

Lecture by Mr. Clement Salaman, March 25th, 1991

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. Let us find the stillness that is here together. Let us dedicate all that is to come to the one Self. It is an honor to introduce Mr. Clement Salaman who comes from the London School. Mr. Salaman has for many years been head of the Renaissance Study Group which has taken upon itself the delightful and arduous task of translating the works of Marcilio Ficino. The group has completed four volumes and is presently working on the fifth. This work has been acclaimed by the academic world and literary circles as surpassing previous translations. In itself it stands as a remarkable transmission of remarkable ideas and visions from a period which can form and inspire our lives.

Mr. Clement Salaman.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. It is very nice to be here. It is the second time I have been in New York, but it is like being home because everyone is so hospitable and so friendly that one is really rather overwhelmed. It is very, very nice. The first time I came we didn't visit the School, but we were in the middle of New York somewhere, lost and I took out a map and three or four people came running up to give directions. It was very nice.

This evening you won't be surprised to hear that I am going to talk about the Renaissance, the Florentine Renaissance. It is very near to my heart and is something which is not in the past. I think that is the first important thing to say. It is present, now. We still see things through the eyes of the great Florentine artists who opened our eyes to beauty as we perceive it now as a gateway to Truth. We come under their spell whether we like it or not. We do so because any Renaissance, and there have been quite a number in history, is a manifestation of consciousness of an exceptional kind so that everything seems lighter, brighter, more intelligent, noble and more beautiful for a time. Consciousness is always the same but the manifestation is different every time. It is always universal so that what comes from a Renaissance makes for wholeness, oneness

and bliss, a touch of happiness. It always reveals the unity and the extraordinary thing is that when one looks at a Leonardo painting or a Donatello sculpture, if one is still, there is an immediate connection with that heightened consciousness, that heightened awareness which was actually responsible for the work in the first place. The works are for all time. They lift anyone who can really see them up to the level from which they were done and that is a rather wonderful thing. Behind the artists and sculptors and architects who were responsible for these marvelous works there is always wise men or a wise man who is the center of it all and who very often forms a school so that the work can proceed after he has left this embodiment and these are the great teachers and one of them was Marcilio Ficino, about whom I shall be talking. Their words have a very special effect. I hope that it may be possible sometime here for some kind of work of this kind to proceed, because in groups that translate these letters, it first started in 1968, a long time ago, they do have an amazing effect. It is a *satsanga* as they call it in Sanskrit, good company, which you enter when you start upon the work and one finds that as you start to translate it, you can't translate it until the meaning is clear. You can't find the right words to express it until something inner has got the meaning. As that happens there is this wonderful illumination that takes place in these groups so that they seem to be raised, as it were, by some other source to a much higher degree of consciousness than one is ordinarily aware of. It has this marvelous effect and in doing so of course they illumine the school and I hope they illumine other people who read them. If you haven't found it and you haven't read them I very much hope that you will. Ficino was the leader of the Platonic Academy. There is a New York professor, called Professor Hankin who says that it shouldn't be called a Platonic Academy, but I have not read his reasons for thinking so. It is surprising because the Academy did not work on anything except Plato and the Neo-Platonist, the people who followed him, so I don't understand quite what his objections. I must ask him. The academy wasn't actually founded by Ficino. It was founded by another great man who is not so well known, Cosimo Di Medici who was the ruler of Florence from 1434 for thirty years and I am going to speak about Cosimo tonight because he is a much neglected figure. There are very few books written about him. I think the last book that was written about Cosimo was written in 1936, whereas there have been a great many books about Lorenzo di Medici and other di Medici who

were not in fact nearly such great men. So that is curious. His writings are disappointing because they simply contain brief instructions about his business and other such matters. Curiously enough one really comes to know the manly through the words of Ficino. Ficino had the most profound reverence for him. It wouldn't be too much to say that he worshipped the man, because every step that he took he found guidance and support from Cosimo, so that he must have been a very remarkable man, if such a man as Ficino could find such guidance and support and friendship from such a source. Unlike many men who would be great he took a back stage. He never pushed himself forward. He was always behind everything. He was a banker; he was a man who made a lot of money which he did do. Florence was the richest state in Europe at the time, the fifteenth century, and Cosimo was certainly the richest man in Florence. He controlled the banks and he controlled all the industry as well and yet you never find his name appearing in the records. You never find his name as one of the directors. He is unknown; he does it all anonymously, a most extraordinary man. What he was really interested in was discovering the truth, the unity, the wholeness to life and like many Florentines and many other Italians he had a notion that all this lay concealed in the writings and the ruins of antiquity. He spent his enormous wealth in getting as many ancient manuscripts as he could, bringing them to Florence, having them copied and having them translated. It is recorded in fact that in one year, very early on in his rule, 1439-1440, he had forty five scribes working at the same time, remember that printing had not been invented, continually at work for twenty two months on three hundred manuscripts. It was a very big operation. He was a man of great stature, great nobility. He didn't keep this work to himself as a lot of his fellow collectors did, but he had a lot of it put into libraries and he is credited with the first public library in the world in Florence. Everyone who wanted to consult and have a chance to look at these manuscripts had a chance to do so. They could look at them and use them. He was an enormously generous man and just, so that not only did he look for this unity and truth but he had a kind of nobility of character that went with it which showed in fact that he already understood it and knew it, as indeed, we all do, but most of us cover it up. Cosimo didn't. There is a little reading which Mr. Posnick will read to you in a moment about a tiny instance, but so often tiny instances in

a man's life actually do reveal what the man is like, so perhaps we could have that first reading:

At Careggi he built the great part of what we see now and the same at Cappodrolo in Megelo at a cost of fifteen thousand florins. These works maintained many poor men who labored thereon. There was not a year when he did not expend on building from fifteen to eighteen thousand florins, all of which went to the state. He was most particular as to his payment. He gave the contract of the building of Careggi to a master surveyor and by the time that it was half done, Cosimo saw that before it should be finished the man should lose several thousand florins, so he said to the contractor, 'Lorenzo, you have taken this work in hand and I know that in the end you will be a loser of several thousand of florins. That was never my intention, rather than you should make a profit. Go on with your work, you shall not lose. Whatever may be right, I will give you'. He did what he had promised. Most men would have held that after the master surveyor had made the contract he should have kept it, but Cosimo, with rare liberality, thought otherwise. In all his dealings he never wished that those who worked for him should lose, but that they should be paid for their trouble.

It gives you an idea of the care and the universality of the man. He wasn't just into making money for himself. He wanted justice in all his dealings. He really was a sort of rare sort of individual. Have a look at him. The first slide is a picture by Vasari in the Uffizi. You can see what he looks like. It is done from a medallion and you can see the sort of melancholy in his face. I don't know what other qualities you see, perhaps you would like to tell me. He is looking beyond the things of this work, would you agree? "Yes". He had a certain shrewdness, an austerity about the man. I think Vasari who is really not a great painter although he did design the Uffizi, he was only given a tiny space to do it. He wasn't normally a great painter, but I think he had actually caught something there, determination, and he certainly had that, gaunt and yet compassionate at the same time. You might now look at Careggi which is his house in Florence about which that quotation was talking. In the next slide, there it is, built I think by Michelozzo. It is a magnificent building, fallen like so many Italian buildings into disrepair, used as a house for nurses, it is barely kept up. It is very sad. There is another shot which I look myself of it from a different angle on the next slide. The other thing about Cosimo is the enormous number of extremely talented people that he got together and not only supported but actually directed. I am going to talk about that in more detail

because it is uncanny what he managed to do and what he managed to get out of those artists, how he directed them so minutely and there is no doubt that he did . We might hear another quotation. These two quotations are from Vespasiano da Bisticci who was a contemporary biographer. He wrote a book called Eminent Statesmen and these quotations are about Cosimo who features as one of the eminent statesmen. This next extract describes his relations with Donatello and one could read about any of these great people who worked for him, some of whose work we will look at in a moment. I hope to show how it reflects what Cosimo wanted from the artist. That is what I want to show you. First the quotation:

He took kindly notice of all musicians and delighted greatly in their art. He had dealings with painters and sculptors and had in his house works of diverse masters. He was especially inclined towards sculpture and showed great favor to all worthy craftsmen, being a good friend to Donatello and all sculptors and painters. Because in his time the sculptors found scanty employment, Cosimo, in order that Donatello's chisel might not be idle, commissioned him to make the pulpits of bronze in San Forenzo, the doors of the sacristy. He ordered the bank to pay every week enough money to Donatello for his work and for that of his four assistants and because Donatello went to go clad in a fashion not to Cosimo's taste, Cosimo gave him a red mantle and cowl with a cloak to go under the mantel, all new. One day in the morning he sent them in order that Donatello might wear them. After a day or two of wear he put them aside saying that he would not wear them again as they were too fine for him. Cosimo was thus liberal to all men of work through his great liking for them. He had great knowledge of architecture as may be seen from the buildings he left, none of which were built without consulting him; moreover, all those who were about to build would go to him for advice.

That last sentence is extraordinary. Great architects, perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, came to Cosimo to find out how it should be done, what they should do. One strongly suspects that the painters and musicians did the same. In a moment we will have a look at some of their work. What he was trying to get form these men was some aspect of the truth, this unity which he clearly knew about, which he was trying to find in these works of antiquity, which he did find in fact in Plato and which he took very effectual steps to have translated and made available. This truth, this unity, it was his intention that it should appear in every kind of art. We will look at these next slides which I hope will reveal that to some extent. That is the Donatello bronze of David which was to stand in Cosimo's courtyard. He was supposed to look down on it from on top.

David was a symbol of Florence because Florence was always surrounded by much bigger states, very often being attacked by them, so they kind of identified with David. There are lots of Davids. There is Michelangelo's David and other Davids, because it was a kind of symbol of Florence. Cosimo has added something to it. It is strange to find David naked, but when one reads Ficino it isn't so strange, because the naked body is a symbol of truth and the clothes which hide the body are a kind of symbol of ignorance. The naked truth means what it says. What is interesting about this is he is also suggestive at least of the figure of Hermes, because Goliath's head has wings on it, which is something which Donatello has added. There is not Biblical mention of that. The wings are so down they almost appear to be on David's feet. The head gear is again remnant of a head gear of Hermes himself. Hermes was very important to Cosimo because he was the great sage of ancient Egypt from whom not only was Plato inspired and Pythagoras, but also according to Ficino, Moses was inspired by him as well and so the two great strands of civilization, that is the Judaic Law and Greek Philosophy to Ficino were from one and the same source, this man Hermes. Hermes also stands for reason, that part of the soul which unites the individual with the Absolute. He can only do it through reason and Hermes stands for reason, so the whole figure meant much more. It did not just mean David; it was a symbol for wisdom itself, the very essence of wisdom. Cosimo has this in the center of his courtyard and quite clearly that was what it was intended to convey. Could we have the next slide? That is Brunelleschi which shows the cloisters to the Pazzi Chapel in Florence and you do get an idea of the perfect proportion of these arches. Everything is in perfect proportion and the Pazzi Chapel itself is entirely constructed on the musical harmonies. All the main musical intervals, the three over two, the fifth, the four over three, the fourth and the octave, which are the perfect harmonies according to the ancients, and the whole chapel is constructed to those proportions. This is kind of reflected just by looking at the cloisters. You get the feeling of that. The reason is of course that these proportions are the proportions of the whole universe. The whole universe is constructed on these proportions according to Pythagoras and according to Plato in the Timeus. This was rediscovered in the Renaissance, and that is why we have so many magnificent buildings, because they were built according to these proportions. Those of you who have been to Waterperry House in England will note that

this rule of building went on for hundreds of years after the Renaissance. They were all built according to the same style, to the same proportions right up to the eighteenth century. I think I remember that even George Washington's home Mt. Vernon, I think you will see them there. Could we have the next slide: That is della Robbia in the museum of the Duomo in Florence. Not only was della Robbia supported by Cosimo in the same way, but this does seem to be such an extraordinary picture. I'd like to know what it conveys to you. What does it convey to you before I say anything about it?

Response: There is great ecstasy to it.

Mr. Salaman: Yes, you can almost hear singing, can't you?

Response: It is earthy.

Mr. Salaman: Yes it is earthy in a way.

Response: The people are not idealized.

Mr. Salaman: These are interesting, the two on the edge, not quite participating.

Whether they are the Witness, as it were, or whether they are just idle, I'm not sure. This quality of life, this reflection of the spirit of life, a perfect revelation of the breath of life, seems to me to burst forth and actually a lot of della Robbia's work is the same, especially these ones of singing people, it really is the spirit of life, born anew. It is a most extraordinary piece of work. The next one is Botticelli and this will again – do you know who that is? It isn't Venus, it is actually Athena or Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and this is a centaur. Would anyone like to say what Botticelli was probably instructed to convey this picture or what it could convey? It could convey simply the spirit of Florence and it had been interpreted as the spirit of Florence and some successful general. There is a much better interpretation than that, I think.

Response: Spring...

Mr. Salaman: Well, it is a sort of spring. Would anyone like to suggest anything?

Response: The centaur looks like he is pleading in a repentant way. Athena is standing there compassionate. Of course there is that hatchet. It is, I suppose, well the centaur is repentant.

Mr. Salaman: In fact that is right. There is no doubt about his submission and the repentance and the centaur is a curious creature from the start, very obviously half man and half beast. What would be the significance of that? What would that be intended to

convey? It is man's base nature. There doesn't seem to be any doubt about that, man's base nature and man's godly nature. You almost get the feeling that Athena is literally dragging the man out of the beast. That, I'm sure is not accidental either. What Cosimo got from these people is astonishing really and it was him that did it. Having been drawn out by wisdom is absolute submission of this figure to wisdom. These Renaissance artists managed to get this totality, this undivided emotion pure and strong as one got in the Della Robbia we have just seen. Let's look at another one. This is very different. This is a Fra Angelico of San Marco. Cosimo in fact started the San Marco Monastery which has these extraordinary Fra Angelico's around every cell. Cosimo has a special cell built for himself and he got this marvelous painter who was also a monk; he too was an amazing man; he was offered the Archbishopric of Florence and he refused it, because he didn't want to leave the life of a monk. It was said that when he painted scenes of crucifixion he was overwhelmed by the subject matter and tears flowed from him and he found it difficult to actually carry on. He was a remarkable man. There is this man, I think it is Saint Benedict. He was a martyr, had a scar on him, not "the" Saint Benedict. This sort of silence is very powerful. The next one is the Transfiguration. Again I'd like to have your reactions to that. What do you make of that?

Response: All inclusive forgiveness.

Mr. Salaman: Exactly. All inclusive forgiveness, an extraordinary figure.

Response: He appears to be on a stump, the tree of life.

Mr. Salaman: This could be well symbolized. In fact he, himself, is in the crucifixion position, which is very significant.

Response: I see a candle and a light on the top of the candle.

Mr. Salaman: Yes, that must convey light and consciousness. It couldn't convey anything else.

Response: He is embracing it.

Mr. Salaman: He is embracing the whole world and it is not only just in his gestures, but in his face as well, light, healing, life is in that picture.

Response: There seems to be more than compassion. There is a great sense of welcome. The back light is in the shape of an egg which has significance.

MR. Salaman: That does have a significance. Again Hermes in common with the Vedic

traditions and other traditions say that is how the universe began, with an egg. I'm sure that is also there deliberately.

Response: Different reactions to it.

Mr. Salaman: There are totally different reactions to it which is very significant.

Response: The smaller figures add up to seven and the Christ is one and then there is the cross at the top of three.

Mr. Salaman: I'm sure that is significant. The last two pictures that we have looked at – if you take this picture and the picture of Minerva drawing them out of the centaur, you find these two sort of strands in Cosimo's life. There really are three strands. There is this veneration of the wisdom of antiquity, particularly the wisdom of Plato, wisdom of Hermes. There is this tremendously strong religious sense of Christian worship, which was very strong in him and there was an enormous love of beauty in him. Beauty of every kind. How are all these three to be reconciled so that they are in fact became one? It was really the magic of Ficino who enable that to take place in ways which we will look at later on. We haven't got very far with our lecture.

That was the nature of the man. One shouldn't use the word politician. He was a statesman really. He looked for unity amongst mankind, certainly the unity of Europe in a way that nobody else or politician of the age could even think of. Briefly, he didn't actually, like Socrates, want to go into politics at all and he didn't go in until he was 43 years old and then he was forced into it, because he was such an important man in Florence that the rulers of Florence at the time were nervous of him. A man called Ranaldo Albizzi wanted him disposed of because he thought he was a threat. Ranaldo Albizzi was an aristocrat and the Medici were supported by the minor guilds which was really the popular party in Florence. Albizzi had him arrested, put in prison and would have had him executed but for the special pleas of Venice and the Pope, all wanted him released, and so he was exiled instead and went to Venice. There was such a demand for him to be brought back that he had to be and the Albizzi were exiled and he was forced into power where he remained for the next thirty years. It is a curious coincidence that in fact the very month, maybe even the very day that he was exiled was the same month that Marcilio Ficino was born in October, 1433. Just one of these curious coincidences. He took over Florence as in his business. You never find his name amongst the grandfolinari

or all the various offices of government. His name is very seldom there, but not anything happens without him actually nodding his head. He controls everything from the back without using apparently using any kind of intimidation or force. It is a mixture of respect and support. He did some remarkable things. One of the things he did was actually reduce the incidence of the tax, he reduced the rate of this tax and increased its yield at the same time. Very few people manage to do that. He was the first person to grade an income tax in proportion to the people's ability to pay for it. He was a long way ahead of his time. In foreign affairs, we will read a quotation in case you think I am biased, which I am. This is from a professor writing just after the war.

“In order to secure control over the Alpine passes and freedom of trade with the Lombard cities, a life threatened by Milanese domination, Venice embarked upon a war of conquest which made her the mistress of half of Lombardy. Florence at first fought on the side of Venice until prompted by Cosimo di Medici she deserted Venice for Francesco Spforza, the new Duke of Milan. In 1454 the Peace of Lodi ended the long war and all three powers formed a defensive league to which Alphonso of Naples adhered and Nicholas the Fifth gave his blessing. The Italian League represented a new attempt to solve the problem of national unity, designed in the first place to prevent any great power from increasing at the expense of its neighbors. It also stood for a united front against foreign attack. In it the rulers of Italy expressed their sense of common ideals, interests and dangers. All but two of the lesser powers were included in it. It secured a forty years' respite from serious warfare during which each state concentrated its energies on the art of peace. Every city made its contribution to the civilization of the Renaissance and all vied with one another in the magnificence of their building and festivals.”

Yes, I don't know of anybody else who produced a long period of peace and art since the times of the great emperors of Rome, but this is what he did. He did it by this vision of a united Italy, which was quite exceptional at the time of a single unit. So he was outstandingly successful in this sphere. Most of Italy's history has been one of incessant fighting. It had been up to his time and remains so afterwards for a very long time, up until Italian unification in the last century. What an achievement from what an extraordinary man and yet he showed the same sort of wisdom in looking after his own garden. He had the time somehow to know about every single tree. He knew intimately everything about his estates and there is a rather marvelous passage just coming up which not only tells us this but gives us an idea of how he spent his day in a rather delightful way.

Of agriculture he had the most intimate knowledge and he would discourse there upon as if he had never followed any other calling. At San Marco, the garden which was the more beautiful one was laid out after his instruction. Hitherto it had been a vacant field, belonging to some friars who had held it before the Reformation of the Order. In all his possessions there were few farming operations which were not directed by him. He did much fruit planting and grafting and wonderful as it may seem, he knew about every graft that was made on his estates. Moreover when the peasants came into Florence he would ask them about the fruit trees and where they were planted. He loved to do grafting and lopping with his own hand. One day I had some talk with him, with being then a young man, he had gone from Florence where there was sickness to Careggi. It was then February when they prune the vines and I found him engaged in two most excellent tasks. One was to prune the vines every morning for two hours as soon as he arose. Cosimo's other employment when he had done with pruning was to read the Moralia of St. Gregory, an excellent work in 35 books which task occupied him for six months. Both at his villa and in Florence he spent his time well taking pleasure in no games save chess of which he would occasionally play a game of two after supper by way of pastime. He knew Manulino who was the best chess player of his age."

Break in lecture

I thought we would start the second half with two more anecdotes from Cosimo's life which again give a very good indication of what the man was like. The first one shows how if someone needed to be told off he could do it very effectively because of this great insight.

It happened that certain of his kinsmen who indeed was very rich, never met him without pouring out grievances, declaring that he was poverty stricken and every day he would tell the same tale. Cosimo made up his mind not to answer him so as to escape this worry, but one day he met this kinsman who straight away began to repeat the same tale. When he had come to an end Cosimo called him by name and said to him, "you are my kinsman and nothing is more displeasing to me than your constant cry of poverty, because a man who proclaims himself a pauper always suffers hurt thereby. Everywhere but in Florence everybody makes himself out to be richer than he really is, but in Florence the custom is the opposite, so that a man gains in one respect and loses in all the rest which is a grave matter. Reverting to your own case, can a man be called poor who has sixty thousand florins with the Lombards who is concerned with trade in Rome, Florence and divers other places, who holds possessions, like you, on all sides which you have bought regardless of the price, out bidding all the rest, who builds sumptuous town and country houses, who lives in the state you and your family maintain with your horses and fine attire, the handsomest in Florence?" Thus Cosimo laid the situation before him. He could make no reply at all as it was all true. This natural medicine cured him completely and he never grumbled again.

He also had a great sense of humor as I hope the following two anecdotes which Mr. Posnick will read to you will make clear. Like all the di Medici he had gout all of his life which was very painful and he was carried about in a sedan chair. The next reading is the story.

“ He used to be carried about the house by the servants in a chair. When he thought they might jostle against the door post he would cry out in pain. The servant once asked, “Why do you cry out” Nothing has happened.’ And Cosimo answered, ‘if anything had happened no amount of crying out would have made any difference.’”

The other anecdote is rather nice, too.

“Cosimo di Medici by reason of his riches, his power and his prudence no less had directed and governed the city of Florence for a long time as if he were its Lord. He once had to negotiate with certain ambassadors from Lucca. The audience was held at his own house according to custom and while he was in discussion with them a small child, his grandson, came up to him with some oak sticks and a little knife for Cosimo to make him a whistle. Cosimo signified that the discussion had adjourned, devoted himself to the child and made him a whistle, telling him then to run away and play. The ambassador, somewhat offended, turned to Cosimo saying, ‘Indeed, Sir Cosimo, we cannot but be surprised at your behavior. We have come to you on behalf of our commune to speak of grave matters and you desert us to devote yourself to a child.’ Cosimo put his arms around their shoulders and said “oh my brothers and my lords, are you not also fathers? Know you nothing of the love for children and grandchildren? You are surprised that I should have made the whistle. It is as well that he didn’t ask me to play it.’

What Cosimo didn’t find until very late in life and it was really what he was looking for all his life was a living tradition of truth. He had found Plato and found the artists and found everything there was to find in the classical writings and having them translated. He never found a tradition that was actually alive until the year 1439 when he was fifty which was the same age as when Mr. MacLaren, the leader of the London School, found the tradition of the meditation. I will tell you about the Council of Florence which really was how it began. In 1439 there was a council set up to form a union between the Western Church and the Eastern Church in Constantinople and the Emperor of Constantinople wanted the union because the Constantinople was under threat from the

Turks. It was arranged and it met first in Ferrara and Cosimo had the Council transferred to Florence and at that Council there was a very remarkable man called Gemistos Plethon whose name is 'the other Plato' because he ran a school in Mistra which not only studied Plato from an academic point of view but actually tried to put the teachings of Plato into living practice and make them real. Cosimo was so impressed with this man and what he said and way he lived that he was immediately resolved to found a school of the same type in Florence as soon as he could. Yet such is the patience in the man that he knew there was nobody available at that time who could possibly do such a thing. It was only when he was introduced to the son of this doctor, Diotefeci Ficino that he recognized in Marsilio, who was Diotefeci's son, the boy who had the ability to one day found the kind of academy that Cosimo had in mind. Ficino himself tells us this that he was selected by Cosimo, 'while I was still a boy'.

We might have a look at the Academy. This is Mistra, a view from the top of the hill. It is somewhat ironic that the second mountain ridge back which is the site of ancient Sparta and there is something ironic that there is absolutely no hint left of it at all, whereas, Athens which Sparta conquered in 404 BC, contained at the time both Socrates and Plato and here is a Platonic Academy being built on top of a hill which overlooks the bare hill which once contained Sparta, is a kind of ironical triumph of thousands of years later of Athens over Sparta. There is another shot of Mistra. That is a Norman fort on top. The Normans got everywhere. Mistra which once housed the Academy of Plato amongst all these buildings here. It is said, related by Ficino, when Cosimo was introduced to him, he said to Ficino's father, "you Ficino have been sent to us to cure bodies but your son here has been sent to heal souls. That is actually related by Ficino's biographer, contemporary biographer, Giovanni Corsi. It wasn't in fact until 1459 when Ficino was 26 that he actually got around to founding the Platonic Academy that we shall be discussing tomorrow. It should be said here that what Ficino did in founding this Academy was to unify these three strands that we found in Cosimo's life, that so far had not been properly united and so bring his life to a complete fulfillment, as I hope to illustrate in the readings to follow as to how he ended his life. The three strands were the beauty, his Christian piety and devotion to Christ and the Christian religion and to philosophy. It was through Ficino's philosophy, or should I say religion. What Ficino

said again and again was that true religion was no different from lawful philosophy and lawful philosophy was no different from religion. They are exactly the same. This was revolutionary, because in the Middle Ages they had been very different, philosophy being confined to a small kind of logic. All the important things were the province of theology. Numerous philosophers and theologians really circumscribed philosophy to a tiny and uninteresting area, mainly natural philosophy. Serious philosophers investigating the nature of knowledge ending with William of Ockham. William of Ockham showed to his satisfaction that knowledge of anything was only by revelations, taking a very similar view to David Hume who wrote hundreds of years later that nothing could be known except through revelation, therefore, philosophy was a rather useless subject and this was the view that predominated in the Middle Ages so it was Ficino and the Platonic Academy who actually resurrected philosophy. He gives a beautiful allegory of this, of how philosophy became clad. She had been found by the Academy walking naked, disheveled and in disrepute along the highways and byways, and she had been got hold of by the Academy, led back to the Academy, clothed and restored to her true place through the Academy. That is exactly what the Academy did. The secret of it was Ficino's frequent assertion that the truth of the Judaic tradition and the Platonic tradition both were taken from Hermes Tristhemegistos of ancient Egypt and that they were saying exactly the same thing so that religion and philosophy were two sides of the same coin, not different. This, of course, was what Cosimo was looking for. He also said and this we will be looking at, I hope on Wednesday, that beauty had been somewhat suspected in the Middle Ages, because one can see this best by looking at the reputation of Venus who had a very bad reputation in the Middle Ages, as signifying lust and all that which would lead men off the true path, or women too for that matter, and into eternal damnation and that physical was a thing to be questioned, held at a distance and generally avoided as far as possible, which was why Cupid was always painted blind, because he shot perfectly good people for no good reason at all. Ficino explained that the true beauty which Venus really represented was a spiritual beauty which transcended any kind of physical beauty and far from leading people to damnation led them to salvation and fulfillment of their lives, which indeed is true. It was these three elements which Ficino, for Cosimo, united in one and brought his life to total fulfillment. There are some rather beautiful accounts

of his final moments which I think we might read you. Mr. Posnick will read the first and I'll read the second.

“Cosimo was as jealous and sparing of time as Midas was of money and although he spent his days with the utmost economy and set great value on each hour, this man who was jealous of every moment would often deplore the hours he had wasted. Lastly he followed the example of the philosopher, Solon, putting philosophy into practice excellently throughout his whole life, even in the most critical affairs, yet practicing it best in the period when he moved from this world of shadow to the light. As you know, for you were there, shortly after we had finished reading Plato's book on the One Origin of Things and the Highest Good, he died, as if now about to drink deeply of that good itself he had tasted in discussion.”

This other account was written in a letter to Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo, and he wrote in a rather similar vein to Piero de' Medici, Cosimo's son, when he dedicated to him a translation of Plato, no it was a translation of Xenocrates' book on death. This is what Ficino says: “He who passed no moment of his life even at the height of activity away from the Muses devoted himself wholly in his old age to the study of philosophy and to the sacred writings.” Muses, of course, stand for beauty and philosophy stands for the Platonic Tradition and the sacred writings probably stand here for the Scriptures. The three elements about which I have been talking.

“That he might have the innermost secrets of wisdom herself, he orders us to translate from Greek to Latin 10 books of our holy Plato and one of Hermes Trismegistus, which expound all the precepts of life, all the principles of nature and the holy mysteries of God. All of these Cosimo read carefully and understood. On the twelfth day after he had complete Plato's book, On the Principle of Unity and the Highest Good and seeming ready to return and enjoy that principle and that good, he was called back to the celestial light at sunset on the twentieth day before his pure spirit was loosed from its attachment to the body. Just before he had begun to lament the wretchedness of this life and to attack the follies of man, declaring death to be a gain. He spoke in such a way of the vile nature of this life that it seemed as if it were now attaining the bliss of Heaven.

That really brings the lecture to an end. I would like to talk tomorrow about Ficino himself and the Academy, how they came into being and what they did and what they taught and to spend Wednesday evening talking about beauty and love which were the essence of what Ficino had to say and indeed the essence of the Renaissance.

Thank you very much. It is very nice to have that reaction. Some questions? Why not? We could certainly spend a little time discussing them.

Q: You said at the beginning that there have been series of Renaissances. Could you speak about that?

Mr. Salaman: I'll try to. It is quite interesting actually. I don't know what to make of astrology quite but it is a fact that Jupiter comes into conjunction with Saturn in the same sign once every eight hundred and seventy years and Kepler made a great deal of this conjunction and said that you would expect profound changes in the human spirit, outbursts of creative energy, some such expression in his book in which he tried to show that if you took the orbits of the planet, they fitted into each other in the same proportions as the five Platonic solids fit into each other. If you look at history and periods of about every nine hundred years you do get actually rather remarkable things happening. There was the Florentine Renaissance which was unquestionably a renaissance. Eighteen hundred years before then you get the renaissance in ancient Athens. Clearly something remarkable was happening there. About five hundred BC you get some very interesting things happening, too, very remarkable figures at the time of the empire of Justinian and the time of Benedict founding of monasteries. It is the time of Boethius and the time of Dionysius Exiguus. Taken together they had the most extraordinary effect on the Middle Ages. Nine hundred years before then you get the New Kingdom in Egypt, and nine hundred years before that is the beginning of the Middle Kingdom and nine hundred years before that is the foundation of the Old Kingdom. It is rather remarkable; five renaissances there. Something does seem to come in the cycle to awaken the culture and fill it again with consciousness or rather uncover the consciousness that is there.

Q: You mentioned several of the artists that were in the sphere of influence of Cosimo. Do we know how many were involved with the Academy or was it his personal influence?

Mr. Salaman: There is a letter in which he lists the names of the people in the Academy. It clearly isn't the full list. Although he lists poets and Alberti is listed, there are no actual artists who are actually listed as members of the Academy. Clearly they knew a great deal about the philosophy and were clearly expressing it. Whether they were members or not I don't know, but they were clearly very much its influence.

Q: Did they have contact with the members of the Academy of Plethon?

Mr. Salaman: He was a very old man in 1439, already over eighty, when the Council of Florence met. I don't think it is likely that Ficino ever met him or if he did he would have been very young. Undoubtedly he read his writings and was very much influenced by them, particularly the Chaldean Oracles, as they are called which are really elements of Zoroastrianism and Zoroaster's teaching which had been translated into Greek. He was very much taken by those, but I don't think he ever met him.

Q: Is it known how the works of Plato survived all the way to Ficino's time?

Mr. Salaman: There seem to have been quite a number of copies at Constantinople and also at the number of monasteries, a lot of ancient literature, including Dialogues of Plato. There have been revivals of Plato from time to time in history and a lot of copies have been made. In the twelfth century a lot of copies were made particularly of the Timeaus and the Republic. The twelfth century renaissance, if that was a renaissance, was based on the books of Plato. Then there was Duns Scotus, who also translated Plato. Plato has always been not very far from the surface of things. In fact all the copies of Plato except the Timeaus and the Republic were in the East and were unknown to Western Europe until the beginning of the fifteenth century. So in a way that is how it was, I think.

Q: Could you say something about the work of the Renaissance Group?

Mr. Salaman: The Renaissance Group really translates the letters of Marcilio Ficino. We started in 1968 and we have done four volumes. We are now working on a fifth. It is slow because we do so many other things at the same time. We hope to bring out another one in about a year's time. That is what it does primarily, but we do also give the kind of talks that I am here as a kind of spokesman for the research that has been done by a lot of people. They have been giving a series of ten lectures twice in London last year and really a lot of work has gone into preparing the material for that. So there is the main activities of it.

Q: What was Ficino's relationship to the church?

Mr. Salaman: He was a priest. He was ordained in 1473. He worked very hard for the church. He was a canon eventually of the Florence Cathedral and his life's work was to unite the teaching of Christ and the teaching of Plato, to show that the teaching of Christ

and the teaching of Plato was the same. That is what his work was really. That accounted for its enormous effect. Petrarch had said at the end of the fourteenth century that even the meanest Christian is happier than Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, because he saw a diversity between philosophy and religion which for a long time, ever since the twelfth century, people had felt. It was showing that there was no diversity which brought such a relief and happiness and fulfillment to Cosimo and to the whole culture of the time. There was only agreement.

Q: In the letters there are commentaries on Plato. Are there any other writings being looked at?

Mr. Salaman: Yes, some of the commentaries are being translated by academic professors. The Theologiucs Platonicus is being translated now in Canada. It is on the immortality of the Soul but it is written to show the unity of Christianity and Plato. There is the work on the Christian religion. There are three books on Life which has been translated three times by Americans, twice in the last two or three years. There are commentaries on Plotinus and commentaries on St. Paul which haven't been translated. There is a lot that hasn't been translated. I think I have mentioned all the things that have been.

Q: Are they all in Latin?

Mr. Salaman: Mainly in Latin. There are some in Italian but most are in Latin.

Q: You mentioned how extensive Cosimo's influence was and how he recognized Ficino's potential. To what extent is Cosimo's desire for the unity of the three strands influenced Ficino's work and his direction?

Mr. Salaman: It is always an interesting question. I think men of a superior nature have a perception of truth almost at the same time. It is extraordinary how the mind works, like how many times my wife and I arrive at the house at the same time from different directions, in different cares of to pick up the phone and ring someone exactly as they were about to ring you. It seems to work in another area somehow. There are cases of people influencing others. Each one of us can think of being influenced very profoundly by people but in other areas in it like the sea rising. It sort of manifests at the same time indifferent places. I think in those two people it is more like that. I think, also, a question and answer are manifestations of knowledge, different aspects of knowledge and it seems

a bit that Cosimo had the question and Ficino had the answer, but it is all the same knowledge. I imagine it might be propitious to stop. But I do hope some of you can come again.