

FRANCO MORMANDO

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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), Treviglio, Bergamo, Cremona, Piacenza, Crema, Vicenza, Bassano, Belluno, Feltre, Modena, Lucca, Prato, Volterra, Arezzo, Grosseto, Perugia, Assisi, Todi, Gubbio, Viterbo, Orvieto, 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 *comune*. 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 acquaintance¹.

¹ Four cycles («corsi») of Bernardino's vernacular sermons are extant and have been published in the following editions: San Bernardino da Siena,

Spanning 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, geographically and culturally somewhat «off the beaten trail.»² Proud of her glorious medieval achievements, Siena remained imbued with the aura and traditions of her past. There the Renaissance

Le prediche volgari, Volumi I e II (corso di Firenze 1424) edite dal padre Ciro Cannarozzi. Pistoia: Tip. Cav. A. Pacinotti, 1934 (hereafter simply referred to as «A» and «B»); *Volumi III, IV e V* (corso di Firenze 1425), ed. Cannarozzi. Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1940 (hereafter, «C», «D», and «E»); *Le prediche volgari: predicazione del 1425 in Siena*, Volumi I e II, ed. Cannarozzi. Firenze: Tipografia E. Rinaldi, 1958 (hereafter, «F» and «G»); *Le prediche volgari* (Siena, 1427), a cura di Piero Bargellini, Milano: Rizzoli, 1936 (hereafter, «H»).

² See F. SCHEVILL, *Siena: The Story of a Medieval Commune* (New York: Scribners, 1908), *passim* and L. ZDEKAUER, *Lo Studio di Siena nel Rinascimento* (Milano: Hoepli, 1894), pp. 44-48.

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 1434³. 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 Buccio da Spoleto, his teacher in the *trivium* and friend of Coluccio Saluti. (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 « rappresentava 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

³ C. FAGGIANO, *L'eloquenza volgare di San Bernardino da Siena* in *La Rassegna Nazionale*, vol. CCV (1915), p. 272, footnote.

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 edizione, 1980), p. 19.

⁶ L. BENVOLGENTI, *Vita sancti Bernardini* in *Analecta Bollandiana*, XXI (1902), p. 16.

Francesco Petrarca, messer Colucci nobilissime cose feciono 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 interested, 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 Toscana è la più intellettiva provincia d'Italia, e Firenze è la più intellettiva 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

⁷ Dante is elsewhere (C. 305) mentioned in the *prediche volgari* as recommended spiritual reading and quotes from the *Comedy* appear several times in various sermons. Petrarch is nowhere further mentioned or alluded to; however; the saint does mention the third of the « three crowns of Florence, » Boccaccio, but it is only to condemn his work as dangerous to the soul. Unmaliciously, Bernardino acknowledges Boccaccio's merit as a person but regrets that he had wasted his time writing certain *bestialità* as the *Corbaccio*: « (C)he ti levi da studio de' libri disonesti, come il Corbaccio e altri libri fatti da messer Giovan Boccacci che, salva la sua reverenzia, ne fe' parecchi che fusse il meglio se ne fusse taciuto: valente uomo fu, se quelle bestialità non avesse fatte nè scritte; e forse in vecchiezza se ne pentè » (C. 311). Bernardino never makes mention of Boccaccio's most famous work, the *Decameron*, but must have had some contact with it however indirect, since we can trace, it would seem, the source of two of Bernardino's didactic *novellette* to that work. The stories concerned are, in Bernardino, « L'uomo che sputò in chiesa » (Siena 1425, G-19) and « La medicina di Ghino di Taco » (Siena 1427, H. 470-471), and, in Boccaccio, « Ser Cepparello con una falsa confessione... » (First Day, First Novella) and « Ghino di Tacco piglia l'Abate di Cligni... » (Second Day, Second Novella).

leading figures of Italy at the time on many an occasion⁸. 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)⁹, 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 vestram afficiatur et quam libenti ac prope gaudenti animo increpatione vestras directionesque exaudiat, nil attinet nunc verbis referre vobis, qui admirabilem concursum celebritatemque quo saepenumero conspexistis. Sunt enim adhuc plenae aures civium nostrorum divinis atque mellifluis eloquis vestris, et quamvis plenae sint, tamen eadem illam suavitatem quasi vacuae concupiscunt...¹⁰.

— 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

⁸ For Bernardino's humanist friendships, see E. MUGNAINI, *San Bernardino e l'umanesimo* in *Bollettino di studi bernardiniani*, v. IX (1943); F. DONATI, *Notizie su San Bernardino* in *Bollettino senese di storia patria*, v. I, fasc. I-II (1894), as well as STICCO, *op. cit.*, V. FACCHINETTI, *San Bernardino da Siena: mistico sole del 400* (Milano: Casa Editrice Santa Lega Eucaristica, 1933) and A.G. FERRERS-HOWELL, *San Bernardino of Siena* (London: Methuen, 1913) and BARGELLINI (Brescia, 1980), *passim*.

⁹ See CH. STINGER, *Humanism and the Church Fathers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), pp. 61-65.

¹⁰ Published by Cannarozzi in A. xxxix.

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 Feltré. 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 Guarino¹¹. 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-

¹¹ In a letter to Francesco Barbaro, Guarino speaks of the love and veneration he feels for his « student, » Bernardino: « Cum enim hominem tantum amem colam venerer quantum animus meus capere possit, veritus sum interdum ne amicus potius quam iudex de ipso senserim, quanquam iudicare prius quam amare coeperim. » (*Epistolario*, a cura di R. Sabbadini, Venezia: R. Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, 1915-1919), lettera 239, v. I, p. 376). Cfr. also L. CARBONE, *Orazione funebre* in *Prosatori latini del 400*, a cura di Eugenio Garin (Milano: Ricciardi, 1952), p. 401. Carbone, however, states that Guarino was Bernardino's teacher of eloquence, a glaring inaccuracy given the fact that by 1423 Bernardino had already been preaching with great success for over twenty years and had by then decidedly developed his own effective preaching style.

teano, a Conventual who had been studying the classics under Guarino for ten months but who, inspired by the sanctity and eloquence of the saint, as he himself explains in a moving letter of departure to his master, « converted » to the Observance and joined Bernardino's growing circle of disciples¹².

Thus, as these biographical facts would suggest, Bernardino's contact with Humanism through its leading exponents was both substantial and continuous. Yet — and here is the seeming paradox — very little of this contact explicitly shows through in the friar's own work and as we shall presently see, when weighed against the entire corpus of Bernardino's teaching, the actual presence of humanist ideals in the saint's system of thought proves to be limited indeed. But this, upon reflection, should not surprise us greatly. As we must keep in mind, Bernardino was a preacher of the Church whose first and foremost concern was the evangelization and salvation of souls — and largely uneducated souls at that: though the friar indeed demonstrated a certain openness (and *never* hostility) toward the new culture, he obviously considered it, we must conclude, to be at best of secondary interest and importance to his apostolate among the ordinary, unlettered citizens of the market place. Thus, nowhere in the twenty or so sizable volumes of Bernardino's Latin and Italian sermons, treatises, notes and letters¹³ does the saint even mention any of the above-listed humanist-friends; never does he mention or give sign of having read any of their works (not even their new and valuable translations of the Church Fathers); never does he mention, not even in passing, any of the recent occurrences in the way of manuscript discovery and re-construction, of the dramatic recovery of the treasures of classical civilization or the prodigious artistic and archeological feats of virtue being achieved before his very eyes, most notably in Florence. Knowing that he was in fact a first-hand observer of a great portion of the cultural-intellectual advancements of those early years of Humanism, those who read Bernardino expecting to find mirrored in him that world will in the end remain

¹² Alberto's letter is reproduced by Facchinetti, p. 33.

¹³ Bernardino's 16 extant letters, only two of which are written in his hand, are of little interest to us here, concerning for the most part his speaking appointments or other strictly administrative matters. They are published in Volume VIII of the *Opera omnia* (works in Latin). Quaracchi: Collegio San Bonaventura, 1950-1965.

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 istudiare 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 vivere: »

L'uomo senza scienza è una canna vana in nocimenti... Lo studio è ottima cosa e onesta... (S)egue lo studio, chè 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... Istudia adunque e viverai lieto e giocondo... »¹⁴

— all sentiments which no humanist or scholastic would have found argument with¹⁵. 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 cose 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 of 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. 306.

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 saresti un zero senza lo studio. Adunque, grande gloria è lo studio » (C. 309-310) — a statement which echoes Vergerios's *De ingenuis moribus* where we find the following description and exaltation of the *artes liberales*: « Io chiamo liberali quegli studi che convengono a uomo libero, per i quali si eserciti o si coltiva 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. Poichè, come le arti ignobili hanno per fin il guadagno e il piacere, così la virtù e 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). Humbly, 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, « à autà grandissima umilta » (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 maiorem Dei gloriam*; glory as the inevitable consequence, the « shadow of virtue, » as Augustine explains to Francesco in Petrarch's *Secretum*.

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 combatted. 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 speziali persone, la qual cosa si chiama ignoranza... (C)ontro a lei combatteremo alla larga. Ella è quella bestia che santo Giovanni scrive a undici capitoli dell'Apocalisse che uscì del pozzo dell'abisso... L'ignoranza è un grande abisso di tenebre, che ella è scura, fredda e debole... Tutto il male volere, tutto il male potere è nello abisso della profonda ignoranza. (I)l 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'ò detto più volte, quanto più l'uomo è di gentile intelletto, tanto più 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 à(,) ingrassa e sta lieto. Lo intelletto gentile ch'è nelle cose di Dio ben fisso, ingrassa di Dio. El mondanaccio brodososo no' è altro che carnaccia » (D. 262). Proceeding from this premise, Bernardino confutes the popular notion of « gentility. » It is the « bestialità 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 nobiltà

¹⁶ Quoted by G. TOFFANIN, *Storia dell'umanesimo* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1947, terza edizione riveduta), p. 121.

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 ingrossa ed è porcaccio... (D. 213);

(C)osì 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 niuno, 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 esercizio 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 cose: Primo, diletto; secondo, onesto; terzo, et utile... Impossibile cosa è 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 'l 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' Vangelisti 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)ello studiare d' libri d' dottori santi e della santa Scrittura, nella Bibbia o in qualunque altro santo libro, ti porge 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 aresti tu un gran piacere se tu vedessi o udissi predicare Gesù Cristo? Grandissimo! Così san Paulo, santo Agustino, santo Gregorio, santo Geronimo, e santo Ambruogio e gli altri santi dottori? Mai sì! Or va', leggi i loro libri, qual più ti piace, o di qual più fai istima, e parlerai con loro ed eglino parleranno te; 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

Aristotile, nè di molti altri filosofi, che non la biasimo, no; però non la voglio lodare come quest'altra si dee lodare lei. Imperò che come una medesima acqua si può conduciare per uno canale di pietra lavorato e pulito, e un altro la può conduciare per una forma di terra, che sarà uno loto al pari di quella; così, dico è altra dottrina che parla della salute dell'anima, che non è quella che parla della salute del corpo. L'uno parla de' naturali; l'altro delli spirituali beni; e qui vedi quanto è meglio *eloquia Domini*, che niuno altro parlare (H. 84).

Though cautious, Bernardino's view is not antagonistic to the humanist stance for is the not the same sentiment expressed by Petrarch in his own declaration: « ma quando avviene di dover pensare alla religione, vale a dire, alla verità suprema, alla vera felicità, alla salvezza eterna e di doverne parlarne, allora certamente non sono ciceroniano, né platonico, ma cristiano. »¹⁷ Surprisingly, nowhere else does the saint broach this topic, despite the fact that it represented such an important issue of debate in his own day. However, further evidence convinces us of the friar's guarded stance vis-à-vis the authority of the pagan writers where matters of faith and morals are concerned. Among the papers of Bernardino, we find a long extract from Pietro di Giovanni Olivi's commentary on the Act of the Apostles (*Super Acta Apostolorum*), copied by Bernardino himself, which deals specifically with the issue of the use of pagan authorities in preaching. The passage contains a list, drawn up by Olivi, of the « multiplex vitium et periculum » caused by the use of such material, of which Bernardino took special note, marking out the passage in the margin with his pen:

Ex quo multiplex vitium et periculum suboritur studio et cultui christiano: Primum est superbie et inanis glorie, quia huiusmodi allegatores philosophorum supra modum arroganter et inaniter gloriantur in istis, et reliquos, quantumcumque Christi et Sanctorum sapientia plenos, repunt nihil scientialiter scire; et quasi silogisticæ seu philosophicæ expertes.

Secundum est curiositatis nimie, et a studio divinarum Scripturarum plurimum distractive, qua tales tam avidè tamque assidue vacant doctrinis mundanorum et paganorum, quod supra modum tepide et remisse et raro seu interpolate accedunt ad studium Scripture sacre, et multo rarius ad devotum studium divinarum.

¹⁷ In « De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia liber » in *Prosa*, a cura di E. Carrara et al. (Milano: Ricciardi, 1955), p. 760.

Tertium: occulte et fallacis permixtio humanorum et pagano-
rum errorum. Predicti enim philosophi fuerunt utique homines pa-
gani, et ideo non mirum si veritati sui luminis naturalis immiscue-
runt errores paganicos vel humanos.

Quartum: ex predictis consuragens est infidelis et erronea ado-
ratio philosophicæ autoritatis in dogmatibus suis. Quod non solum
est secundum se vitiosum, sed etiam faciliter precipitans in hereses
chatholice fidei destructivas. Unde ex Platonicorum philosophia Ori-
genes aberrans factus est fons heresis Arriane, et multarum alia-
rum, ex quibus multe ecclesie et regna christianorum antiquitus sunt
fedate et dissipate. Cuius dissipationis vestigia nimis usque hodie
manent¹⁸.

Vanity, distraction, error and heresy: the list was enough to per-
suade 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-
vano questo modo... » (C. 303) nor are the classical texts alien to
him. He cites in his sermons (however rarely) several Greek and
Roman authors (among them Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Ju-
venal, Cicero, Vergil, Vitruvius, Apuleius and Quintilian) although it
is not sure how many (especially the Greeks) he had encountered
first-hand in their own works. More likely, he merely repeats the
citations found, « ready-made », in his more accessible Christian se-
condary sources (i.e., the patristic and scholastic works and the me-
dieval *summae*). Bernardino uses the classics in the same way the
Church had used them for centuries before: to serve in the eluci-
dation and affirmation of the Gospel message. On the example of
the early Fathers, the Middle Ages had « converted » the pagan
authors (to use the description of Rhabanus Maurus, abbot of the
renowned monastery-school of Fulda and one-time student of Alcuin,) that is to say, it read their works from a Christian perspective, seeing in these products of « natural reason » corroboration of or prophetic allusion to the Christian truth:

¹⁸ Quoted by D. PACETTI in *Gli scritti di San Bernardino*, in *San Bernardino da Siena: saggi e ricerche pubblicati nel quinto centenario della morte (1444-1944)*. Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, nuova serie, vol. VI. Milano: Società Editrice « Vita e Pensiero », 1945. pp. 92-93.

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*)¹⁹.

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 *sermons 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 è il 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 potè 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, Aimò 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 loro²⁰.

In reference to study, Bernardino mentions the classics specifically only twice: Ovid is signalled out once (C. 311), along with the

¹⁹ RHABANUS MAURUS, *De clericorum institutione*, quoted by J. LECLERCO, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Trans. by C. Misrahi. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), p. 60.

²⁰ L. VALLA, *Prefazione al secondo libro delle Eleganze*, in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* (a cura di E. Garin, Milano: Ricciardi, 1952), p. 603.

« 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 sì! Piglialo, recatelo inanzi, e studialo, e rugimalo bene d'ogni sentenza 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:

(O)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 also²¹.

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

²¹ JEROME, *Epistola XXII*, translated and quoted by E.K. RAND, in *Founders of the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 106.

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, chè tu azapparesti in acqua. Ma per tuo diletto e contemplazione, piglia l'Epistole di Santo Girolamo, che fu così fondato dottore. Sai? Con quella barba bianca, e impara da lui. Sai tu come si domano e giovenchi? Io so bene domare e giovenchi, 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 sforzi, 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 piei, el bu' vecchio tocca da canto, e dalli una biccata, 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 biccata 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 associate 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 joins together two of the dominant leitmotifs of humanist literature, the exaltation of *eloquenza* and the *impegno civile*, exemplified during the friar's lifetime in such figures as Leonardo Bruni and Francesco Barbaro.

Realizing that it is an utterly necessary skill in the daily life of a state, Bernardino extols the virtue of eloquence, as did his humanist contemporaries, calling it one of the « tre cose (che) sono da pensare e d'appetire più che tutte l'altre (in questa vita). »²² Yet,

²² The other two are « avere grande scienza » and « avere eccellente e virtuosa vita ».

eloquence is praiseworthy only when coupled with civic duty; true to his calling as a Franciscan, actively involved in the world, and as a patriot, Bernardino sees great virtue in the *vita attiva*, the life of service to the community, which however, must be tempered and nourished by one's life of prayer, the *vita contemplativa*: « Due cose bisogna (avere): la prima, congiunzione di cose umane in vita attiva, la seconda, congiunzione di cose divine in vita contemplativa... non l'una senza l'altro. La vita attiva purga lo 'ntelletto, la vita contemplativa allumina lo 'ntelletto » (B. 444). Bernardino therefore links the two ideals, eloquence and service, at all times:

E questi giovani che studiano el Ciciarone fanno bene per sapere favellare, ma io non odo che ce ne sieno molti, che è grandissima vergogna a questa città (Siena) a non esserci una brigata di giovani valenti che sappino dire quattro parole se fusse di bisogno... (F. 54);

Chi studia, si diletta sempre in virtù, e fa che comparisce sempre nel mondo. Se uno non sa parlare in grammatica, a che è buono? Fa' ragione. Se gente forestiera ci venisse e sapesse parlare in grammatica, chi lor risponde se non ci fusse de' secolari?... (G. 300).

Chi è ozioso nella patria si debba cacciare via; Alcuni che sono ricchi che non àno bisogno di guadagnare nè di stare a bottega, diensi allo studio morale e pulitico, imparino a vivere come uomini, istudino in rettorica e in altre iscienze acciòche, bisognando alla patria, possino essere operati in ambascerie e in altri casi della repubblica (B. 46).

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* of 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, chè 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 seguitarà 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 metterla in pratica fra i mercatanti, e fra tutta la Repubblica: però 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:

fate che voi non diventiate cotali pecoroni. Ella è cosa che piace a Dio (H. 888).

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*, incomincia proprio dal Cinquecento ad enumerare questi sacri oratori ed attribuisce a Mons. Cornelio Musso, O.M.Cov. († 1574) il grande merito di aver per il primo introdotto nei Chiostrì l'eloquenza classica: « in sacra claustra urbanam atque nobilem formam invenit, posthabita rudi et agresti, qua usi fuerant priores », che era chiamata, per disprezzo, *eloquenza fratesca*²³.

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*

²³ G. CANTINI, *San Bernardino perfetto predicatore popolare*, in *San Bernardino da Siena: saggi e ricerche*, p. 205.

pietas. »²⁴ 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 più 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 indicate²⁵. 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: « ... però che il vostro venire a me è uno perdimento di tempo; che potrei stare a studiare e fare una predicozza a la magnifica a onore di Dio; e voi sète 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 confessions²⁶. 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 riverenza a' preti e a' prelati, bene che fussino cattivi e viziosi » (A. 217).

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 297.

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 PACETTI, *La libreria di San Bernardino e le sue vicende attraverso cinque secoli*, in *Studi Francescani*, LXII (1965), pp. 3-43.

²⁶ See FACCHINETTI, p. 475.

He is even able to make clerical ignorance the subject of one of his amusing tales:

Elli furo due preti, i quali parlandosi insieme disse l'uno l'altro: — come dici tu le parole della consecrazione del corpo di Cristo? — Colui rispose e disse: — io dico: *Hoc est corpus meum*. — Allora dicendo l'uno all'altro: — tu non dici bene; — e stando in questa questione, sopragionse un altro prete, al quale costoro gli dicono questo fatto. E 'l prete lo' disse: — nè l'uno nè l'altro di voi dice bene, imperocchè si vuole dire: *Hoc est corpusso meusso*; — dimostrando lo': — tu vedi che egli dice *corpusso*, e però vuol dire *meusso*; e però da ora in là non dite altrimenti che così: *Hoc est corpusso meusso*. — Costoro non rimanendo d'accordo al detto di costui, deliberaro di domandarne a un piovano che stava presso a loro, e deliberati andarono a questo piovano, e poserli il caso. E il piovano vi rispose e disse: — o che bisogna tante cose, quanto che io me ne vo alla pura? Io vi dico su una Avemaria. — Ora ti domando a te: so' scusati costoro? Non vedi tu che ellino fanno adorare per Iddio uno pezzo di pane? (H. 425).

On the other side of the fence, Bernardino likewise ridicules and chastises in his listeners the widespread ignorance, gullibility and irrational fanaticism which often characterizes the practice of their faith. His *prediche volgari* also contain many angry passages condemning and debunking such pervisions of reason and faith as witchcraft, superstitions and astrology and toward the practitioners of these « arts » Bernardino shows neither tolerance nor mercy²⁷. The saint, for example, tells us (H. 784-785) with pride that thanks to his preaching on the subject of witchcraft in Rome « furono acutate una moltitudine di streghe e di incantari » and in recounting in vivid detail the trial and final burning at the stake of one of these « witches » (who « confessò senza niuno martorio che aveva ucisi da trenta fanciulli col suchiare il sangue loro »), Bernardino expresses the desire that similar trials and executions be conducted also in Siena: « Doh, facciamo uno poco d'oncenso a Domendio qui a Siena! » He urges his audience to turn in all of these « agents of the devil » at once: « (S)ubito l'acusi a lo Inquisitore ogni strega, ogni stregone, ogni maliardo o maliarda o incontatrice » (H. 787).

²⁷ The friar devotes five complete sermons to this subject: C. XII and XIII, H. II and XXXV and G. XXVI.

Bernardino is just as insistent and as virulent in his denouncement of the petty superstitious practices, extremely common among the faithful, which had sprouted up especially around the observance of religious feasts as he is in his tirades against the more serious « black sciences. » Bernardino is well acquainted with many of these superstitions and is able to list and describe them for us with accuracy (for which present-day cultural historians are most grateful). For example, one such passage:

Fannosi mille pazzie tutto l'anno, specialmente nelle feste comandate, che si debbe collo spirito tornare a Dio, el dimonio l'offusca colle cirimonie de' pagani. Per la nativitate del nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, in molti luoghi, si fa tanto onore al ceppo. Dalli ben bere! Dalli mangiare! El maggiore della casa el pone suso, falli fare danari e frasche, el dì di calen di gennaio mangiano delle fave lesse che ricrescono e beni della casa. Altri non vuole che la donna gli entri in casa se non mette il piè ritto innanzi. L'altra non dare del fuoco alla vicino il lunedì mattina. L'altra sputa addosso al compagno per non li fare mal d'occhio. Alle donne del parto mille pazzie... (B. 187-188).

Self-proclaimed prophets, hermits and other such « holy men » — whether religious fanatics or shrewd racketeers or just simply mentally-unbalanced individuals — profitted greatly from the gullibility of the populace of Bernardino's day, as they have done throughout the whole history of mankind. Bernardino chides his listeners (H. 611) for the readiness with which they are willing to declare every « Tizio e Caio » who comes out of the woods to be a saint from above: « Elli saranno cotali romiti, che usciranno del bosco e profeteranno. El vulgo de la gente andarà dicendo: — oh, elli ci è il più santo uomo! Egli è uno profeta. » With great sarcasm, the friar advises the women that, instead of listening to such men, they should perform the following « act of charity » for them:

« O donne, se mai voi ne vedete niuno, io vi voglio insegnare la maggior limosina, che voi li potiate fare. Sapete che fate? Fate che voi li mandiate tre uova per una, e fate che egli le beia, però che li bisognano, perchè il difetto loro è solo votamento di cèlabro, e non v'è miglior medicina di quella. »

Bernardino relates (H. 620) several incidents regarding « cotali ingannatori, cotali ipocriti, sai, cotali romiti » in seeming abundance in that age. He tells of one who led a band of naive souls (« e gli

fece spogliare tutti innudi, uomini e donne») to the ocean front on their way to « il Sipolcro » on foot and convinced them that the waves would part making a path for them in the sea, just as the Red Sea had done for the Hebrews; however they didn't have time to verify that promise since, their presence being made known to the local *signore*, they were all rounded up and imprisoned. Next, with exasperated incredulity, the friar tells of another such humbug, « il quale andava attaccando con una sua suora, e dipingeva angioli e andavano dicendo che ella era pregna di Spirito Santo, e andava daendo di quello latte; e colui li premeva e mettevale le mani in seno! » Bernardino never ceases to be amazed by such gullibility; his final word on these stories is always the same: « O grande ribaldaria! Parti che questa sia cosa ragionevole?... Non piacciono a Dio questi tali cose, però che non sono ragionevoli. »

The foolishness and superstition which surround the saints and their relics equally foment the wrath of Bernardino. He admonishes (A. 212) sternly those who pay more attention the painted statues in Church rather than to the Blessed Sacrament (« Va' a l'altare maggiore quando entri in chiesa, e quello adora, e non ti pone alle figure dipinte ») and then (B. 413-414) laughs over the story of « San Boninforte, » a legendary figure whom the popular fantasy had created out of a certain tombstone bearing that name which, it turns out, held in reality the remains of a *dog*: « botavansi quivi, e venne a tanto che fu chiamato san Boninforte, e facevanci de' miracoli ed era un cane. » Similarly, people are quick to believe in and venerate as such, Bernardino complains, every and any so-called « relic » of the saints put before them, with no further proof of authenticity. The most popular « relics » included the supposed fragments of the « True Cross » (« mostransi tanti pezzi del legno della Croce di Cristo che, accozzandoli insieme, non gli tiererebbono sei paia di buoi » (A. 216) and the Virgin's milk:

O, O, del latte della Vergine Maria; o donne, dove siete voi? E anco voi, valenti uomini, vedestene mai? Sapete chè si va mostrando per reliquie; non v'aviate fede, chè elli non è vero: elli se ne truova in tanti luoghi! Tenete che elli non è vero. Forse che ella fu una vacca la Vergine Maria, che ella avesse lassato il latte suo, come si lascia delle bestie, che si lasano mugniare? Io ho questa opinione io, ch'io mi credo che ella avesse tanto latte nè più, nè meno, quanto bastava a quella bocchina di Cristo Jesu benedetto (H. 620).

Again and again, Bernardino exhorts his listeners to exercise their power of reason, « il dottore messer Ragione. » rather than allowing themselves to be carried away by these *ciuffulatori* (A. 216, 221) or by the unbridled flights of their own too vivid imaginations. This appeal to reason and caution applies, the saint adds, to all aspects of the practice of one's faith but especially and above all to the performing of acts of penance and other forms of asceticism. As far as such practices are concerned, Bernardino is continually warning his listeners to be prudent, cautious, *reasonable*. The values which he extolls, although by no means alien to medieval thought, are precisely those being given renewed prominence with the rise of Humanism: reason, order, *discrezione* and the *aurea mediocritas*:

Ogni cosa vuole ordine. Quante cose vanno male per non andare a ordine!... Loderei la via del mezzo!... Non perdere l'uno per l'altro; la via del mezzo!... ogni cosa che non si fa secondo ragione non piace a Dio... sì che c'è anco discrezione... Io voglio che tu vada per consiglio a uno che ti saprà molto ben consigliare... Sai chi è costei? Costei si chiama madonna Discrezione. Costei ti insegnerà il quanto e quando e come. »²⁸

In his sermons on the topic « Come non si dee far più penitenza che 'l corpo possa portare » (VII, Florence 1425) and on fasting (XXVIII of the same series), Bernardino attempts to further combat all forms of religious extremism and to caution his listeners as to the great dangers involved in the wrongly understood ascetic life, in fasts, abstinences, solitary confinement, etc. You can't reach heaven overnight, he says (H. 602) to the overzealous, go slowly, with discretion: « Oh, elli è il grande pericolo! Elli so' stati molti che so' voluti andare in vita eterna in uno passo e in uno salto; e molte volte se ne so' trovati impazzati; che per la troppa astinenza l'è poi mancato il cèlabro. » And elsewhere (G. 135) the same cautionary message: « Sono molti, che come lo' vien uno pensiero, si vogliono fare romiti, e poi subito vorrebbe diventare papa collo desiderio. Io non ti consiglio a questo modo, ma consiglioti che facci bene. E anco sono di quelli che impazzano per essere soli. »

Such a lesson Bernardino himself learned through personal experience in his youth, just commencing his life of « strict observance. »

²⁸ The remarks respectively from H. 439, A. 393, C. 1135, A. 242 and H. 442.

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:

Elli 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 mangiarò 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 incominciai a cogliere una insalata di cicerbite e altre erbucchie, e non aveva nè pane nè sale nè olio e dissi: cominciamo per questa prima volta a lavarla e a raschiarla, e poi l'altra volte e noi faremo solamente a raschiarla senza lavarla altromenti; e quando ne saremo più usi, e noi faremo senza nettarla, e dipoi poi e noi faremo senza cogliarla. E col nome di Iesu benedetto cominciai con uno boccone di cicerbita, e messamela in boca cominciai a masticarla. Mastica, mastica, ella non poteva andare giù. Non potendo gollare, io dissi: oltre, cominciamo a bere uno sorso d'acqua. Mieffe! l'acqua se n'andava giù; e la cicerbita rimaneva in boca. In tutto, io bebbi parecchi sorsi d'acqua con uno boccone di cicerbita, e non la potei gollare. Sai che ti voglio dire? Con uno boccone di cicerbita io levai via ogni tentazione; chè certamente io cognosco 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 asceticism³⁰. 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 Squarione in Bergamo's Accademia Carrara: the drawn cadaverous profile, with its blackened, sunken eyes, cold pallor and pursed, parched

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.

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 within 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-scholastic 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-scholastic cast.