

tory. To succeeding ages they left a priceless heritage of achievements in the arts, literature, classical scholarship, archeology, and historical and political thought, as well as impressive contributions in philosophy, economic theory and practice, and education. Yet we will be disappointed if we try to find in 1400 or 1500 a civilization in all respects different from that which existed in 1200 or 1300. As Federico Chabod, a great Italian scholar, has shown, continuity in culture is unavoidable, most change is very gradual, and the new developments often occur within the formal framework of the old systems, problems, and habits of thought. Thus, we must look for change and development in the midst of continuity. Charles Homer Haskins, the celebrated medievalist, was probably doing precisely that when he stated his opinion that there was an Italian Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, "whatever we choose to call it."

In the following selections, some of the qualities and characteristics of Italian life in this period will become evident, as will the attitudes and assumptions of several of the keenest observers and most articulate writers of an age in which eloquence was held in high esteem.

\* For Chabod's position, see his *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, pp. 14-200. Haskins' remark occurs in *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 5.

FROM: Werner Gundersheimer (ed)  
The Italian Renaissance

## COLUCCIO SALUTATI

1331-

In 1374, at the age of 43, Coluccio Salutati arrived in Florence and began to work for the city as a notary. In the following year he was elected Chancellor, an office that he held through annual re-election until 1406, when he died. In a city ridden with internal factions and rivalries, he was universally trusted as a fair and loyal public servant. In addition, he became the leader and patron of the Florentine humanists. His arrival at Florence, in the year of Petrarch's death and the year before Boccaccio's death, provided a new standard-bearer for the stylistic and classical interests of their disciples. The elegance of his Latin was legendary. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the Duke of Milan who almost succeeded in subjugating the entire peninsula, is reported to have said that one letter of Salutati's did the Milanese cause more damage than a thousand Florentine horsemen; a voluminous diplomatic correspondence gives evidence of Salutati's gifts of eloquence.

Though Salutati subscribed to the conventional Christianity of his time, and was probably a man of genuine piety, he warmly supported the educational and literary innovations of the humanists. His reputation for piety and good judgment made him an excellent spokesman for the humanist cause, which he had several occasions to defend against attacks by conservative guardians of the scholastic curriculum. His replies usually took the form of letters addressed to an individual but intended for public circulation. Of these, the most important is his letter to a learned Dominican friar, Giovanni Dominici, who later became a cardinal.

Dominici (an influential popular preacher whose methods and influence have sometimes been compared with those of

Univ. of Washington Libraries

Savonarola) had written a long treatise arguing that the study of the liberal arts, including the Greek and Roman classics, was not proper for children, and should only be granted to learned adults under carefully controlled circumstances. In his reply, Salutati considers the liberal arts individually, and attempts to show that all of them are essential to the education of a Christian, as well as intrinsically valuable. The excerpts which follow present his defenses of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, especially as these arts may be learned from their ancient secular sources. It is interesting to note how characteristically medieval much of Salutati's thinking is, even when he is defending humanistic studies. (From *Humanism and Tyranny: Studies in the Italian Trecento*, by Ephraim Emerton. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925, pp. 246-61. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press.)

### From *A Letter in Defense of Liberal Studies*

I have read your book, reverend Father in Christ, and find it a veritable splendor of noonday in which is no darkness at all, and not, as you in your modesty call it, "A light shining in the darkness." After the Prologue you give us forty-seven chapters, following the letters of the passage you have chosen for your text [*lux in tenebris lucet et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*], truly an enormous work, in which you have gathered many excellent selections and have displayed your vast learning to my great admiration.

Who would not marvel that so busy a man, continually occupied with spiritual affairs, preaching to the people the word of God, hearing and warning sinners in the secret of the confessional, speaking with God in prayer, hearing the voice of God as you read, soaring, as it were, above yourself on wings of contemplation,—that a man, I say, thus occupied, having scarcely time for the necessary things of life, should have been able to put forth such a huge volume merely to settle one little question! But, when we are led by the goodness and the grace of God it is sure to happen that we can do more than we supposed, nay, more than we could ask. He, that Spirit which is above us, goes beyond us and does more than we his

instruments could accomplish. The limitless Supreme, though He works through us and in us, is surely not confined by any human measure. So that, whenever we see something done by a man which seems to be beyond ordinary human powers we can say, and we ought to confess and preach: "Lo! the finger of God is here!" Thus when we think of the lives of Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, their work and their writings, we are amazed, our hearts fail us, and we say: "The Holy Spirit has done this, not these men."

So it is, venerable John, that I am all of a tremble at the very idea of speaking against you, and I dare not assail one single thing which you have established, not only because the finger of God has done it, but also because it seems utterly foolish to cast doubt upon what your learning and sanctity have laid down. When, however, I was reading your most elegant composition I came to the place where you sum up the whole controversy and raise the question whether it is right for Christian believers to make use of profane literature. I had already written to Brother John de Angelis who was persistently and absolutely denying that this was permissible to Christian men, and had said to him that it was necessary to the understanding of many books written by most holy doctors, Augustine, Jerome, and many others. I said also that when we are opposing the authority of the Gentiles, whether these be historians or poets, or, more dangerous still, orators or philosophers, we ought to be armed in every possible way. We did not, I said, put forward these studies and these traditions as an end in themselves, but as a means for going on to other things. Now everybody was saying that you maintain the very opposite of this opinion.

But—thanks be to God! who is the supreme and perfect Truth, from which as from a seed every true thing is derived—you say in the early part of your treatise, with admirable reasoning, precisely what I was saying. You set this forth at length and most cogently in your first twelve chapters. In the rest, however, you go on to a conclusion as if you were delivering a final judgment and putting an end to the whole question. You admit that the reading of profane literature is not to be forbidden to those who are instructed and established in the faith, as to which I never had any controversy with Brother John de Angelis. So that, if I chose to accept what you say, there would be nothing left for me to say in reply to

what comes afterward. But many have the impression that you would like absolutely to forbid profane literature to Christians, which I distinctly say ought not to be done, and to this you agree, though only in part.

And indeed, most pious Sir, if you did not so earnestly place nobility of intellect above the will, the very opposite of what I maintained when I was discussing the nobility of law and medicine, perhaps I would avoid the burden of a reply, giving way to your authority and your reverend character. But, since it will be a help to discuss this second point I will speak equally of both, so that you may see whether I did well in placing the nobility of the intellect lower than that of the will, and whether we ought to say that boys should not be initiated into profane literature, but should begin with the study of the sacred writings. Then, after you have seen what my opinion is on both these points, it shall be your part to amend, to correct, to change, or to cut out whatever arguments I shall put forth subject to your correction.

I will, then, begin with you, Reverend Father, a discussion, first as to whether it is more satisfactory and more convenient to commence our education with sacred literature or more useful to spend some time on profane studies, and this shall be my first discussion under six headings and shall form my first treatise. In the second place we will consider whether I was right in giving to the will precedence over the intellect, which seems not to be your opinion nor that of great and holy authorities in your Order. When this is done I will prepare a conclusion to the whole discussion, always subject to the Truth, to better judgment and to your correction, confident that, even though you remain of your present opinion, still you will not despise one who thinks otherwise.

In this I shall proceed the more freely because I shall not make any statement which in my opinion is an argument either for or against the faith; but if this latter should happen I hereby now revoke and condemn it. God has given his servant grace never to have had a thought contrary to the faith. Even when human reason seemed to contradict it I have never had the slightest hesitation. How could my intellect venture to dissent from Holy Scripture or be in doubt about that which has been settled by the whole body of believers? I know not how it may be with others, but so it has at

ways been with me. Even when I was a child and still more now, when with added years I have by God's grace seen and seriously considered more things, I have been most firmly convinced that no doctrine can be more compelling than our faith and the sacred writings; that whatever is contrary to these is utterly false and whatever departs from them is madness. I have always held it to be the greatest folly and intellectual presumption to deviate in any way from the precepts of Jesus, the teaching of Paul, the counsels given by both of them, the opinions and traditions of Jerome, the treatises of Ambrose, the expositions of Gregory and the discussion of Augustine or to disagree in any particular with men of such learning and holiness.

Let the mob of philosophers run after Aristotle or Plato or the pestilent Averroes or any better man if there is one—never mind about their names! I am satisfied with Jesus Christ alone, who while learning flourished in Greece and Italy and while Italy was crushing everything at her own pleasure by force of arms, "made foolish the wisdom of this world"—foolish, not through the wisdom of the wise nor the power of the strong, but through the foolishness of his preaching and his cross; through fishermen, not philosophers, through men of low estate, not those in worldly power.

And, since my first heading is the more important, being related to many things, as for instance to philosophers, grammarians, logicians, rhetoricians, and all the heathen who have handed down anything for us to learn, I will begin with Grammar which we know was in a high state of development before the time of Christ, and which is the gateway to all the liberal arts and to all learning, human and divine.

## I

I have no doubt whatever that you will agree with me that those who are to enter upon the study of Christian doctrine must, by a kind of necessity, begin with Grammar. For, how can one who is ignorant of letters take in the knowledge of Holy Scripture? And how can one know letters without a knowledge of Grammar? Do you not see how ignorance of Grammar has misled monks

and all who labor under the lack of such training? They do not understand what they read, nor can they properly present it to others for their reading.

A simple faith can, I admit, be perceived by the uneducated, but Holy Scripture and the commentaries and expositions of the learned they cannot understand. These can scarcely be comprehended by men of letters—I mean not those who have simply studied Grammar, but even those who have labored over Dialectics and Rhetoric. Grammar itself is in great part unintelligible without a knowledge of general facts [*rerum*], of how the essential nature of things changes, and how all the sciences work together—not to mention a knowledge of terminology. All studies in human affairs and in sacred subjects are bound together, and a knowledge of one subject is not possible without a sound and well-rounded education. But, however it may be with the ease or difficulty of learning Grammar, how about Christian doctrine itself? The Christian can with difficulty know just what he ought to believe, and if someone, on the authority of Scripture or of some reasoning however feeble, opposes him he will not know how to answer and will begin to waver in his faith. O, how many and what important questions do we hear every day which cannot be answered by mere crudity and a holy simplicity without the aid of learning! What would become of the whole body of the faithful if all were ignorant of letters or of Grammar? Of what avail would be the battle-line of believers against the heathen or against heretics without the learning supplied by Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric?

Can any one deny that letters and Grammar were invented by the heathen and that, if those studies are to be forbidden to Christians, the art of Grammar itself will be closed to them? If this sounds absurd to us, why ought we entirely to reject the study of the heathen? Grammatical problems certainly cannot affect one's belief. The science of Grammar does not discuss and examine matters pertaining to the faith and to salvation, and therefore there is no danger in this kind of inquiry; no error hostile to the faith can thus be introduced. If sciences are to be rejected on account of their inventors—and it is a well known fact that they were all invented by heathen—why was it that the Christians accepted them from heathen hands? Why did they not all go to pieces? Why are

they not condemned by everyone? Why are they taught and studied in your monasteries? Believe me, venerable John, it is neither fair nor reasonable to send into exile, as it were, the many teachings and traditions of the heathen, to exclude them from Christian homes, except insofar as they are opposed to the faith and to the conclusions of holy Fathers.

Nor do I think it fair, because one or another held a bad opinion of our faith, to proscribe the learning which he has handed down to us. The error of an author is one thing; the falseness or the contagion of the science he has invented is another. So that even if a heathen, a publican, a heretic, or a criminal has told the truth or professed a science harmless in itself, the truths he has spoken cannot be condemned on account of the fault of the author. . . .

The art of Grammar comes first in order and in [ease of] perception. It was, beyond all doubt, invented by heathen, whether we consider its discovery or its development. This we have to assume both from reason and from necessity, and, since we can acquire it from no other source than that from which it was derived, namely from the heathen, and since Christians, even though they have commented upon it, have most certainly taken all they say from the heathen, why do you forbid this and other studies for Christians?

Whence did the primitive Church learn how to express itself if not from the heritage of the heathen? When the call of God came to the nations and was accepted by them, how could they have learned to know the sacred writings and to understand their teachings and their purpose if they had been ignorant of their own learning, that is of Greek and Latin Grammar? Why do you cause this subject to be taught and studied in your own congregations and churches? On this point I think I have said enough, and I do not believe that you, when you have read the above, will deny its truth, in spite of what appears to be your absolute prohibition of profane studies to Christians.

Quintilian [c.35-95 A.D.; Roman authority on eloquence] says, if I may very briefly quote his own words, that this science is divided into two parts, the art of correct speech and the interpretation of the poets, and hence it has more in reserve than is shown on the surface. And farther on he says:

It is not enough to have read the poets; every kind of writing should be studied carefully, not only for the contents, but also for the words, which often derive their force from the authors who use them. Grammar is incomplete without music, when we have to speak of meter and rhythm. If it be ignorant of astronomy it cannot understand the poets who, not to mention other things, are continually making use of the rising and setting of the constellations in their descriptions of time. Nor can it ignore philosophy on account of the numerous passages in almost all poems drawn from an intimate familiarity with the philosophy of Nature [i.e., natural science], as, e.g., Empedocles among the Greeks and Varro and Lucretius among the Latins, who delivered their message of wisdom in verse. Furthermore we need no small degree of eloquence if we would speak fully and appropriately of each proposition we have demonstrated.

When Fabius [Quintilian] had said this, he added:

Wherefore those persons are not to be tolerated who criticize this science as trifling and vacant, for unless it has laid solid foundations for the future orator, whatever he builds thereon will fall to the ground. It is a necessity for youth, a joy to the aged, a sweet companion in solitude, the only element in every form of study which has more of utility than of display.

Thus M. Fabius Quintilianus, that most highly cultivated writer, in the first book of his *Institutes of Oratory*.

To this should be added, in order to show the wide scope of this discipline, the work of Marcianus Mineus Felix Capella, in which, after the first two books describing the marriage of Philology and Mercury, he sets forth with the perfection of brevity the doctrine of the seven liberal arts.

So that, since it is the function of Grammar to know these arts and to teach them, and since this branch of learning should precede all others, and since it is a part of the heritage of the Nations, it follows logically and of necessity that, far from being prohibited to Christians, it ought to be placed before all other studies. But of this I have spoken elsewhere; and now, having said enough about Grammar we will go on to Logic.

## II

Who can deny that Dialectics, being an inquiry after truth, which is the sole object of all liberal arts and of every science, is a necessary study for Christian men? Our faith is the supreme Truth, and we come to it through truths without number. Since then this science is the instrument for discovering and estimating truth, who cannot see that it is a necessity to Christian believers in reaching the goal of Christian truth? Shall not the believer begin by learning first the substance of the faith, and then, after he has made a habit of this, as you would have him do, turn to the studies by which he may comprehend and defend what he has already perceived?

Tell me, my venerable John, when can any one be fortified on every side in purity of faith by human reason unless he reach this truth through the discussion of those endless doubts by which it is wont to be weakened and through knowing and removing many arguments on one side and the other? It is most true, as Democritus, quoted by Cicero, said, that Nature has hidden the truth in deepest mystery. So that, if Nature has hidden her truths, that is, natural truths—for he knew of no others—in such depths, what shall we think of that infinite power whose nature is such that we do well to call it supernatural?—especially since the truths of Nature are finite, while this power must be acknowledged as infinite. In what depth, what pit, what abyss does supernatural truth lie concealed!

But now, the things we hold by faith alone being of such a nature that natural reason cannot reach them, it is easy for some fiction of human reasoning to shake them from the place they once held. Therefore it is necessary for neophytes to learn, together with the doctrine, the means by which to defend it. Who would allow raw recruits, untrained in military affairs, without teaching in the principles of war, to be placed at the post of danger unarmed and not even knowing with what weapons to defend themselves or to attack the enemy? With what reason could they be used even in a slight skirmish? Let them learn at one and the same time to handle weapons, to fight, to conquer and to meet danger, lest at

the first encounter they should be struck with terror and beat a retreat or, if they cannot escape, should be captured.

So much for Logic, which acts on the intellect with compelling force by means of reasoning. Now let us pass on to Rhetoric which accompanies Logic, but acts upon the will. Both of these aim at the same goal but by different ways. The one enlightens the mind to an intellectual conviction; the other brings it into a willing attitude, or, to put it in another way, the one proves in order to teach; the other persuades in order to guide.

### III

I know not how to carry on this discussion more effectively than by using the words of Saint . . . Augustine. In the fourth book of his *De Doctrina Christiana* he solves the problem as follows:

28  
The art of Rhetoric may be used to persuade both to truth and to falsehood, and who dare say that the truth (in the person of its defenders) ought to stand unarmed against falsehood so that those who are trying to persuade men to falsehood shall know how to make their audience friendly and interested and receptive from the start, while the champions of truth shall not know how to do this? Shall the former present falsehood tersely, clearly, and plausibly while the latter set forth the truth so that it is tedious to hear, difficult to understand, and unattractive to believe? Are the former to oppose truth with fallacious arguments and false assertions, while the latter are unable to defend the truth or to refute falsehood? Shall the former stir the minds of their hearers to error, terrify, sadden, rouse, and exhort in glowing speech, while the latter are cold, slow, and languid in the defense of truth? Who is such a fool as to call this wisdom? Since, then, the art of eloquence standing between the two can persuade powerfully to either good or evil, why is no preparation made by good men to fight for the truth when evil men are using this art in the service of wrong or error to gain their own vain and wicked ends?

Such are the words of the holy father Augustine. And now, then! Does it really seem to you that this famous doctor is forbidding to Christians and to those entering upon the way of God the study of

Rhetoric, although it is the heritage of Cicero, the special weapon of the heathen, their sword and spear? He saw in others and felt in himself how easily scholars allow Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric to make their way into theological truth. He saw how necessary these are to beginners in order to learn and to understand the sacred writings. He remembered what a protection they were to him when he had fallen into the Manichaean heresy, how they had saved him from remaining, through ignorance, in the error in which he had been caught. He did not forget that the first glory of his salvation flashed upon him out of the darkness of Cicero, the man whose language, as he himself says, was admired by almost everyone—not so, however, his soul!

That book of his called *Hortensius* contains an exhortation to philosophy, and yet that book changed my whole attitude of mind and caused my prayers to turn to thee, O Lord, and changed my will and my desire. The whole vain show became suddenly a vile thing to me, I desired immortal wisdom with an incredible longing of the heart, and I began to arise and return to thee.

All this Father Augustine said, and here you can see what fruit our God, Creator and Redeemer, drew from out the filthy rubbish of the heathen. So Augustine could not have taught that Christians should be prohibited from things which he remembered by the grace of God to his own salvation, things which he knew were not merely an instrument but a summary of many truths and which he had found a wall of defense for the truth, a weapon, a tool and a sword of protection and victory when he had to fight for the faith or for the sacred writings. Who amid the audience of scholars would desire the banishment of teaching by which he was profiting every day and making progress more and more toward the truth he was seeking?

Imagine for yourself a person well grounded in the *trivium*, that is, in the literary studies; then let him enter on the study of Christian doctrine and sacred literature at the same time with another person untrained in those [preliminary] branches, and which do you think would or ought to become steeped [in sacred learning] the more rapidly, or the more completely, the trained man, or the

crude and ignorant one? Finally, since the whole *trivium* is a way and a means, not an end, and is planned so that through it we become able to learn other things and not that we may rest in it, is it not a preposterous and utterly ridiculous idea after the end has been reached to go back and work around to the goal again? If, as you would have it, after we have learned what pertains to the faith and have become well grounded therein, these [literary] subjects are to be studied, tell me, I pray you, to what end? Is it for their own sakes? But they are not an end in themselves. Is it that we may progress further? But we shall already have passed the boundary and left behind us the final goal of all learning!

I can see no reason for this opinion, my dear John, unless it were that, finding you have not reached your goal, you follow the example of men who have lost their way and have strayed from the true, straight, and well-worn path and so you turn back to the point at which you wandered away. But enough of this! . . .

## ✠ PETRUS PAULUS VERGERIUS, *The Elder*

Even the simplest circumstances of Vergerius' life have been much disputed, but it is now generally accepted that he was born in Capo d'Istria in 1370, and died in Budapest in 1444. He was educated in Padua and Florence, where he studied Greek under the great Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras. He appears to have been a doctor of law, medicine, and philosophy, and he served for some years as professor of logic in the University of Padua. He was familiar with the major intellectual developments of his time, and accepted elements of both humanism and scholasticism. After 1405, Vergerius became increasingly involved in ecclesiastical questions, and played an active role at the councils of Constance and Basle. He then entered the service of the Emperor, in which he seems to have remained for the rest of his life.

The treatise *De Ingeniis Moribus* ("concerning excellent traits") probably was written between 1400 and 1402. Not only one of the first educational treatises produced by a humanist writer, it was also one of the most influential. It survives in many manuscripts, went through many printed editions, and was widely known and respected well into the sixteenth century. The work is addressed to Ubertinus, the young son of Francesco Carrara, the lord of Padua, and it succinctly summarizes the educational ideals that came to be fostered in the humanistic schools attached to Northern Italian princely courts during this period. Many of the characteristic themes of humanist educational thought emerge here—the relationship of arms and learning, the importance of physical as well as mental development, the need for a familiarity with all of the

