

Alessia Contarino (Ed.), Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Dialogus de adoratione* [Studi pichiani 18]. Olschki, Florence 2017, xi + 163 pp. ISBN 9788822265333. €25.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his nephew Gianfrancesco seldom had an entirely smooth relationship with the ecclesiastical authorities. When Giovanni Pico presented the pope, Innocent VIII, with his set of 900 theses in 1486, seven of them were condemned as heretical and six others as being of dubious orthodoxy. Pico then fell under the spell of Savonarola. Although he resisted the friar's exhortations to join the Order of Preachers he had himself buried in a Dominican habit. Gianfrancesco too was one of the most outspoken and enthusiastic supporters of Savonarola, and, after his uncle's death and Savonarola's execution, he did his best to defend both his uncle's memory and Savonarola's teaching. Despite a life spent in an almost uninterrupted state of warfare with his closest relatives, who were trying to seize his estate of Mirandola and who finally contrived to murder him in 1533, Gianfrancesco Pico was a productive writer. He was for ever eager to present his ideas about the reform of the Church and the clergy (which were said to have influenced the decisions of the Fifth Lateran Council), his hope of restoring the Church of the Apostles, and his eschatological convictions. He was also steadfast in his opposition to the *prisca theologia* of Ficino and the magic he associated with it.

For some nine years, between 1501 and 1511 while Mirandola was occupied by his brother, Gianfrancesco Pico remained in exile. He travelled to Germany, and met some of the leading German humanists when he tried to persuade the emperor, Maximilian I, to support his claims to Mirandola. With the rise of Lutheranism he felt bound to stress his own orthodoxy—he had relied on Pope Julius II to recapture Mirandola in 1511 and he approached later popes with his plans for ecclesiastical reform—and the episodes of iconoclasm north of the Alps at the end of 1523 offered him an opportunity. Encouraged by one of his closest German friends, Nicolaus Schönberg, the archbishop of Capua who shared his devotion to Savonarola, Pico wrote his *Dialogus de adoratione* which was completed early in 1524.

The dialogue is dedicated to Clement VII whom Pico hopes to congratulate on his victory over the two main enemies of the Church, the Protestants in the West and the Muslims in the East. A striking feature of the dialogue is the violence of Pico's attacks on Luther. In accordance with the more extreme Catholic propaganda he describes Luther as a monster in every respect, 'monstrum horrendum ingens.' 'Caveas Lili,' he admonishes his interlocutor, the humanist Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, 'ullam esse aut artem aut diligentiam, qua possit tam deforme, tam varium, tam inconstans ostentum representari.' Luther, the very worst of

heretics, had devastated Germany; he was entirely responsible for the iconoclasm and destruction of the churches and the subversion of the Church itself. If Lutherans would single out Savonarola as one of their precursors, and even reserved a place of honour for Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, few followers of Savonarola, as the *Dialogus de adoratione* shows, reciprocated their respect.

Pico uses the *Dialogus de adoratione* to defend his uncle against the attacks of the Spaniard Pietro Garsias who had once sat on the committee that condemned Giovanni Pico's theses and had written an attack on them. Drawing on his uncle too, Gianfrancesco provides us with extracts from Giovanni's lost commentary on the second Psalm. The *Dialogus* deals with worship in its various forms through the ages, pagan, Jewish, and Christian. Referring to the pseudo-Dionysius, the authenticity of whose writings he defended, Pico posits that man can only worship an object the image of which is to be found in his mind. While such images are essential, the actual carved or painted image can certainly do no harm, and may well do some good. True worship, Pico maintains, echoing Savonarola, should be performed in the spirit, but for a great number of human beings the best means to reach this stage is through a visual object. The idea of a spiritual participation in divine worship had been revived in 1517 with the republication in Strasburg of Clichtove's *Elucidatorium ecclesiasticum* in which the superiority of mental prayer over vocal prayer is emphasised, but in which the merits of vocal prayer are also appreciated. Another of Pico's sources, Alessia Contarino reminds us, is Gerson with his strong tendency to affective mysticism.

The *Dialogus de adoratione* remained in manuscript. Pico's reasons for not having it published are not entirely clear. Alessia Contarino suggests that the pro-imperial position of Pico, once shared by Clement VII, had given way to a papal policy of neutrality which might have made the appearance in print of the dialogue something of an embarrassment. Nor do we know how Clement VII reacted to the moderate spiritualism and the echoes of Savonarola which are only too clear. This, therefore, is the first printed edition of the text, based on the Vatican manuscript Vat. Lat. 3735. First we have the original Latin version with the marginal notes and corrections indicated in footnotes. This is followed by a fully annotated Italian translation. The notes, together with Alessia Contarino's clear and informative introductory essay, allow us to situate the text in the more general context of Pico's work and of the religious developments of a time at which the borders between heterodoxy and orthodoxy were still fluid but were about to harden.

*Alastair Hamilton*

The Warburg Institute, London

*alastair.hamilton@sas.ac.uk*