The Bonfire of the Vanities and the Ecology of Preaching

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Anybody who has been to Tuscany will have pleasant memories of the sunshine striking hilltop villages. But Florence, which is one of the two cities at the centre of this study is not a hilltop village, unlike Siena, Volterra, Cortona San Gimignano or Arezzo. What is important about Florence is the river Arno. The Arno answered all Florence's need for water, it contributed to her hygiene, fish from the river helped to feed her whilst the river's race turned the millwheels that ground the flour for the people's bread. Equally important was the effect of the river on the Florentine economy. A plentiful supply of water was necessary for the washing, fulling and dying of cloth which was the basis of Florentine wealth. By the end of the thirteenth century the two pillars of Florentine political policy had been well-established: the pre-eminent cloth industry which promoted the establishment of branch houses of Florentine merchants all over Europe, and an alliance with the papacy which helped to promote the independence and security of the commune of the city.

In the fifteenth century the city was dominated by an oligarchy of merchant families. The constitution was republican, but there was scope for only limited participation in government. Florence could in no way be called democratic. Government rested with the *ottimati*, the 'best men' of the community. This group itself was divided up into various parties built around family alliance systems. Over the years through marriage contracts, trading partnerships and, business ventures, patterns of association were forged which lent a certain stability to communal politics.[1] By 1429, when Fra Angelico was about 42 years old, the leading figure in Florentine politics was Cosimo De Medici, a wealthy merchant and financier who had increased his fortune through acting as the papal banker. Cosimo's economic activity had made him one of the richest men in Europe. His banking house had branches in Rome, Geneva, Bruges, Ancona, Pisa, Avignon and even London. Apart from the movement of international finance and the business of money-lending, Cosimo engaged in trade on a large scale. The basic goods traded were wool, cloth, alum, olive oil and spices. However, there were also luxury goods. The Medici agents were able to deal in almonds, bedsteads, paintings, ginger, gold bullion and also choirboys. Choirboys were recruited in the Low Countries for service in the Roman basilicas. The musical tradition in the Netherlands was thought to have the highest quality in Europe at the time. When we look at Florentine painting of this period it should come as no surprise to see many of these objects represented, even in religious

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painting.

Cosimo, although wealthy, always attempted to play down his own role in government. He was the concealed puppet-master of Florentine politics. As one contemporary wrote, 'He acted privately with the greatest discretion in order to safeguard himself, and whenever he sought to obtain an object he contrived to let it appear that the matter had been raise by someone other than himself'. Pope Pius II wrote about him, 'Although Cosimo is practically signore of the town he behaves in such a way as to appear a private citizen.' Cosimo was happy to maintain the pretence of himself as a mere private, public-spirited citizen. He wrote on one occasion to Pius II, 'You write to me not a s a private man who is satisfied with the mediocre dignity of a citizen, but as though I were a reigning prince...Well you know how limited is the power of a private citizen in a free state under a popular government.' The business of government was often carried on behind the scenes. As one opponent of Cosimo wrote, 'the commune was governed at dinners and desks rather than in the Palace; many were called to office, but few were chosen to govern.'[2]

A keynote of Florentine political life was honour. Social control was regulated by honour and shame. Those who governed had to be men of honour, they had to have the respect of those amongst whom they lived. As an English author wrote, 'Honour is not in his hand who is honoured,but in the hearts and opinions of other men'. It was reckoned that honour was the reward of virtue. An honourable man was expected to behave in a certain way. If he did not then he was shamed and lost respect. Honour had various expressions in religion: the honourable man was supposed to support religious enterprises, to show charity, to be a benefactor of religious institutions and to display piety. An honourable man was also supposed to be a man of his word, to respect the bonds and compacts that he entered into freely. Another social dimension of honour was a devotion to lineage, to family and kinship. Honour could be inherited, it came through 'blood'. It was not an individual possession but came through the lineage. An honourable man had also to show a certain amount of patronage. He had to share his good-fortune with others as a form of reinvesting it in the community. The Medici family wealth allowed them to grant favours, offer protection and to sponsor less important people in public affairs. In this way not only war they able to build up a party they were also able to display their importance.[3] Florence was very much a display society, glory had to be manifested in order to retain credibility. The honourable man had to undertake projects for the glory of the community, to shoulder a share of the burden of the commune in proportion to the respect with which he was treated.

Cosimo De Medici did just that. A number of his undertakings were prompted out of a concern for honour and were designed to show off the glory of Florence. In that way some of the glory would reflect on him and on his house. Significantly, when he died the commune ordered that the phrase *pater patriae*, father of the country, be carved on his tombstone.

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Cosimo undertook many works of public patronage. He supported humanist scholars and writers, he gave gifts of books to the libraries of religious houses. He bought up on of the most famous libraries of the day from Niccolò Nicoli and gave six hundred of the manuscripts to the library of his Dominican foundation of San Marco, effectively founding the first large-scale public library in Italy.[4] In his commissions for the libraries of his favourite religious foundations he took the advice of his old friend Tommaso Parentucelli, who subsequently became Pope Nicholas V and the founder of the Vatican Library. Cosimo was not a philistine tycoon who ordered books by the yard. One of the greatest Italian humanists of the age, Marsiglio Ficino said of him,

> Even till the last day when he departed from this world of shadows to go to light he devoted himself to the acquisition of knowledge. For when we had read together Plato's book dealing with the *Origin of the Universe* and the *Summum Bonum* he, as you who were present well know, soon after quitted this life as though her were really going to enjoy that happiness which he had tasted in our conversations.[5]

One of his great projects was the establishment of an Observant Dominican community in the former Silvestrine monastery of San Marco in Florence. There was already one house of Dominicans in Florence at Santa Maria Novella, but the new priory was not to be staffed from there. Nine friars from the Observant house of San Domenico came down the hill from Fiesole to take up residence in Florence. Until 1445 a single prior was to govern both houses. As soon as they arrived work began on the reconstruction of the living quarters of the priory which had been left in a very bad state by the monks. The building continued for over a decade and was still unfinished at its consecration in the presence of Pope Eugenius IV in 1443.

Michelozzo (1396–1472) was responsible for much of the architecture, including the unusual feature of the library which was to be open to other Florentines to use. Michelozzo followed the style and pattern of Roman architecture trying to impart a sense of harmony and peace. He had drawn up the plans for Cosimo's own palace. Brunelleschi was a bolder and more innovative architect, but Michellozzo was more reliable from Cosimo's point of view. Brunelleschi was expensive, had frequent quarrels with his workmen and was really used only on the grandest of projects. Cosimo persuaded the chapter of his parish church, San Lorenzo, to employ Brunelleschi. For smaller projects, more connected with his own personal interest Cosimo chose Michelozzo. This tells us that Cosimo took a strong personal interest in San Marco it was not just a prestige project, but something which reflected his own personal spiritual vision. A vision which included ideas as to the structure and functioning of the Christian commonwealth that the commune of the city was supposed to represent. From its first moments then San Marco was to share in the civic ethos of the community. The two communities were to

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interpenetrate and influence one another.

Cosimo invested money in other religious foundations too. He spent little money on commissioning paintings, unlike some of his contemporaries, but he did put a lot in to architecture; more than any of his contemporaries in Italy at the time. As one observer wrote in 1463,

> 'Cosimo himself, a most famous man, builds now private homes, now sacred buildings, now monasteries, inside and outside the city, at such expense they seem to equal the magnificence of ancient kings and emperors.'[6]

He built the abbey church at Fiesole, a new dormitory for the friars of Santa Croce and was involved with the restructuring of the church of the Annunziata. In his own parish church of San Lorenzo he pledged himself to lend money free of interest for the choir and part of the nave. In return for this only members of the Medici family were to be buried in that part of the church, and only their coats of arms were to be displayed there. Various client families, like the Sassetti and the Tornabuoni founded and endowed side chapels where their own arms were displayed. As a result between 1420 and 1490 the church emerged as modern monument to the Medici family.

The churches in Florence were constructed according to a particular spatial pattern which reflected the ideal order expected in society. Men and women entered by different doors and would have worshipped in different parts of the church. A little way inside the nave a wooden screen with central doors was erected. This was the women's church, they were not permitted to go further into the building. Beyond that was the area reserved for the men which ended at the choir screen. The screen enclosed the choir which was reserved for the religious. Only the most distinguished of laymen would be invited beyond this. Then there was the sanctuary in the apse enclosing the altar. The most sacred space was where the holy sacrifice of the mass was carried out and Christ's presence realised amongst his people. St Bernardine of Siena, the fourteenth century Franciscan preacher, taught the Florentines that churches were sacred because they housed things and persons. Primarily, it was 'the place and hotel of God'. The titular saint resided there in a special way and was its possessor. The body of Christ also rested there. Angels lived in the church as did other saints. These presences were disclosed through images. The church was not primarily sacred space then it was the focus of sacred presence. The families of the local area wanted to be associated with these sacred presences and invested considerable sums of money in adorning and endowing their churches.[7]

Cosimo wanted to gain rights over the choir and apse of San Lorenzo because that was the dynamo that made the whole building tick. Spiritually, it was the force that animated the whole quarter. He wanted to be tuned into that channel. His client families showed their own honour by coming as close as they could to the most sacred space when building

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their chapels. The wealthiest families tried to found chapels by the choir screen or in the transepts. The closer you go to the door the less important your family was. Cosimo did exactly the same when he began the reconstruction of the church of San Marco. He bought the patronage rights of the apse and the choir from the family that owned them. The segmentation of the church paralleled the social hierarchy in a given neighbourhood and in the city as a whole. When the community of the parish came together to worship they saw the ideal pattern of the Christian community laid out before them in its harmony and order.

The mendicant churches served a valuable purpose when they were founded in the thirteenth century Italian cities. There were more patrons around looking for spiritual projects to endow in order to gain merit and to ease their passage to judgement. In many Italian towns the main mendicant Orders have churches at the four corners of the town, often built into the walls of the city. Often too, convents of nuns are to be found at the gates. They are there as spiritual bulwarks to defend the town from its enemies and to preserve sacred and civic order. Their ringing the city with prayer is a more powerful protection than the walls that enclose the city. Through the religious houses the city becomes not simply defensive space but sacred space. Civic liturgy and religious liturgy become intertwined. The images of one are applied to the other and vice versa. Now, the mendicant churches served a number of purposes in medieval Italian civic and religious life. They offered a solution to the tension that was often experienced between civic and family identity. Factionalism and family vendetta were constant features of medieval Italian urban life. The donation of land by the *commune* to the friars for their churches opened up space for families to invest in chapels and endowments. The friars' churches became monuments to family piety and were soon littered with family coats of arms which signified possession. This meant that the important, publicly symbolic churches, like the cathedral, could be kept free from tendencies towards privatisation. In the fourteenth century the *commune* of Florence forbade family arms being put in the cathedral and ordered the removal of the bodies of private citizens from there. They were trying to separate and protect the identity of the *commune* from that of its parts. This accounts for the success of the mendicant churches since the friars were willing to privatise parts of their churches in order to ensure income and local support.[8]

The mendicant churches came to reflect the social and political alliance structure of the quarters in which they were built. The people in the local area tended to develop an intense loyalty to the friars in their quarter. We can see that in the life of Catherine of Siena who was brought up in the shadow of the Dominican church. Members of families would also have representatives amongst the communities in the city. Sons, uncles and nephews who were friars would maintain their links with their families living in their palaces and houses round about the priory. Some of them would be reminded of ties of kinship and family loyalty by their

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family coats of arms on the walls of the priories or in the shape of the chapels that adorned the churches. Since it was mostly the custom in the fifteenth century for friars to remain in the priory that they originally entered, it was possible for friaries to be marked by strong family traditions. This meant that many of these institutions were slow to change. It also meant that they were in danger of becoming too closely involved with local circumstances and politics, losing that detachment which was necessary for the religious life. These tendencies had two consequences, one religious and one secular.

First of all the secular: since the mendicant churches were representative of the quarter in which they were situated and were heavily involved with the purely local society it was difficult for the increasingly powerful magnates to privatise them.[9] Cosimo, when he was looking to expand his prestige by a further religious endowment, could not have moved into the established mendicant friaries. Santa Maria Novella was a prestigious and aristocratic house in which too many of the great and good in Florence had a stake. He turned his attention to an entirely new foundation then which would consolidate the family's northern boundary on the edge of the parish of San Lorenzo. San Marco had the advantage of allowing Cosimo to start entirely again from scratch and ensuring that no other family would be involved in the endowment of this particular church. He chose the most radical and up-to-date religious movement to receive his generosity. The observant Dominican friars of San Domenico in Fiesole, who were only too glad to move into the city. Usually their priories were in the countryside or in small towns. Due to the hostility of their less observant brethren most of the larger towns were barred to them. Here they got a foothold in a major city which gave them the opportunity to practice that popular form of preaching which was the hallmark of the Observant apostolate. So who were the observants and from what did they emerge?

In many ways they are a response to that privatisation of religious life described above. The movement for reform, or rather for a return to the letter and spirit of the primitive observance, began under the leadership of Raymond of Capua (1330–1400), who was Master General from 1388–1400. He was also confessor to Catherine of Siena and wrote her life. Inspired by her example he promoted Dominican reform. One of his main collaborators was John Dominici (c. 1356–1419) a Florentine who was allegedly cured of a stutter through the intercession of Catherine of Siena. John was an eloquent preacher who was thrown out of the Venetian republic because of the stir his sermons were causing, and also because he had attracted an enthusiastic following of flagellant penitents known as the 'White Penitents'.

The movement for reform was not universally popular amongst most Dominican friars and met with stiff resistance. Many of them said that had never lived the life that was being envisaged and had no conviction that it was possible to live such a life in what they regarded as 'modern times'. Communities were divided and many threatened to erupt into violence. In

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the subsequent disputes the General Chapters tried to keep the Order from splitting in the way that the Franciscans had. In the end the Chapters compromised by admitting that no Dominican could be forced to live according to the primitive constitutions. However, volunteers for this way of life would be permitted. It was then necessary to provide some places where this way of life could be lived, since it is impossible to have one group of friars living a strict life and another a less observant life in the same priory. One priory in each province was to be set aside as a house of observance. Novices could then be trained in these houses and sent to other observant priories when these came into being. The Chapters appointed two vicars for the Observants, one in Germany and one in Italy. John Dominici was the vicar for Italy and one of the most successful of his foundations was San Domenico in Fiesole, which became the nursery of saints, including John Dominici himself, the prior, Antoninus, subsequently bishop of Florence, Lawrence of Rippafrata, Fra Angelico's novice master, Angelico himself and Anthony Neyrot. It was from this community that the founding friars of San Marco came.

What were the religious consequences of Cosimo's foundation? What did the Observant community want to establish at San Marco? They insisted on strict corporate and individual poverty. The houses were to be supported simply by day to day donations or by income drawn from the regular quest, begging from house to house. In many conventual Dominican houses certain abuses had been incorporated into the way of life. There was a flourishing private economy. Many of the friars were permitted to retain various gifts and stipends they received. Since some of them were closely involved with relatives and friends round about the priories some of them could, in fact, have quite substantial private incomes. More than that they were allowed to will these possessions, including their own cells and their preaching territories, to other members of the community. Some of them even left property to their own priory. In 1324 Fra Barro Sassetti, a member of the wealthy Sassetti family and a friar of Santa Maria Novella, provided the sacristy with a double series of vestments, an altarpiece and had donated altar cloths and liturgical garments for use of the priest, deacon and subdeacon. The altarpiece was accompanied by an altarcloth with precious stones and embroidered with images that embellished the front of the altar on major feast days.[10] Leonardo Datini, the Master General of the Dominicans and a friar of Santa Maria Novella, built some of the apartments constructed to house the Pope during his stay in Florence from his own resources. Some of the friars were clearly very rich indeed. Some were given ecclesiastical benefices with annual rents, which supplemented their income. Some of this was be paid in the form of a tax to the priory, the rest they kept. Masters in Sacred Theology and Preachers General also had other privileges. As a result fraternal equality was destroyed. Some friars lived comfortable lives others lacked even the basic necessities of life. Traditional discipline was accordingly relaxed. Some friars cited

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dispensations which freed them from the obligation of ever attending the choir; fasting was relaxed and meat could be eaten; the habit, although always worn, was fashionably and well-cut and made of better material than the white wool St Dominic had commanded; cloister was dispense or even ignored. The Observants set themselves to eradicate these abuses and to live in the traditional way in a proper environment constructed for prayer, preaching and contemplation. This is precisely what San Marco was meant to provide.

What did Cosimo get out of this? He invested large sums of money in the reconstruction of San Marco, but the investment actually went towards an important public purpose. The library at San Marco was a major contribution to the intellectual and scholarly life of the city. It gained Cosimo much honour and respect. Also, because the Dominicans of San Marco were to live from almsgiving, Cosimo was not troubled by setting aside a large endowment for the priory. He did not need to alienate, in perpetuity, any of his resources. Since the friars were to depend on the daily generosity of the people they were not interested in acquiring the kind of contacts with the local environment which characterised the other Orders of friars. They did not wish to alienate parts of the church to local families or to allow the cloister to be breached in any way at all. They kept very strictly to the rule that no strangers were to enter a large part of the enclosure area. According to the primitive constitutions the dormitory area especially was to be out of bounds to any save members of the priory community. Cosimo himself had a cell in the dormitory which he was allowed to use when he wished. No other outsiders would have been allowed in. It is in the dormitory area that most of the paintings by Fra Angelico are to be found.

In San Marco the normal pattern of decoration of mendicant friaries is reversed. Normally the public areas are richly decorated with frescoes and other paintings. In San Marco the private areas are the most heavily and deliberately painted, apparently according to a particular scheme, although we are not quite sure what the scheme might be. A definite statement is being made about what the building is for and what kind of life is to be lived there.

One of the characteristics of Observant spirituality was a strong contemplative and devotional element. This is reflected in the paintings of Fra Angelico and especially those he executed in the cells of the brethren in San Marco. They were obviously painted to stimulate the devotional and theological life of the brethren. Spirituality and theological study were to be united. St Antoninus, who as prior of the community, may have had a hand in the arrangement of the scheme had quite pronounced views on what it was proper to paint and what it was not.

> Painters are to be blamed when they paint things contrary to our Faith — when they represent the Trinity as one person with three heads, a monster, or, in the Annunciation, an already formed infant, Jesus,

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> being sent into the Virgin's womb, as if the body he took on were not of her substance . . . But they are not to be praised either when they paint apocryphal matter, like midwives at the Nativity, or the Virgin Mary in her Assumption handing down her girdle to St Thomas on account of his doubt, and so on. Also, to paint curiosities into the stories of Saints and in churches, things that do not serve to arouse devotion but laughter and vain thoughts-monkeys, and dogs chasing hares and so on, or gratuitously elaborate costumes — this I think is unnecessary and vain.[11]

Fra Angelico follows these guidelines to the letter. None of his paintings could be described as vain. All of them confront the scriptural accounts of the mysteries of the Lord's life. There is nothing apocryphal or curious. Neither are there references to living people through their being portrayed in the paintings as actors in the drama. There are contemporary references to historical characters in the choice of saints portrayed in some of his paintings. but these are not actual portraits of the Medici family. In this he differs from other artists working in Mendicant churches.

The pictures in the cells were thoroughly consistent with St Thomas Aquinas' views on contemplation. Words, signs or pictures can lead us to devotion which then rouse the mind internally and through this process a person is raised to God. Fra Angelico's use of white and his other techniques give the impression that the light comes from the interior of the picture itself. Through the contemplation and preaching of this mystery the viewer himself will undergo a process of transfiguration if he endures in this particular way of life. The themes are entirely Christocentric and the point is further made by the unusual presence of a tabernacle in the dormitory. The pictures and the living presence of Christ in the Eucharist complement one another.

If we were to look at other mendicant churches at the time we would see a different pattern of decoration and religious art serving a different purpose. In the Church of the Carmelites Fra Filippo Lippi, himself a Carmelite friar, was busily painting a series of frescoes on the history of the early Carmelites. The same pattern is repeated in other mendicant houses. What they are showing is that same concern for honour which characterises the secular oligarchy in their obsession with lineage and blood. Religious Orders have their lineage too and it is characterised by antiquity. In the Carmelite case they emphasised always tracing their origins from Elijah and Mount Carmel. They were relying on just that apocryphal tradition that Antoninus was condemning. The motto of the Dominican Order was truth, and only truth could be represented.

In San Marco the glories of the Dominican Order are not celebrated, or rather only one is, the contemplation of Dominic and the other Dominican saints who do not invite us to look at them but direct our gaze onwards to the mystery they are contemplating. They are mediators and are not the message. Basically San Marco is an anti-privatisation

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statement. This may be contrasted that with another famous chapel in Florence, the Sasetti Chapel in the church of Santa Trinita. Sasetti was an associate of Lorenzo De Medici. He originally hoped to endow a series of paintings in Santa Maria Novella in a chapel which would serve as his burial place. His family had long-standing connexions with the Dominican convent. Some of the family had been members of the community there. However, he was thwarted in his ambition because the Tornabuoni family owned the rights to the chapel. The Tornabouni commissioned a series of frescoes which precisely failed to conform to the conditions laid down by St Antoninus. They are full of curiosities and of contemporary portraits of the members of the family.

The Tornabouni had taken over the chapel from the Ricci family who had fallen on hard times and who could not afford to paint the chapel and keep it in good order. Rather than endure the disgrace of this they allowed the Tornabouni to repaint the chapel provided the Ricci arms were featured in it. The Tornabouni agreed, but painted two sets of their own arms on the apse wall facing the worshippers in the Church. The Ricci objected only to be told that their arms were indeed in the chapel, next to the tabernacle, which was the most honourable place in the church. The fact that they were so small that nobody could easily see them was irrelevant. Eventually the city council agreed with the Tornabouni and the Ricci lost out. But the Sassetti family also had ambitions to feature in Santa Maria Novella.

The Dominican community of Santa Maria Novella decided against the Sassetti and stuck with the Tornabuoni, they too were involved in the factionalism of the city community. They were not maintaining that detachment that should characterise true religious. Sassetti gave up the friars altogether and went off to the monks at Santa Trinita where he drew up his own scheme for the memorial chapel. Here the difference between San Marco and the unreformed Orders is marked. What we are presented with is a privatised, autobiographical scheme which runs the risk of imprisoning the gospel and domesticating the saints.

The central character in the scheme is St Francis, chosen because he was the donor's patron. A link was forged between the two of them then. St Francis loses his connexions with his Order and becomes, in a mysterious way, a client of Sassetti's. There are various scenes drawn from the history of the Franciscan Order but they are transposed to a Florentine setting. The confirmation of the Order by Pope Innocent III, for example, takes place not against the backdrop of the Lateran palace in Rome but against the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence. A connexion is being made between Florence and Rome. Florence was promoting herself as the heir to the civilisation of classical Rome. On the pope's right,the place of honour, stands the patron with his son and his employer, Lorenzo De Medici. Sassetti is demonstrating his loyalty to his employer, the head of the Medici bank. Lorenzo was also the head of the dominant faction in Florence at the time and a target of the prior of San Marco's strongest

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criticism. The Prior at the time was Girolamo Savonarola. Lorenzo had just restored relations with the pope. The Pope, Sixtus IV, had been involved in an anti-Medici coup, the Pazzi conspiracy, and contacts had been strained since then. In the foreground there are a number of children emerging from the stairwell. With them is Lorenzo Poliziano, a humanist but a frequent attender at San Marco and a great admirer of the community there. One of the children is Giovanni, Lorenzo's son, who was made a Cardinal at the age of 11, and 24 years later became Pope. The connexion between Florence and Rome was based on the belief that Florence had founded Rome. Poliziano claimed to have found the historical evidence for this.

The other significant fresco is a scene from Francis's life. It refers to his raising the son of notary from the dead in Arles. In 1478, Sassetti's son, Teodoro had died. However, soon afterwards, another son given the same name was born. The Arles miracle is set in the square before Santa Trinita, the church which houses the Sassetti chapel. Sassetti is referring to the death of one son and his resurrection in the form of the birth of another soon afterwards. In the same picture are portraits of some of Sassetti's young kinsmen. Meanwhile he and his wife are depicted in the nativity scene above the altar as silent spectators, they occupy the place that would have been given to the friars in Fra Angelico's version of similar scenes.[12]

What we see in these frescoes is a complicated form of privatisation of common images and a common patrimony: the gospel and the lives of the saints. They are domesticated and woven into the family ideal that spread beyond Sasetti to include the wider faction to which he belonged. In the Assisi frescoes Francis is the head of an Order approved by the papacy in the Sassetti chapel he is a family saint. The details in the picture shed light on all kinds of economic, political and cultural configuration which are absent from San Marco.

In 1496 Savonarola preached in Florence on the Saturday of the third week of Lent. He addressed a packed congregation and the tone of his address must have threatened many who heard him. Yet in the end it was the logical consequence of the spirituality of the Observant Dominicans lived so fervently by the San Marco community,

> How is it that if I were to say: give me ten ducats for one in need, you would not give them, but if I tell you: spend a hundred for a chapel here in San Marco, would you do it? Yes ! in order to have your coat of arms placed there, for your own glory, but not for the glory of God . . . Look through all convent buildings, and you will find them full of their founder's armorial bearings. I raise my head to look above a door, thinking to see a crucifix, and behold there is a shield, I raise my head again a little further on, and behold there is another shield—armorial bearings everywhere. I don a vestment, thinking that a crucifix is painted on it; but arms have been painted even there, the better to be seen by the people. These, then are your idols, to which you make sacrifice.

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On 23 May 1498 Savonarola was executed in the Piazza della Signoria. The community of San Marco was persecuted and deprived of its privileges, and even the great bell of the priory which had summoned the people to hear the sermons and to attend the liturgies was ordered to be brought out in a cart around the streets of Florence to be publicly flogged by the city executioner. Fra Angelico's vision was shattered.

1 J.R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici* (London, 1977), 21.
2 For a good summary of Florence and Cosimo de'Medici see, Vincent Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance* (London, 1967), 61–84
3 Mervyn James, 'The Concept of honour, 1485–1642', in Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modem England.* (Cambridge, 1986) 270–308.
4 George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1992), 11–15; 119–24.
5 Quoted in Hale *op.cit.*, 28.
6 *ibid.*, 31
7 Bram Kempers, *Painting, Power and Patronage: The Rise of the Professional Artist in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1992) 36–7.
8 *ibid.*, 72–4
9 Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1979), 336.
10 Stefano Orlandi op, *Necrologio di Santa Maria Novella* (Florence, 1955), i, 40.
11 S. Antonino, *Summa Theologica*, iii, viii, 4.
12 Kempers, *op. cit.* 203–06

Fra Angelico's Deposition from the Cross: The Circumstances Explored

Michael Prendergast

The Strozzis were a large, rich and powerful family in the Florence of the 1420s. Like many aristocratic merchant families of the time, they planned a chapel where only they would have the right to be buried. Such privatised funerary and memorial arrangements were not unusual, though in combining theirs with a functioning sacristy in the monastic church of Santa Trinita, the Strozzis started a trend which was to be important in the evolution of Renaissance architecture. Because it was stripped of furnishings and pictures in the seventeenth century, the chapel-sacristy at Santa Trinita now looks bare, but in the early fifteenth century it was full of colour and religious imagery.

The head of the family, Palla Strozzi, took a leading part in the planning of the memorial chapel. He negotiated with the monks, engaged an architect, masons and stone carvers and had his deceased father

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