THE HUMANISTS, THE PAGAN CLASSICS

AND S. BERNARDINO DA SIENA

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Who in the Italy of the early Quattrocento could boast of greater knowledge and more direct experience of life and culture on the peninsula than that of itinerant Franciscan preacher, Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444)? Enormously popular and prodigiously energetic, Bernardino devoted his entire adult life—nearly forty years—to a mission of continuous travel among the towns of Italy, meeting, conversing with and evangelizing his fellow countrymen. Preaching in the cathedrals and public squares' Bernardino, from 1408 until his death, had covered (sometimes more than once) every major city and town of northern and central Italy, with many stops at the smaller ones: not only Siena, Florence, Rome, Venice, Bologna and Milan (where his fame as preacher first blossomed in 1417), but also Ferrara, Padua, Verona, Genoa, Mantua, Pavia, Brescia, Alessandria, Como (he even passed into the Canton Ticino), Treviso, Bergamo, Cremona, Piacenza, Crema, Vicenza, Bassano, Belluno, Feltre, Modena, Lucca, Prato, Volterra, Arezzo, Grosseto, Perugia, Assisi, Todi, Gubbio, Viterbo, Rieti, Urbino, Forlì, Rimini, L'Aquila (where he died and is buried) and many place in between. Often asked to preach entire Lenten, Advent or other liturgical cycles, Bernardino was likely to spend weeks in a given place and thereby have ample occasion to observe (and frequently directly intervene in) the political and social affairs of his hosting commune. He was thus a man well acquainted with his times, the eight volumes of his celebrated prediche volgari being both the abundant proof and fruit of this acquaintance.

Spawning most of the first half of the fifteenth century, Bernardino's busy preaching career coincided with those years of great cultural-intellectual ferment in Italy, the rise and rapid affirmation of Humanism. Now, the hostility with which Bernardino's near contemporary and fellow clergyman, Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici, greeted this new culture is well known, having been given forcibly direct expression in the friar's controversial treatise, Lucula noctis. But Dominici did not speak for everyone in the Church, and certainly not for Bernardino. But what specifically was Bernardino's own rapport with Humanism? What reception was it given in the friar's life and teaching? Unfortunately, an answer cannot be as easily supplied as in the case of Dominici, Bernardino never having explicitly addressed the issue. Yet, we can with some effort, sifting through the available data (textual as well as biographical), know the friar's mind on the matter.

There is no doubt that Bernardino's fundamental forma mentis was, from the start, loyally medieval and scholastic. From what we know of his early education and Franciscan training, Bernardino appears securely linked by virtue of these studies to the intellectual heritage of the medieval-scholastic past. Classroom education apart, Bernardino had, furthermore, been formed in Siena (brought there at age eleven from his birthplace, Massa Marittima), a city which had had its greatest period of cultural-economic achievement already in the Due-Trecento and, after suffering a period of commercial decline, by the fifteenth century (when Humanism was gathering its greatest force) represented only a secondary urban center, geometrically and culturally somewhat « off the beaten trail. » Proud of her glorious medieval achievements, Siena remained imbued with the aura and traditions of her past. There the Renaissance...
penetrated much later than in Florence or other cities, the first
humanist of real note to teach in the city being Filelfo for a brief
time around the year 1434 3. This therefore was the climate in
which Bernardino passed his adolescence and early manhood and
which decided his own cultural perspective.

Yet, as a youth, he would still have come into contact, however
brief and tenuous, with the new ideas and ideals of Humanism
in the person of Giovanni di Boccaccio da Spoleto, his teacher in the
trivium and friend of Coluccio Salutati. (There exists a long letter
written by Salutati to Giovanni in which the former gives his friend
a catalogue raisonné of his works.) 4 At that time Giovanni « rappre-
sentava a Siena l'alta cultura: » 5 an « eminent teacher of moral
philosophy, » 6 whose noted treatise on the schism in the Western
Church, De schismate tollendi, was much thought of in his day and
can be found today in the Vatican Library, the scholar had come
to Siena from the University of Bologna in 1396. Invited by the
Comune to teach in its Studio, he also gave public readings of and
lectures on the Divina Commedia. It is impossible to think that
given the fame and importance of Salutati, Giovanni would not have
spoken to his students, Bernardino among them, of the works and
ideas of the Florentine cancelliere. Bernardino’s praise, at one point,
of three specific Florentines seems to suggest this possibility. It
was, in fact, Giovanni who would have taught « literature » — then
part of the study of rhetoric — to the young Bernardino (and it is
he no doubt who was responsible for both the relatively good
acquaintance with the Divina Commedia which Bernardino appears
to have, as well as for the great esteem he displays toward its
author). Bernardino, preaching to the Florentines in 1425, praises
Giovanni’s friend, Salutati, in unqualified terms, along with Dante
and another illustrious Florentine: « Il vostro poeta Dante, messer
Francesco Petrarcha, messer Colucci nobilissime cose fecciono et da
chomendargli grandissimamente » (C. 311-312) 7.

Later, whatever the nature of his studies in the intervening years,
reaching adulthood, Bernardino as « wandering evangelist » was able
to encounter face-to-face many of the principal personages of the
humanist movement and therefore come to know for himself the
ideals and goals of that movement — that is, the re-animation of
classical letters, with its accompanying endeavors in the fields of
ethics, philology, archeology, art and architecture and its resultant
cultivation of new models of eloquence and education. An interest-
ed, alert, active participant in the daily life of this age, Bernardino
could not help but be aware of the latest news, for example, of the
joyous discoveries of lost classical texts, the establishment of new
schools and of new humanist intellectual centers at the courts,
palaces and private homes of Italy. Such an awareness of the special
achievements being accomplished in his homeland in this special
moment in time seems to underlie Bernardino’s pointed observation
that « (L)a patria d’Italia è la più intellettiva parte del mondo, e To-
scana è la più intellettiva provincia d’Italia, e Firenze è la più intel-
lettiva città di Toscana » (B. 64).

Such an awareness could not have failed to developed through
meeting and forming friendships, as he did, with several of the

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3 C. Faiggiano, L'eloquenza volgare di San Bernardino da Siena in La Ras-
4 M. Sticco, Poesia e pensiero in San Bernardino da Siena (Milano: Vita
e Pensiero, 1945) p. 129.
5 P. Bargellini, San Bernardino da Siena (Brescia: Morcelliana, sesta edi-
6 L. Benvoogdenti, Vita sancti Bernardini in Analecta Bollandiana, XXI
(1902), p. 16.
leading figures of Italy at the time on many an occasion. In addition to his trips to that city to preach his two corsi in 1424 and 1425, Bernardino was also present in Florence while the Church Council (1439) was being held there (to discuss the issue of unification of the Western and Eastern Churches) and which had drawn to the city many important humanists and other scholars of both East and West. In Florence, Bernardino knew and gained the friendship as well as the respect of Vespasiano da Bisticci (whose shop the friar used to frequent, as he tells us in the very complimentary portrait of Bernardino in his Vite di uomini illustri), Giannozzo Manetti, Ambrogio Traversari (whose letters contain many references to Bernardino in either praise or vigorous defense of the saint against his detractors), Tommaso Parentucelli (the future pope Niccolò V who was to canonize Bernardino in 1450), and Leonardo Bruni. An indication of the esteem which Bruni and the city of Florence had for the Franciscan is the letter sent to Bernardino by Bruni as chancellor in 1425, inviting, rather, entreating the saint to return to their city to preach. The letter begins thus:

Fratri Bernardino. - Reverende vir paterque amantissime, Quanta devotione et quam eximia charitate florentinus populus erga personam vestrum affiliatur et quam libenter ac prope gaudenti animo inceruatione vestras directionesque exaudiat, nil titnet nunc verbis referre vobis, qui admirabilem concursum celebritatemque quo saepenumber conspexistis. Sunt enim adhuc plena aures civium nostrorum divinis atque mellifluis eloquis vestris, et quamvis plenae sint, tamen eamdem illam suavitatem quasi vacuae concupiscunt...

—a great display of affection indeed, all the more remarkable when one reads the friar’s Quaresimale preached in the city in the previous year in which he is quite open and passionate in his condemnation of the corruption of his Florentine hosts, sparing the feelings of no one.

Despite his severity and his ascetism, Bernardino appealed to the people of his day, including the most learned among them. In Rome (1427), he met Maffeo Vegio (author of the treatise on humanist pedagogy, De educatione liberorum) who was to later write the saint’s biography upon which future generations were to depend so much for the facts of Bernardino’s life; and in Siena (1425), he saw and made a lasting impression on the young Enea Silvia Piccolomini (who, as he describes in the minibiography of the friar included in his De viris illustribus, after having heard Bernardino preach, wanted immediately to become a Franciscan but was instead dissuaded by friends who convinced him that his true calling was elsewhere). Bernardino was likewise on familiar terms with Francesco Barbaro who, as podestà of Treviso, invited the friar to preach in that city (1423). In the years 1421-1422, preaching in Venice, he there came to know Leonardo Giustiniani; in Pavia, Cattone Sacco; in Milan, Gasparino Barzizza; and in Padua, Vittorino da Feltre. Finally, in the midst of these encounters and consequent friendships, in an unmistakable gesture of interest in the new culture forming in his day, despite his age (he was by then 43) and his busy apostolic schedule, Bernardino actually frequented the school of Guarino Veronese for three months in 1423 — a surprising and noteworthy fact recorded both in Guarino’s Epistolario and in Ludovico Carbone’s oration upon the death of Guarino. Listening to the lessons of Guarino, Bernardino would have had the opportunity of gaining the purest, most vivid picture of the ideals and endeavors of that first generation of humanist scholars. From Guarino’s school Bernardino also acquired a new and valuable companion, Alberto da Sar-
disappointed. Bernardino is, yes, a mirror of his age, but the image which his sermons present us with is a selective one, including only one or two fleeting reflections of the society of the humanists.

Nonetheless, having said this, we are able to identify one important area in which the friar shows himself to be in fundamental agreement with his humanist contemporaries, thus explaining, at least in part, how so close a bond of mutual acceptance and esteem could exist between these men of otherwise dissimilar occupation. This point of encounter is the issue of education, its nature and goals, an issue so dear and so central to humanist inquiry and activity, as it would be for Bernardino, teacher of the masses. Before going further, we ask: are we necessarily to see here in these common ideals a manifestation of the influence of Humanism on Bernardino's thought? This is perhaps possible though not demonstrable given available evidence and not the only explanation. Were not Bernardino and his contemporaries in that first generation of Christian humanists both children of the same medieval-scholastic world (the former more pronouncedly so, to be sure, than the latter)? And thus did they not draw to a large extent from the same intellectual-cultural heritage? That Bernardino and so many of his humanist contemporaries could be in agreement on the level of fundamental principle on this issue, as we shall see, is only further demonstration, contrary to certain previous interpretations of the period, that the passage from scholasticism to humanism was decidedly one of evolution rather than revolution.

Bernardino treats the subject of study in two of his prediche volgari: one delivered in Florence in 1425 entitled «Come si deve occupare il tempo in istudiere cose spirituali» (XVII) and the other, containing the same message and concrete advice, entitled «Questa è la predica che si fece a li studenti che studiavano,» the 42nd of the sermons preached to the Sienese later in the same year. Both sermons are urgent defenses of the value of study which, for the intellectual and technical skills it imparts, is automatically and always equated with a life of productive labor and active service to one's community. In each, the saint's message is the same: if you want to live a better life, you must devote time to study, whether pursued in school or on your own; in other words, education is the key to «il ben vivare:

L'uomo senza scienza è una canna vana in nocimenti... Lo studio è ottima cosa e onesta... (S)egue lo studio, che in esso s'impara ogni
virtù... lo studio fa l'uomo valente. E però non sia niuna che l'abbia a male ch'io v'insegno a ben vivere... tanto sta bene al gentile uomo lo studio quanto all'anello la gemma... Istudio adunque e vivereal lieto e giocondo... » 14

— all sentiments which no humanist or scholastic would have found argument with 15. Since he is a minister of the World of God and not a university pedagogue, Bernardino focuses his remarks in these two discourses specifically on lo studio morale o spirituale: « come si dee occupare il tempo in istudiare cosa spirituali » runs the title of his sermon to the Sienese while elsewhere he likewise specifies « onestissima cosa è a darsi a studio o morale o spirituale, e non istare alla loggia di messer Zaro (the name of a dice game) » and still elsewhere: « (In) che si debba esercitare il giovane a essere gentile uomo?... Allo studio de' santi dottori e 'l vivere morale » (C. 308, D. 213). Yet, as is well evident in his remarks (cited further below) concerning the Studio of Siena and the necessity of having an educated citizenry, Bernardino is at the same time fully ap-

14 The quotes are taken respectively from G. 298, C. 309, G. 297, G. 301, G. 297 and C. 309-310 — a statement which echoes Vergerios's De ingenium moribus where we find the following description and exaltation of the artes liberales: « lo chiamo liberali quegli studi che convengono a uomo libero, per i quali si esercita o si collita la virtù e la sapienza, e il corpo e l'animo ad ogni miglior bene si educa, e coi quali siamo soliti procurarci gloria ed onore, premii promessi, dopo quelli della virtù, all'uomo sapiente. Poiché, come le arti ignobili hanno per fin il guadagno e il piacere, così la virtù et la gloria rimangono lo scopo degli arti liberali. ». (Quoted in L'educazione umanistica in Italia, a cura di Eugenio Garin [Bari: Laterza, 1949], p. 67). Humility, however, is the virtue which Bernardino esteems above the rest, even and especially in the learned. « E nota che ogni gran dottore di Santa Chiesa, » he points out to his audience, « a puta grandissima umiltà » (B. 116). The glory and honor Bernardino and Vergerio refer to are therefore to be understood, not in terms of self-aggrandizement but rather in the light of the Christian ideal: glory as the just reward, given in moderation, for deeds well-done, deeds virtuously done ad maorem Dei gloriam; glory as the inevitable consequence, the « shadow of virtue, » as Augustine explains to Francesco in Petrarch's Secretum.

15 In praising study, Bernardino also uses the same vocabulary — onore and gloria — which we encounter in humanist treatises to describe the ultimate rewards of a liberal education. For instance, Bernardino states: « Adunque lo studio è utile per te, per la tua famiglia, per la tua città e per i tuoi amici, e potrai comparire in tutte le terre del mondo, e innanzi a qualunque signore, e diventerai uomo, ove sarresti un zero senza lo studio. Adunque, grande gloria è lo studio » (C. 309-310) — a statement which echoes Vergerio's De ingenium moribus. The humanist's defense of study is the conviction (as much scholastic as it is quintessentially humanistic) that ignorance is in fact « the root of all evil » and as such is to be both feared and combated.Echoing the sentiments of Petrarch in his Dell'ignoranza (« Quale povertà credi tu sia per l'anima l'ignoranza? Ben grande, tale che tranne il vizio, non ve né un'altra maggiore ») 16, Bernardino declares war on ignorance:

Inspirato dal sommo Iddio, per carità (voglio) impugnare questa santa quaresima contro a quella cosa che molti ne inganna, e quella cosa che pericola il mondo, le città e le castella, le provincie, e popoli e le speciali persone, la qual cosa si chiama ignoranza... (C)contro a lei combatteremo alla larga. Ella è quella bestia che santo Giovanni scrive a undici capitoli dell'Apocalisse che usci del pozzo dell'abisso... L'ignoranza è un grande abisso di tenebre, che ella è seura, fredda e debole... Tutto il male volere, tutto il male potere è nello abisso della profonda ignoranza. (I)1 maggiore amico che abbi el dimonio è lo ignorante e l'ozioso (C. 321-322, G. 301). Bernardino realizes that the « gentile intelletto » — that is to say, the refined, educated mind — is far better equipped to recognize good and evil (« Come t'ó detto piu volte, quanto piu l'uomo è di gentile intelletto, tanto piu apprende el bene e così el male, » B. 64) while his antithesis, « l'uomo animale », as Bernardino calls him, is less able to tell good from bad, being more attracted to the immediate, sensory pleasures, incapable of appreciating the higher « beni spirituali: » « L'uomo animale non è capace de' beni spirituali; del godimento che l'anima giusta a(,) ingrassa e sta lieto. Lo intelletto gentile ch'è nelle cose di Dio ben fisso, ingrassa di Dio. El mondanaccio brodoso no' è altro che carnaccio » (D. 262). Proceeding from this premise, Bernardino confutes the popular notion of « gentility. » It is the « bestiality del mondo » which, according to the saint, « crede che i gentili uomini sieno quegli che stanno a forbire le panche e andarsi trastullando con la civetta in mano » (D. 213), that is to say, those who pass their time in carefree idleness and frivolous pastimes. If this be the case, Bernardino points out ironically, then the pig must be the noblest of creatures: « tu dici: Egli è nobilità

preciative of the inherent goodness and utility of all branches of learning.

At the heart of Bernardino's defense of study is the conviction (as much scholastic as it is quintessentially humanistic) that ignorance is in fact « the root of all evil » and as such is to be both feared and combated. Echoing the sentiments of Petrarch in his Dell'ignoranza (« Quale povertà credi tu sia per l'anima l'ignoranza? Ben grande, tale che tranne il vizio, non ve né un'altra maggiore ») 16, Bernardino declares war on ignorance:

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lo starsi; el porco (allora) è nobilissimo, però che sempre si sta in lussuria, broda e ribalderia » (G. 298). Instead, true gentility resides in those who exercise their minds and their talents and then apply the fruits of that study in profitable employment for the good of their families and community:

L’anima à questa natura: quanto più s’esercita, tanto più si desta e raffina. Il corpo che sta in ozio con l’anima insieme ingrassa ed è porcaccio... (D. 213);

(C)osi studiando e pigliando diletto, vaghi della vagillazione della mente e non ti grilla il cervello come agli atri giovangeli o uomini fatti che non attendono a studio nium, ma a forbire le panche... (C. 305);

Se non ti eserciti..., diventi come un porco in istia che pappa e bee e dorme; non attendi ad altro che mangiare, a bere e dormire, e lussuriare. La gentilezza non sta nell’oziosità, ma nello essercio di te e della tua famiglia, e della tua città... (C. 307).

Therefore, the aim of education is for Bernardino as it is for Petrarch, for Salutati, for Alberti and for Vittorino da Feltre, the formation of morally-upright citizens ready for service to God and country: « Che fanno allo studente le scienze? Fanno tre case: Primo, diletto; secondo, onesto; terzo, et utile... Impossibile cosa a che se tu studi, che non sia altro che valentuomo o virtuoso... » (G. 296, G. 309).

Absent, however, from Bernardino’s remarks on study are the classical authors who, as we know, occupied an important position alongside Scripture, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in the curriculum of the humanist pedagogues. The Bernardinian syllabus contains, it would seem, only sacred readings:

(D)ice santo Girolamo: Ama la scienza della Scrittura santa, il Vecchio Testamento e ’1 Nuovo, ingrassati di dilezione di Dio!... (E. 50);

(S)i mantiene l’anima e la buona coscienza, per le Sante Scritture del Testamento Vecchio e del Nuovo, l’Epistole di santo Pavolo e degli altri santi Apostoli; le Scritture de’ Vangeli che sono e Vangeli; e sermoni de’ santi Dottori de’ vecchi e de’ nuovi; le leggende de’ santi Martiri; a la vita de’ santi Confessori; a la costanza de le sante Vergini... (F. 53).

(N)el Danieli studiare d’ libri d’ dottori santi e della santa Scrittura, nella Bibbia o in qualunque altro santo libro, ti porgo alla mente tanto diletto che passa tutti gli altri (C. 304-305).

These are the only texts Bernardino mentions in his advice on the subject of profitable reading and study for the Christian. Bernardino himself obviously took the same intense delight and experienced the same intimate « meeting of two minds » through his sacred studies that Petrarch and, later, even Machiavelli in his panni curiali derived from their reading of the authors of antiquity; but while the emotional-intellectual experience is perhaps the same, again, the reading list is different:

Non aresi tu un gran piacere se tu vedessi o udissi predicare Gesù Cristo? Grandissimo! Così san Paulo, santo Agustino, santo Gregorio, santo Geronimo, e santo Ambrugio e gli altri santi dottori? Mai si! Or va’, leggi i loro libri, qual più ti piace, o di qual più fai istima, e parlerai con loro ed egli parleranno teo; udiranno te e tu udirsi loro, e gran diletto ne piglierai (C. 305).

Despite the fact that Bernardino does not feel the same enthusiasm and reverence of his humanist contemporaries for the classical authors, the friar never displays any sign of hostility toward them or toward those scholars who study them; he knew very well that men such as Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome themselves read and studied with great interest and profit the Greek and Latin classics in whose works they found formulated that sapientia which assists man in his pilgrimage to God. Unlike the angry and suspicious Dominici, whose Lucula noctis was written in direct attack against Coluccio Salutati and the growing popularity of «pagan » studies fostered by the chancellor, Bernardino never engaged in polemics against what Dominici saw as the pernicious infiltration of pagan influence in the formation of the Christian mind. However, the saint does have an opinion on the subject of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and in one sermon cautiously airs his view. In line with his humanist friends (who were at the same time faithful Christians - Guarino, Traversari, Manetti, et. al.), Bernardino states his view on the question of the pagan classics by making it clear that Sacred Scripture is to be preferred above the rest. Although in the following passage he specifically refers to the Greek philosophers, his remarks can easily be applied to all the ancient auctores for, as the saint says, it is Scripture which represents the most direct route to spiritual health:

Eloquia Domini declaratio sermonum tuorum. - La dichiarazione delle tue parole; — non dice la dichiarazione di Platone, nè di
Aristotle, none of his other philosophers, that they were biased, no; but if you wish to praise the other, you shall praise me. However, he who would praise the medusa who is it, to a pen? He would praise it! The passage contains a list, drawn up by Olivi, of the 'multiplex vitium et periculum suboritur studio et cultui'. The Apostles 'ex profitibus humanorum et paganorum, quod supra modum arroganter et inaniter glo-

Vanity, distraction, error and heresy: the list was enough to persuade Bernardino for it would seem that the friar adopted Olivi's advice as his guidelines in the practice of his own preaching.

Bernardino was of course not ignorant of the achievements of classical antiquity (at one point he praises the Romans for their custom of training children in a profession or trade at a very early age, declaring: 'I romani antichi e valenti uomini in ogni arte tene-

Ex quo multiplex vitium et periculum suboritur studio et cultui christiano: Primum est superbe et inanis glorie, quia huiusmodi allegatores philosophorum suprema modum arroganter et inaniter gloriatur in ipsis, et religiosus, quantumcumque Christi et Sanctorum sapientia plenos, repunt nihil scientialiter scire; ev quos sioligistice seu philosophice expertes.

Secondum est curiositatis nimie, et a studio divinarum Scriptu-

Tertium: occulte et fallacis permixtio humanorum et pagano-

Quartum: ex predictis consuragens est infidelis et erronea ador-

...
That is what we customarily do, and what we ought to do, when we read pagan poets, when the books of worldly wisdom fall into our hands. If we meet therein with something useful, we convert it to our own dogma (ad nostrum dogma convertimus). 

The classical authors in Bernardino's sermons play a similar role. Aside from those serving as sources of information on natural history or geography, for example, they represent in the prediche volgari as in the sermoni latini only appendages to his discourse, necessarily of secondary importance. For instance, praising the virtue of «il perdonare magnamente," Bernardino adds in passing an appropriate, pithy line from Seneca: «Seneca dice: —onestissima cosa e l'fare vendetta col perdonare» (G. 259). Similarly, he elsewhere refers to a trivial fact concerning the emperor Vespasiano without however citing the source of his information: «Dice che Vespasiano vi gittò uno dentro (il Mare Morto) e non vi poté perire (G. 104).»

Typical of the role of the classics in the Bernardinian sermon, these, as we can see, are appropriate but merely cursory use of the same classical auctores who in the works of the humanists were accorded such great homage; for Bernardino, Scripture, the Fathers and the Schoolmen are authority enough and when in need of further authority or information, he is more likely to cite instead the medieval «textbook» writers such as Isidore of Seville or Uguccione (author of the influential Derivationes), the same men who later were to meet the undisguised contempt of Lorenzo Valla:

a me sembrano tanto grandi (Donato, Servio e Prisciano), che tutti gli scrittori successivi mi paion balbuzienti; fra i quali viene primo Isidoro, il più presuntuoso di questi ignoranti, il quale non sapendo nulla pretende insegnare tutto. Vengono poi Papias e gli altri indotti, Ebrardo, Uguccione, el Cattolico, Aimo e altri ancora, indegni di essere nominati, che a gran prezzo insegnarono a non sapere niente, rendendo anzi talora anche più sciocco chi andava a scuola da loro.

In reference to study, Bernardino mentions the classics specifically only twice: Ovid is signalled out once (C. 311), along with the «libri d'innamoramento» of the poets frowned upon by the saint because «ti trarranno del vero studio delle Scritture sante," and elsewhere (G. 53) Bernardino refers to «el Ciciarone» («E questi giovani che studiano el Ciciarone fanno bene per sapere favellare...») — a remark we shall return to below) where the Latin orator is used more as a symbol of the study of rhetoric rather than seen as an author in his own right.

In this context of concerned awareness of the risk inherent in the use of the pagan classics where matters of faith and morals are concerned, Bernardino's special recommendation of Saint Jerome, among all the Fathers, as particularly profitable and pleasurable reading for all, takes on added significance:

Piglia Geronimo. Piacet'egli? Mai si! Piglialo, recatelo inanzi, e studialo, e rugimalo bene d'ogni sentenzia e quando te l'ai abituato, ogni cosa che tu fai o in detti o in fatti, piglia il fondamento di lui, e tiello bene nella mente (C. 315).

Jerome, in whom Bernardino as a young student had found both scorza gentile and midollo — that is to say, an aesthetically pleasing literary style coupled with moral substance — and thereby had been won over to Scripture, away from the fantasie poetiche (cfr. C. 305), represented the best possible role model for the young Christian student in the age of Humanism. Eminent scholar yet saint, Jerome had struggled to arrive in his own life at the necessary balance between his attraction to the classics and his pursuit of God, having been rescued from his previous error by a dramatic vision in his famous dream:

(0)f a sudden, I was caught up in the spirit and haled before the judgement seat of God. Blinded by its light and by the brightness of those who stood about it, I fell prostrate to the earth, not daring to look up. When the voice asked me concerning my condition, I replied that I was a Christian. «Thou liest,» answered He that sat upon the throne. «Thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian; for where thy treasure is, there shall thy heart be also.

Jerome, who went on to become one of the pillars of the faith, set an example in his scholarship which was to serve the Church for

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centuries and it is thus with enthusiasm and confidence that Bernardino can recommend him to his own students. Bernardino draws an affectionate image of the saint, « maestro santo Gerolamo, barba canuta, » as the wise old man with the long white beard who guides and corrects the impetuous young mind, just as an old bue teaches el giovenco:

ma non porre fede in quelle favole, ch'è tu azapparesti in acqua. Ma per tuo diletto e contemplazione, piglia l'Epistole di Santo Girolamo, che tu cosi fondato dottore. Sai? Con quella barba bianca, e impara da lui. Sai tu come si domano e giovanchi? Io so bene domare e giovanchi, perch'io sia frate. Non vedi che sempre si pone al giogo col giovenco uno bu' vecchio, acciò che la gioventù dell'altro non si sfiori, e va sodo e dritto; quando el giovenco vuole fare uno poco di brado, o non potere, o non volere, e non pare che possa alzare e pizi, el bu' vecchio tocca da canto, e dalli una bicciata, e fallo tornare al solco. E così fa' tu. Piglia el tuo maestro santo Girolamo, barba canuta, e quando tu vai variandoti e impastoiandoti, e tu leggi, e lui darà una bicciata a' tuoi falsi pensieri (F. 54).

The above-quoted reference to « el Ciciarone » brings us to another aspect of Bernardino's views on education — the value placed on eloquenza as an important civic skill to be developed through one's studies — which represents another point of encounter between the saint and humanist ideals. Just as Bernardino automatically associates study with virtue, so too does he associates it with the acquisition of practical, useful skills to be employed for the greater profit and honor of one's patria; however, the one skill that he singles out in particular is that of il sapere favellare, that is, the ability to speak articulately in a public, official context. Here Bernardino likewise makes appeal to the public utility to be derived from a university education (in the form of the « eloquent » civil servants it produces) in his defense of the Studio di Siena, whose existence was apparently in jeopardy at the time:

Or come so' necessarie queste due (i.e., l'arte della lana e l'arte de le scarpette), così è anco necessario lo Studio: è molto poco inteso da chi non ha letto. Non lo lassate partire da Siena, cittadini sanesi, ch'è voi non comprendete l'utile e l'onore, che ve ne viene di qui a poco tempo. Ponete mente a Bologna, il nome e l'utile e l'onore; così vi seguirà a voi, se voi vel saprete mantenere, però che ine si fanno gli uomini atti a farvi capire in ogni luogo. Poi che voi avete la Sapienzia, fate di mettarla in pratica fra i mercatanti, e fra tutta la Repubblica: perché che come v'ho detto, ella è necessaria e utile al bene comune e piace molto a misser Dominedio. Voi ve ne potete già veder, che ne vengono una brigata di cittadini atti a dottorarsi: e come io a' cittadini, così vo' dire a voi, che studiate:

el giovenco:

The Humanists and s. Bernardino da Siena
Bernardino thus shares the humanist esteem for eloquence. But there is a difference. The friar's praise for eloquence is more generalized and utilitarian than that of many humanists who admired in particular the elegant forms of classical Roman oratory, over the objectionable, "stuttering" speech of the medieval rhetoricians of which Valla complained in the above-cited passage. When we then, furthermore, analyze the nature of Bernardino's own "eloquence", we discover that the friar's preaching style represents, in structure, in content and in language, a clear mixture of scholasticism with popular low-style literary forms, remaining unaffected by the resurgence of the classical standards so enthusiastically promulgated and exercised by the humanists. As Fra Cantini reminds us, it was only later, after Bernardino's lifetime, that Church oratory began to adopt the classical standards:

Col Cinquecento anche l’Eloquenza sacra prese forma e paludamento classico. Apparve come la grande riforma dell’Eloquenza sacra, tanto che lo stesso piissimo Card. Federigo Borromeo nella sua opera, De sacris nostrorum temporum oratoribus, incominciò proprio dal Cinquecento ad enumerare questi sacri oratori ed attribuirsi a Mons. Cornelio Musso, O.M.C., († 1574) il grande merito di aver per il primo introdotto nei Chiostri l’eloquenza classica: « in sacra clausura urbanam atque nobilem formam invenit, posthabita rusticitas, qua usi fuerant priores », che era chiamata, per disprezzo, eloquenza fratesca.

However fratesca the form of Bernardino's own discourse may at times be, there is nonetheless a perceptible spirit shining forth in many of his remarks to which we can appropriately apply the label of docta pietas, an attribute closely linked with the humanist mentality of the Quattrocento in polemic with the sancta rusticitas of much of the clergy. In his fundamental attitude toward learning and the application of the intellect in every endeavor in life, especially the practice of one's faith, Bernardino aligns himself on the side of the humanists, so much so that he has been in fact been given (by Toffanin) the title "predicatore popolare della docta pietas." For Bernardino, as the humanists learning and faith, as we know, are not mutually exclusive; rather, the one nourishes and sustains the other. « Bonitatem et disciplinam et scientiam doce me, quia mandatis tuis credidi » is the verse from the Psalms (XVIII, 66) with which he opens both of his sermons on study, linking, from the start, scientia (as well as bonitas and disciplina) directly to faith in the Lord and in His commandments ("mandatis tuis").

Though he does not admire knowledge pursued merely out of idle curiosity ("Non volere sapere piú che ti abbisogni di sapere") (H. 423), Bernardino himself remained an eager student in a certain respect for all of his life — as his appearance at Guarino's school and the size of the personal library he left at his death indicate. However, the aim of his study was always directed toward his pastoral duties as priest and preacher. On the subject of his own studies, Bernardino entreats his listeners not to flock to him with requests and favors which he is incapable of granting since it takes away from his study time: «... perché il vostro venire a me è uno perdimento di tempo; che potrei stare a studiare e fare una predicazione a la magnifica a onore di Dio; e voi siete cagione ch’io non posso stare a studiare per istare attendere a udire voi » (H. 616-617).

Furthermore, the same educational preparation that he had sought for himself, Bernardino expects in all the clergy (those, that is, who were actively engaged in a public ministry) and as Vicar General of the Observants, sought always to raise the intellectual level of his friars. In addition to the encouragement he gave by word and personal example, Bernardino founded a school of theology at Perugia in 1440 where he himself gave a course on canon law and later, dismayed at the scandalous ignorance of a certain portion of the friar-confessors, he deprived all unschooled Observants of the right of hearing confessions. Bernardino was not blind to the popular reputation of ignorance from which the friars suffered: he talks openly of the problem though he never uncharitably denounces any of his peers and instead reminds his audience that they must always « fare rivenza a’ preti e a’ prelati, bene che fussino cattivi e viziosi » (A. 217).

25 Bernardino's library contained about forty manuscripts, all works by sacred authors enumerated above, in addition to copies of his own sermons and treatises. See Pietritti, La libreria di San Bernardino e le sue vicende attraverso cinque secoli, in Studi Francescani, LXII (1968), pp. 3-43.
26 See Facchinetti, p. 475.
He is even able to make clerical ignorance the subject of one of his amusing tales:

andavano dicendo che ella era pregna di Spirito Santo, e andava
with exasperated incredulity, the friar tells of another such humbug,
time to verify that promise since, their presence being made known
to the local waves would part making a path for them in the sea, just as the
on their way to « it Sipolcro » on foot and convinced them that the
fece spogliare tutti innudi, uomini e donne ») to the ocean front
ninforte, » a legendary figure whom the popular fantasy had created
Red Sea had done for the Hebrews; however they didn't have
his final word on these stories is always the same: « O grande ribal-
Red Sea had done for the Hebrews; however they didn't have
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Red Sea had done for the Hebrews; however they didn't have
his final word on these stories is always the same: « O grande ribal-
The most popular « relics » included the supposed fragments of
similarly, people are quick to believe in and venerate
tout of a certain tombstone bearing that name which, it turns out,
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He too was one of those zealous, idealistic souls attracted by the life of the desert hermit and at one point attempted such a life; but he failed miserably, as he, laughing at himself, confesses to his audience:

Elle mi venne una volontà di volere vivere come un angelo, non dico come un uomo... mi venne uno pensiero di volere vivere d'acqua e d'erbe, e pensai di andarmi a stare in un bosco... e (mi) dicevo: — bene sta, come facevano e' santi padri: io mangiargi dell'erba quando arò fame; e quando io arò sete, berò dell'acqua. — E così deliberai di fare:... E col mio pensiero andava cercando dove io mi potesse appollaiare... E andami costà fuore dalla Porta a Follonica, e incomincia a cogliere una insolata di cicerbette e altre erbuccie, e non aveva né pane né sale né olio e dissi: cominciamo per questa prima volta a lavarla e a raschiarlà, e poi l'altra volta e noi faremo solamente a raschiarlà senza lavarla altromenti; e quando ne saremo più usi, e noi faremo senza nettarla, e dipoi poi e noi faremo senza cogliarlà. E col nome di Iesu benedetto cominciai con uno boccone di cicerbetta, e messamela in boca cominciai a masticarla. Masticà, masticà, ella non poteva andare giù. Non potendo gollarle, io dissi: oltre, cominciam a bere uno sorso d'acqua. Mieffe! l'aqua se n'andava giù; e la cicerbetta rimaneva in boca. In tutto, io bebbi parecchi sorsi d'acqua con uno boccone di cicerbetta, e non la potei gollare. Sai che ti voglio dire? Con uno boccone di cicerbetta io levai via ogni tentazione; che certamente io conosco che quella era tentazione (H. 603-604).

Commenting on the friar's remarks as to the need for moderation, reason and discrezione in one's life of faith, one critic has even affirmed: «(In Bernardino) si osserva il tramonto dell'ascetismo medievale.» 29 Yet, let us not be misled. Though he urges the avoidance of rash extremism, the friar still strongly recommends in other portions of the prediche volgari the virtue of a life of intense penance and ardent asceticism 30. Once a friar, Bernardino himself led a life of total self-abnegation to the fullest extent of that term. One need only glance at any of the contemporary portraits of the saint, especially that executed by an artist of the school of Lo Squarcione in Bergamo's Accademia Carrara: the drawn cadaverous profile, with its blackened, sunken eyes, cold pallor and pursed, parched lips are testimony enough to the fervor and at times violence of the saint's own asceticism.

This, therefore, is the sum total of Bernardino's encounter with the world of Humanism. It is an encounter characterized by harmony and agreement on several fundamental principles and not by antagonism; by mutual respect and trust and not by fear and suspicion. Yet it would be wrong to hold Bernardino up as an exponent of Humanism. The exigencies of his duties as preacher to the unlettered masses clearly obliged the saint to follow different models and to look in different directions as far as the focus and articulation of his own public oratory are concerned. In the past, too eager to place Bernardino in the company of the humanist thinkers of that age, certain critics, by isolating some of the saint's statements and exaggerating, I feel, their intent and importance whithin the overall economy of Bernardino's worldview, have seen a greater so-called reflection of humanist thought in his work than there actually is. This, I suspect, is a result of a quasi-hagiographic desire to present Bernardino in the « best » possible, most flattering light: in the days (not too long ago) when Humanism was associated with the idea of intellectual progress, modernity and in short, « better » literature (and therefore, medieval-scolastic thought with the opposite qualities and tendencies), this was achieved by demonstrating how much was in common between the friar and his humanist contemporaries. Now that we have a greater understanding of and appreciation for the culture that preceded — and gave birth to — Humanism, we can be more objective in our evaluation of Bernardino's own forma mentis, praiseworthy for its sympathetic and enlightened openness to the new culture of his day yet of fundamentally medieval-scolastic cast.

29 P. PULIATTI, La letteratura ascetica e mistica del Quattrocento (Catania: Edizioni Camene, 1953), p. 73.
30 See, for example, his advice to widows, Sermon XXII, Siena 1427.