cardinal of Geneva, kinsman of the king of France, thereby launching the Great (Western) Schism, during which there were two popes until 1410 and then three until 1415.²¹ Nor was that the end of it. Although Martin V capitulated to the demands of the Council of Constance in 1417, his successor, Eugenius IV (1431–47), came to blows with the Council of Basel, which in 1439 deposed him and elected the retired count of Savoy as Felix V. It was the skillful diplomat, Nicholas V, who in 1449 secured the honorable abdication of Felix—the last antipope in history—and dissolution of the council of Basel, thereby effectively also ending the grave threat of conciliarism to the papal monarchy. Nicholas, of course, could not possibly have known of either fact or its long-term significance, but he had every reason to breathe a sigh of satisfaction and dream of past glory.

Tradition has it that he was also greatly impressed by the turnout of the faithful in Rome for the celebration of the Jubilee Year in 1450. In imagining a magnificently revived and restored Rome, he consulted with Leon Battista Alberti, whose collaboration and enthusiasm have probably been exaggerated by historians.²² In any event, Nicholas did not have enough money, and what

19 Guillaume Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon 1305–1378*, trans. Janet Love (New York, 1965), citing Louis Gayet, *Le Grand Schisme d'Occident* (Florence-Berlin, 1889), 3

20 Franz Petri, ed., *Bischöfs- und Kathedralstädte des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Städteforschung A 1 (Cologne-Vienna, 1976); J. Jeffrey Tyler, *Lord of the Sacred City. The Episcopus Exclusus in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 72 (Leiden-Boston, 1999).

21 On the tumultuous election and its aftermath, see Walter Ullmann, *The Origins of the Great Schism. A Study in Fourteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Politics* (London, 1948; repr., New York, 1967), 1–89.

22 See Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Renaissance* (New York, 2000), 265–66, 278–79, 283, 295–98, 300–15.

he did have he had to devote to more basic matters—the reestablishment of order throughout the Patrimony of St. Peter, above all by the building and rebuilding of fortresses. He was very much of a piece with the increasing militarization of the papacy and of the College of Cardinals in the high and later Middle Ages right up to the time of Julius.²³ Nicholas was, furthermore, very proud of his achievements in this realm, as the various versions of his testament reveal.

Finally, for all his humanist inclinations, Nicholas stood very much with the later medieval popes in his view of the prerogatives of the pope and of his place in the world as the Vicar of Jesus Christ here on earth. In 1455, in response to a request from the king of Portugal, Nicholas V issued a bull entitled *Romanus Pontifex*, granting

Full and free faculty to the said King Alfonso [V] to invade, conquer, crush, pacify, and subjugate any whomsoever Saracens, and pagans, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever established and their kingdoms, dukedoms,...and all mobile and immobile property whatsoever held and possessed by them, and to reduce their persons to perpetual servitude [*in perpetuam servitutem*]...²⁴

Although this view of papal dominion over the entire world had been increasingly articulated since at least the pontificate of Innocent IV (1243–54),²⁵ these are words that would have gladdened Gregory VII (1073–85), who had anticipated in what we might call bullet points (in the *Dictatus papae* of 1075) a similar vision of Roman primacy in all the world.²⁶ Nicholas simply employed the

23 See D.S. Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals and War. The Military Church in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (London-New York, 2006).

24 The long text in both Latin and English is widely available on the internet and in Francis Gardiner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies* (Washington, 1917), 9–26. This crucial section is quoted in John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change. The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, 2005), 63, who supplies full and mordant context for and commentary on this bull on pp. 62–67 (and, more generally, pp. 17–123). I have rendered the last word as “servitude” rather than “slavery” (the ubiquitous translation) because “slavery” automatically conjures up modern feelings about slavery and obscures the central fact that until the last two-hundred years or so the nearly universal practice in the conduct of war was to take everything and everyone that the conquerors wished.

25 See James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels. The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250–1550* (Philadelphia, 1979).

26 Cowdrey, *Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (Oxford, 1998), 502–07.

full range of beautiful words, useful words in the humanist armory to graft Christian missionary expansionism (commanded, after all, by Christ Himself) onto ancient Roman military imperialism. He saw no irreconcilability between the two, nor about putting “humanism” at the service of either. On the contrary, judged from the viewpoint of our assumptions about “humanism” and about the *intrinsic* evil of slavery (as Pope John Paul II put it), “humanism” conferred on Nicholas V no enlightenment whatsoever.

Nicholas was not succeeded immediately by another humanist, but rather by Calixtus III, the first of the Borgia popes who laid the foundation for the later ascent of that family into historical fame. In 1458 Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini was elected pope and took the name Pius, evoking immediately for those in the know the Latin phrase *pius Aeneas* which characterized the founder of Rome. Like Tommaso Parentucelli, Aeneas was impoverished and so had to make his way in the service of prelates and princes, in the course he wrote a great many works, literary, historical, and contemporary, all in fine neo-classical Latin. He topped it all off with his *Commentaries*, taking his cue from Julius Caesar, another Roman with whom he wished to be associated. He was not the first to deploy this reference, however. The Aretine humanist and Florentine chancellor Leonardo Bruni used the singular *Commentarius* for his memoirs,²⁷ and the Florentine sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti used *Commentaries* for his wide-ranging work which incorporated an autobiography.²⁸ As a form of self-memorialization, autobiography was, however, neither an ancient revival nor a creation of “the Renaissance,” but rather another point of continuity with “the Middle Ages,” when autobiographical works began to appear in unprecedented numbers from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward (e.g., Rather of Verona, Walter of Speyer, Otloh of St. Emmeram, Peter Abelard, Guibert of Nogent, Gerald of Wales, Emperors Charles IV and Maximilian I, etc.). It happens that Pius II's *Commentaries* is the only autobiography produced or at least left behind by any pope, and so as such it is neither characteristic nor representative of anything, but indeed unique.²⁹

27 *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, eds. and trans. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, 1987), 21–22.

28 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I Commentarii*, ed. Ottavio Morisani (Naples, 1947). Only parts of this work have been translated into English, and they do not include the autobiography in Part Two.

29 *The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. and ed. Florence Gragg and Leona Gabel, Smith College Studies in History 22, 25, 30, 35, and 43 (continuously paginated) (Northampton, MA, 1937–57). The same translators and editors undertook a far more readily available abridgment under the title *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II*.

Unlike Nicholas V, Pius is not usually regarded as a great promoter of humanists and the humanist movement, partly because he was so busy writing himself, partly because (some might say) he was so busy promoting himself. His account of the events of his own age is a very long work indeed (over 860 pages in complete English translation).³⁰ Perhaps the most startling revelation is of Pius' decision to lead personally a crusade against the Turks, a matter of the greatest urgency to him since Constantinople had fallen in 1453. From the very beginning of his pontificate he poured himself into trying to organize a concert of European powers. Unfortunately, the council or congress of Mantua (June 1459–January 1460) proved to be a great disappointment in its call for a three-year crusade. In deep frustration, Pius then devised a clever scheme to rouse the princes from their pastoral torpor. In April 1462 he spoke to six cardinals, all wise and loyal. He recalled that after the fall of Constantinople, Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (r. 1419–67), had vowed to go on crusade, provided that another great prince join him in this expedition, but none had been forthcoming. Philip therefore regarded himself as excused. Not so, said Pius: "He is excused but not absolved. His obligation still stands." Pius now resolved to force his hand:

We are resolved, old and ill as we are, to undertake war against the Turks in defense of the Catholic Faith. We will set out on the crusade. We will summon Burgundy to follow us who are both king and pontiff and we will claim the fulfillment of his vow and oath. No excuse will be open to him. A greater than king or emperor, the Vicar of Christ, will declare war. It will not beseem a duke bound by a vow to stay at home. If Philip accedes to our desires, he will not come without a great and mighty army. Many will follow so noble a prince...We will command a five-year truce between all Christians now at variance. On those who obey we will bestow Heaven's blessing...the disobedient we will excommunicate and consign to the devil as slaves of everlasting fire...On land and sea we shall easily equip the war when it once becomes known that the Pope of Rome with the holy senate is marching straight on to win salvation for all and desires no man's silver since he is resolved to risk not only his own gold but his own person for Christ's sake.³¹

An Abridgment (London, 1960). References to this work hereafter will be to both the complete text and to the shorter *Memoirs*.

30 And over 2,700 pages long in an edition with the Latin text and facing Italian translation, plus notes (*I Commentarii*, ed. Luigi Tataro [Milan, 1984]).

31 *Commentaries*, pp. 517–18; *Memoirs*, pp. 237–38.

The cardinals were appropriately astonished at the novelty of this proposal, for no pope had ever done anything like this. In response to the crushing defeat of the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071, Pope Gregory VII in 1074 had talked and written about leading a great army of 50,000 to the East, but nothing had come of it.³² Later popes declared and launched crusades, but not one accompanied, much less led, a crusade—at least not until Pius II, almost 400 years after Gregory VII. For Pius, however, it was not merely talk, for even though the expected hosts did not turn up, he still journeyed to the papal naval base at Ancona. The six cardinals had assured him that “his purpose was worthy of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, who like a shepherd did not hesitate to lay down his life for his sheep.”³³ Had he expected to die on this venture and receive the palm of martyrdom, even though he presumably must have known that Rome did not canonize fallen crusaders as martyrs, despite the clear wishes of crusaders like King St. Louis IX (who was only accorded the title of “confessor”)?³⁴ Or rather, aware of his failing health, did he instead decide upon a last grand gesture to seal the renown for which he had so assiduously worked?³⁵ While he waited, the expedition fell apart for want of transport, and two days after the arrival of the Venetian flotilla of twelve galleys, led by the Doge himself, Pius died on August 15, 1464.³⁶

In short, although their humanist backgrounds equipped Nicholas V and Pius II with better Latin and rhetoric, and hence diplomatic and political skills, than many of their medieval predecessors, they still had far more in common with them than the term “Renaissance popes” might suggest. Here, too, then, the term “late medieval” is far more on the mark.

32 H.E.J. Cowdrey, “Pope Gregory VII’s ‘Crusading’ Plans of 1074,” in his *Popes, Monks and Crusaders* (London, 1984), X, 27–40. Cowdrey’s later *Pope Gregory VII*, 484, adds nothing to the earlier article.

33 *Commentaries*, p. 518 (Memoirs, p. 239). On crusading as a form of the imitation of Christ, see William Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia, c.1095–c.1187* (Woodbridge-Rochester, 2008), *passim*.

34 William Chester Jordan, “Honouring Saint Louis in a small town,” *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 263–77, at 266–68.

35 As he openly states in the very first paragraph of the *Commentaries*, p. 9 (Memoirs, p. 26).

36 On this crusade, see Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274–1580. From Lyons to Alcazar* (Oxford, 1992), 105–09, who calls Pius “the greatest crusade pope since Gregory X [1271–76]” (p. 105).