

THE PLATONIC ACADEMY IN FLORENCE

Mr. Salaman's Second Lecture

March 26, 1991

Introduction: Good evening. This evening we have with us from the London School, Mr. Clement Salaman who has for many years been in charge of the Renaissance Study Group. This Study Group has had the function of translating the letters of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino was a very important figure of the Florentine Renaissance, about which we will hear quite a bit this evening. The translations have now proceeded to the point where there are four volumes and a fifth is being worked on at the present time. Mr. Salaman comes this evening and tomorrow evening as well to discuss the works and the life of Ficino and I am delighted to be able to welcome him tonight.

Mr. Salaman: It is very nice to see so many people here and it is very nice to see so many people who were here last night too and so many new people. What we discussed last night was Cosimo di Medici and how he came to select the leader of the Platonic Academy in Florence and we discussed generally what kind of man he was. Tonight we shall talk about the Academy itself, what it did, and how Ficino, in fact, ran it. There are some interesting comparisons with how the Philosophy School runs today. There is a tradition that the Academy stood on one side of the Arno (I don't think anyone actually knows where it was). The Arno is the river that runs through the middle of Florence and the university stood on the other side. A contrast is that the universities tend to divide and analyze things, break them into their constituent parts, whereas the Academy tries to bring things into wholeness and into unity. In particular the unity which it was particularly interested in was the spirit, the body, and the mind, in fact, one should say 'the soul'. Here the soul is of course the divine principle in man. The spirit is really the life principle, the breath principle, which actually holds us all together here, animates everything, and sustains everything. The body is simply, the body. Ficino was well qualified in all these areas, even before he started the Academy in 1459, because his father was a doctor and he was very interested in health and medicine throughout his life. In fact, he operated as a doctor and wrote three books on life, which really are to do with health. He was particularly interested in the

health of those studying philosophy because he said the kind of life they led which involved study and practice put certain requirements on people and it was essential that they have a strong enough body to pursue the study of philosophy. The second aspect, the spiritual, it is difficult to find a word to translate *spiritus*. It means breath, breath of life, but Ficino thought of it as that principle which connects the mind, the soul and the body. He describes it as airy and he says it is nourished by fine music, fine sense, in fact, by the elements, the pure elements, but particularly by music. Very early on he mastered the playing of the lyre and he tried to revive the Greek music that Orpheus was supposed to have played, and actually played this music again.

We might have a look at our first slide which is of Ficino himself and takes up this theme of music very cleverly also with the theme of theology. The last aspect which he says is the soul; while the body is nourished with medicine and the spirit with music, the soul in order to be liberated needs the true Teaching. The true Teaching as he found it most purely expressed, was in Plato. This bust of him in the Florence Cathedral rather beautifully catches this, because in fact although he is holding a volume of Plato, he is actually almost plucking it as though it were an actual lyre. He has caught the two in one. The kind of instrument that he played unfortunately we don't know very much about, but I will show you two instruments. One is the guitar which was developed from the lyre and it has a lot of strings. It has some twelve strings, but it also shows you a kind of devotion to the instrument which is really rather delightful, late fifteenth century. Probably the instrument which Ficino played was more like the one you will see in the next slide. This is in fact a rather damaged della Robbia again and part of the instrument has come off, but this in fact represents Orpheus playing his lyre. This is also very significant because according to Ficino, there was a line of theology which started with Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian whom I spoke of last night, and this Teaching which was brought to Greece by Orpheus so that Orpheus, as well as being a musician who charmed animals and even charmed the Prince of Hell so that he got down there and got his wife very nearly to come back with him until she looked back at the last moment, was also a master teacher. It says something that here he stands in the Campanile of the Duomo of Florence, in the bell tower; really he is there because Ficino stresses the importance. He wouldn't have Orpheus on a church tower if it hadn't been for the teaching of Ficino proclaiming that he bore this teaching down from antiquity

and carried it to Greece from where of course it passed into the whole of Europe. Notice that the Greek lyre has four strings which symbolized, according to Ficino, the different seasons of the year. The longest was winter; the shortest was summer and the middle two, spring and fall. He really became so expert at this lyre that he could actually change the mood of a whole gathering, simply by his playing. It has a sort of magic about it. At one point the Turkish Army which had been generally encroaching on Europe for some five centuries, finally landed in Italy in 1480... and threw the Italians everywhere into complete consternation at this event that the Turks had landed and there seemed to be a kind of inevitability about their progress through Europe which threw everybody into a kind of despair. A number of humanists, of whom Ficino was one, gathered to write letters to all the princes of Europe begging them to come on a Crusade to help the Italians remove the Turks from the land. They all assembled but instead of getting down to their task, they got so depressed by the difficulties they were going to have to face that nothing seemed to be happening. Ficino just stood up and he played the lyre and we have a reading... of an eyewitness who was there, Bishop Campanile who described what happened:

Seeing that our sorrow was heavier than becomes philosophers, he, Ficino, rose and looking at us smiled as was his custom and said, 'do we think that the barbarian chains have already been hung around our necks? At the end he took his lyre and sang with marvelous persuasion those verses from Virgil beginning 'Second hope of mighty Rome.' It was as if curly headed Apollo took up the lyre of Marsilio and fell victim to his own song, rapture arose as eyes caught fire and he discovered music which he had never learned.

So that was the quality of his playing and there are various accounts of that. That isn't the only one but it is one of the clearest. In a letter which he wrote quite early on to Francesco Musano, he wrote this,

The body is indeed, healed by the remedies of medicine, but the spirit, the link between body and soul, is tempered and nourished by sound and song. Finally the soul, as it is divine, is purified by the divine mysteries of theology. In nature a union is made from soul, body and spirit. To the Egyptian priest, medicine, music and the mysteries were one and the same study.

As I said, Ficino was very well equipped to deal with all those and combine those studies and expertise in himself. He was a master of Latin at a very early age and he became a master of Greek and was very well able to translate from Greek into Latin the work of Plato which he

thought contained the purest form of the teaching of unity. In fact he had just embarked on these translations when Cosimo told him to stop because a manuscript had suddenly become available to Cosimo. He had heard of it. It was in Bulgaria and he procured this manuscript of Hermes Trismegistus which was the actual source. When Ficino refers to the Egyptians he is really thinking of Hermes Trismegistus. He is really always quoting him as his authority.

What Ficino recommended for the care of the body was open air, clean air, shining waters, evergreens, olives and vines. That was the ideal mixture for the body. Cosimo gave a small villa to Ficino at Careggi so that he could be close by him. He warns his followers against having too much sleep, and he recommends that they should rise with the sun or in winter, two hours before the sun gets up, that they should not study for too long, and when they contemplate they should do so at dawn and dusk. He recommends the lyre for the spirit and for the soul he recommends the study of theology. Nobody could have done more to make this work available to the people of Florence than Ficino, and it is remarkable how amazingly quick he worked.

When I was introduced it was said that we had done four volumes of Ficino letters, but we have been working on them since 1968. Ficino himself translated all the works of Plato according to his biographer in a space of five years. I don't know if you have seen all the works of Plato. He ran the Academy at the same time and one cannot possibly think how he could do it, and he had many other duties connected with the di Medici family as well. So it was quite remarkable. He supported his family at different times; supported his mother in particular, his father died quite young. He followed this up by translating all the Neo-Platonists, the writers of the first few centuries AD who translated, made commentaries and developed ideas which they found in Plato, people like Plotinus, Proclus, all these people, Ficino translated them too. Plotinus is absolutely enormous, vast, and within some ten to fifteen years Ficino had done all that as well. His primary aim was to show that the Christian religion and the philosophy of Plato were just two different sides of the same coin, that there was no possible conflict between the two, that they said the same thing and that they both in fact originally arose from the wisdom of ancient Egypt. He also wrote to prove the immortality of the soul, that the soul never died and preexisted its incarnation into this body. The effect he had in Europe was extraordinary; people actually accepted what he said. In the fifteenth century the views were very open, people accepted things

far more easily than they did a hundred years later. We found a Papal Bull which Professor Kristeller of Columbia University says was Ficino's influence; it states the doctrine of the immortality of the soul officially as part of the Christian belief. Perhaps more remarkable still is the fact that these pagan poets and philosophers start appearing in Christian churches. Again this is proof that when a great man says something people really do actually listen and they take up what he says. There is the picture of Orpheus that we showed you and I'd like to show you one or two more of these because they really make the point. That is Hermes Trismegistus with the zodiac, the Room of the Sybils in the Vatican. The Borgia Rooms in the Vatican actually have Hermes here looking down on the Pope when he retires to his innermost sanctum that is what he decorated the wall with, Hermes. The same theme: that is Isis, one is Moses and one is Hermes, this is exactly what Ficino was saying that the Egyptian and the Mosaic teaching are the same. I don't know if any of you have read a book which has just recently come out by a Dr. Osmund writing in London who says that Moses was one of the Pharaohs who was a revolutionary Pharaoh who proclaimed just one God and the unity of creation, a rather remarkable man. No one has accepted Dr. Osmund's views, but at least it shows that the ideas of the closeness of the Judaic and Egyptian traditions and indeed the Greek is still a valid point. Here are the Egyptian bulls sacred to Osiris bowing down before the cross and a similar motif on the top. This is the most remarkable of all. It is in Sienna and one gets very little idea looking at it here what it is. It is Hermes again. If you can imagine the great pillars of the Sienna Cathedral which are some twenty to thirty feet apart, that occupies a whole section of floors of the nave. It is an enormous thing, absolutely vast mosaic on the floor of Hermes dispensing his laws to the Egyptians and quotations from his writings about God being the Creator and making the visible world, actually there in the church itself. It would have been unthinkable even fifty years before Ficino. For the liberation of the soul, as we all know, the one vital thing is good company, the kind of company we have here. Without that company you may have all the Teaching you like but in fact it can't for some reason be heard. You need good company, a group; you need a School for these words to be heard. You may listen to the scriptures and you may read them to yourself, but they have no effect or very little effect. You get a group of people all listening to them, all with the same intention and suddenly the words become alive. The words actually become living

which only happens if you have a group, a School. It doesn't really happen any other way so it became essential for Ficino to start this Academy. Unfortunately there is nothing left of his original academy, but on the site there is a very nice Marquessa who has her house where Ficino once had his. It is on the outskirts of Florence and if you go there and talk about Ficino she is so pleased and entertains you with the finest wines. If you stroll around the garden you find there is a philosopher's seat which is very ancient and one likes to think that Ficino himself might even have sat on it. The next slide is a painting of it. You can see that he has tried to put certain things in which of course are not actually there. That is Ficino taken from his bust in the Cathedral which you have already seen and that is what we will be looking at tomorrow night, those of us who can come, it is taken from the figure of Hermes in Botticelli's Primavera reaching up for golden apples with his wand and the snakes going around his wand. That quality of light which is flooding into the place is beautifully captured by Charles Hardacre. It is the only ancient part that is left of the academy of Ficino in Carregi.

The other remarkable thing which probably made the Renaissance possible at all was the fact that somehow the most important people of Florence joined the Academy. They all became members from the di Medici, Cosimo founded it, Cosimo's son, Piero sustained it, Lorenzo was a member; Alberti, the great architect, was a member; Poliziano and if you read the list they are all the great names of Florence, with the exception of the painters. It is difficult to think that the painters were not intimately concerned with it, but they weren't actually there. Ficino, emphasizing Lorenzo's close connection to the Academy, writes to him like this:

I beseech you, my Lorenzo, both in the name of the Academy which flourishes through you and in the name of your country, which is dear to you before all else, you should take care of your health. Unless you are well, I think that neither the Academy nor your country can prosper in these times.

Another interesting member of the Academy was Cardinal Bessarion and if we look at him you will probably see where he comes from. He actually came from the School at Mistra. He drew on the wisdom of one School to illumine another and there is a lot of evidence that he did so. In fact, I talked last night of the School in Mistra which was run by Gemistos Plethon and he was a

member of that, and I think his joining the Academy had the most profound effect on the whole Renaissance, because he knew how a school was run. He had actually been in one and he had a tradition with him that he could bring to the new Academy in Florence. He became a Cardinal which was remarkable really, because he was a Greek Orthodox churchman. He came to settle in the West and no sooner had he done so than he was made a Cardinal. As witness of what he did, Ficino writes a very early letter to him and it is quite illuminating

Some night owls it seems were upset by such bright rays of light and not only despised the sacred treasure of our Plato, but even begin to abuse it. But Bessarion, the light of the Academy, swiftly applies an effective medicine for these feeble eyes so that the gold would not only be pure and shiny but malleable for the hands and harmless to the sight.

And so the Academy with Bessarion and the leading members of Florence got off to a very good start. It is very interesting how it was organized. It was organized rather like Pythagoras' School. In fact Ficino adopted the names of the leaders who were really kind of tutors, called *ayudatores* which means helpers, Ficino actually says. It couldn't possibly have been like that or he couldn't have written about it in that way. It is interesting that, to go back to what I was saying earlier about the importance of company and what I was saying last night about how the translations of Ficino came to be done, because while you meet in these lovely conditions things come to mind and become available that otherwise simply are not available. It is quite evident that it was only after group meetings in the Academy that Ficino produced his greatest works and quite clearly they were related to meetings of the School... It was in 1468 that the Academy first started to meet regularly on Plato's birthday which was also the day he died.

In the course of that there were two meetings in that year and two meetings in many years. They used to meet both in the city of Florence and in the country, Careggi. Careggi is now part of Florence but it wasn't then. In this letter he records that they discussed Plato's Symposium. Here is the letter, I'll read it. It is better to hear the actual words.

Every year the early disciples of Plato would hold a city festival in honor of Plato's birthday. In our own times the Bracciolini, his modern disciples, have celebrated the occasion both in the city and the surrounding countryside. A book, *On Love* records the

country festivities at the home of the splendid Lorenzo de Medici, Careggi.

Now that probably is Ficino's best known work. It is his commentary on Plato's Symposium and it was the first work to be translated into English. It was translated about 1940, I think, by Sears Jayne, who is an American and it is absolutely magnificent. It is probably his best known work. It really comments on each of the speeches that are made in Plato's Symposium and I shall be referring to it quite a lot tomorrow night. The point that I do want to stress now is that it arose from an actual meeting of the Academy. It emphasizes what I was saying about the importance of company, because that is where the really great work does come from. The letter goes on,

I was among the company when you, Bindaccio Ricasoli, Giovanni Cavalcanti and many other members of the Academy sat down to the feast. Of the many different things that we discussed at that gathering, I often reflect especially on the conclusion we reached before the feast about the nature of the Soul. I will gladly remind you of it now. For nothing befits a man than discourse on the Soul. Thus the Delphic injunction, 'Know Thyself' is fulfilled, and we examine everything whether above or beneath the Soul with deeper insight. We all agreed that the reasonable Soul is set on a horizon that is the line dividing the eternal and temporal, because it has a natural midway between the two. Being in the middle this nature is not only capable of rational power and action which lead to the eternal but also of energies of activities which descend to the temporal. Since these divergent tendencies spring from opposite natures we see the Soul turning at one moment to the eternal and at another to the temporal. So we understand rightly that it partakes of the nature of both.

If you remember, for those of us that were there last night, that picture of the centaur and the Goddess Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom, drawing a man out of a beast. That centaur was the nature of the Soul. It has the qualities of a beast and also has the qualities that are divine and are in fact the qualities of God. Ficino wrote his longest work which is now being translated over here, too, the Platonic Theology, which is in fact, eighteen volumes and the complimentary nature of the Christian religion and Platonic philosophy. It would be worth having a look at the next slide which relates to this. This is what he means when he says the soul is in the middle. He also says that the soul comprehends the whole thing, in a sense comprehends God and comprehends body as well and it may move in either direction. This angel is put here because Ficino calls it the angelic world. Sometimes he calls it the celestial or heavenly world and sometimes he calls it the world of causes, where nothing moves, but all the causes of everything lie hid which determine

how everything in fact will move... It is also where our qualities such as justice and goodness, courage, etc. lie in that world. This is the world of nature and this is the world of the *spiritus* which we were talking about earlier, which is animated by the breath of life and the body is the body.

There is in fact a quotation about the nature of the Soul. We might read it.

This mind's eye which desires and holds the light of truth is presided over by the divine sun to which our Plato taught and entreated them to direct the purified power of their mind. And so, when we rise to this point we shall attain the fire, the fine degrees of all things one by one in the following order: bodily mass, quality, soul, angel, God, because the essence of the rational soul holds the mean position in this hierarchy and therefore appears to be the bond of all nature, governing the qualities and bodies on the one hand and on the other hand yoking the Self to the Angelic and to God. We shall show it to be absolutely indissoluble since it binds fast the degrees of nature, utterly supreme; since it presides over the workings of the universe and is full of bliss since it penetrates the divine.

There is just one other thing which should be noted about this, that although Ficino talks about this hierarchy in this way he does insist that it is only the unity that is real and that everything else is simply a shadow, a shadow of the unity. It is not actually real. Both of these statements come from that Platonic Theology and this is the second statement.

The light of God produces the angelic order that is beneath the shadow of God. The light of God produces the soul beneath the shadow of the angelic order. The angelic order obtains unmoving unity from God, the one reality, but beneath the shadow of God it falls into multiplicity. The soul obtains stillness by the light of God, multiplicity beneath the shadow of God and changeability beneath the shadow of the angelic order. The source of unity is God, the source of multiplicity is the angelic order; the source of emotion is the soul.

The thought I would like for you to remember is that it is all produced under the shadow of God and it is in fact a shadow. So it is clear that Ficino regarded the Academy as an eternal light. It was the truth to which people in all walks of life could return and learn something and from whom all could find inspiration and fulfillment.

I'd like to end this first part of the meeting by reading a letter to Lorenzo de Medici about this.

This is why, O Platonic Lorenzo, philosophy delights in encouraging everyone including yourself who wishes to receive instruction and to live a good life to enter the Platonic Academy. For here the young will pursue with pleasure indeed the precepts of life and conduct and the art of conversation. Here, too, those of mature age will be abundantly instructed in matters both public and private. Here finally men will live in the hope of exchanging a mortal life for the eternal. In the gardens of the Academy poets will listen to Apollo singing underneath the laurel. In the entrance of the Academy orators will behold Mercury declaiming. In the forecourt statesmen and lawgivers will lend ear to Jove himself bestowing laws, pronouncing justice and ruling over kingdoms. Finally within the innermost sanctuary philosophers will come to know contemplating the secrets of heaven. There the true priesthood, guardians of that which is sacred, will find the weapons with which to defend religion against the profane. To her therefore, I urge you all to come to practice the liberal arts, where you will master these and [] for freedom no less. For the last run hither all you who are fired by unquenchable resolve to follow the truth and to seek happiness. Here with God's blessing you will persevere to take your fill of truth and happiness.

Really what he is saying is every single profession that is worth calling a profession draws its inspiration from the School because it has something to offer them all. At its center the philosophers, the lovers of truth, who will reach the goal of life which he says is a life of freedom. It is interesting he should say at the end, 'for the last time, run hither all you who are fired by an unquenchable resolve to follow truth.' I will leave you to think about what that could possibly mean. I think we might break now.

Intermission

I was just saying outside how Ficino doesn't talk about founding the Platonic academy, he talks about entering it as though there was this support, a body of great men that somehow guides or looks after a whole civilization. The people who translate these letters very much get this feeling of the Academy being something which is permanently there, which you enter and come under its discipline. Although there may appear to be lots of different schools like lots of different waves arising in the ocean but in fact it is really all one ocean and it is not really lots of different academies but it is single and always there. I think that is worth saying, because the more one works on these letters and the more one studies Ficino and Plato it is very much what is born in

upon one through this study. Ficino himself, like Cosimo, saw everything on the scale of humanity. He didn't see it as an organization of one hundred and fifty people in Florence meeting to discuss Plato, which is how many academics see it; he saw it as something quite different. He saw it in terms of something which was going to uplift mankind for a very long period. It would be worth looking at one or two of the letters where he expressed that. Ficino writes to a Venetian gymnast:

When singular learning is united with surpassing virtue, from this conjunction as it were of the sun and Jupiter, such splendor forthwith shines forth from the learning and such fire from the virtue that by the rays and flames thus extending from the east to west the minds of even the most distant nations aroused and kindled are most persuasively drawn and most powerfully seized.

That is in fact exactly what happened and the whole of Europe was in fact illumined by this teaching and you find little academies growing up everywhere and you find the same disciplines cropping up all over Europe, particularly the ladies who set up a great many Platonic Academies. The most famous one was Margaret of Navarre. Shakespeare has a lovely skit on Margaret of Navarre's court which Shakespeare writes about in *Loves Labors Lost*... This is one of the three courtiers who swear they undertake the disciplines of not seeing a woman, fasting and having very little sleep and this is all really about Margaret's court and does give a rather nice picture of it. They are all Frenchmen.

I can but say their protestation ever, so much dear liege I have already sworn. That is to live and study here three years. But there are other strict observances as not to see a woman in that time which I hope well is not in really there. And one day in a week to touch no food and but one meal on every day beside which I hope is not in really there. And then to sleep but three hours in the night and not be seen to wink all the day. When I was wont to think no harm all night and make a dark night too of half the day which I hope well is not in really there. Oh, there are barren tasks too hard to keep, not to see ladies, study, fast, not sleep...

I am really only mentioning this because someone did ask what the effect the Academy's work was outside Europe. It really was enormous and it is a pity that there is not more time to talk about it, but these academies that did spring up and did find the new values which the Academy stood for, the fact that a man was not just supposed to fight, but he was supposed to be virtuous,

that he was, in fact, supposed to realize his nature and he could do this through being literate, writing, being able to sing and play a musical instrument. There is a whole different concept of a man which was enshrined in the education of the English public schools which took their first inspiration from John Colet who founded the first of these new schools and there are letters between him and Ficino. He went through Ficino's books very carefully and everything that Ficino said about virtue he underlined; he clearly took this very much to heart and it transformed the whole educational systems of our western culture. The literary change was just as important, too. The most important figure was probably Sir Philip Sidney who wrote *An Apology for Poetry* in about 1564 in which he says that the most important kind of poetry was epic poetry and it was most important because it presented the virtues in such a way that people wanted to follow them. The virtue of virtues followed by Ficino, who states this in one of his letters, was the realization of God and all these other things had that in mind. This aim of education and literature has only very recently been allowed to just be forgotten by society at large. It is really very recent. This is by way of being in parentheses because the main thing that I was addressing before was Ficino's view of the Academy itself, but I thought I would just mention these things by way of showing that Ficino's view that the Academy operated over enormous areas, over the whole of our civilization and over many years, centuries, in fact, was actually born out in practice and we still benefit from it, and we still live by that grace in many ways of which we are not aware. It would be nice to hear the second letter which he wrote to Pico della Mirandola who was also a member of the Academy and he was also a very famous philosopher, died very young, at the age of twenty six, in fact. This is how Ficino writes to him: 1492 –

You write that every day you exhort many to abandon the epicurean impiety or to put aside certain ideas and follow the pious opinion of our Plato upon the soul and God by which, as by a middle way they may at length attain to Christian piety. Hail then, true fisher of men, for those who persuade common minds may be said to pursue fish or rather small fish, by those who persuade great minds may be reckoned fishers of men. Our net, Mirandola, is now the reason of Plato, which provided it be rightly drawn beneath the Christian truth, does not break but remains intact and whole while being filled. Would that only three such fishermen would lend their aid to religion that no great fish might remain in the sea. Yet the harvest is plenteous; the laborers are few. Therefore, my dear Mirandola, the fewer we are, the more diligently and assiduously we must work.

This raises a very interesting question as to who the third fisherman was. It is presumed that the first was Ficino and the second Mirandola, but I don't know who Ficino had in mind for the third one.

On the wall of Ficino's Academy hung two pictures. One was of Democritus, laughing at the follies of mankind and the other was Heraclitus who wept at their misery. I thought it might be nice to see a copy of this picture which hung in the Academy. This one is by Bramante. The original one was supposed to have been by Leonardo. There is Democritus laughing, Heraclitus weeping, and there is the world. The design at the top we have often tried to decipher but we have never gotten very far with it. I don't know if anybody else would like to have a shot at it, but it is probably expecting a lot.

I spoke about all these academies being founded all around Europe mainly by the ladies, queens and the mother of Henry the Seventh who founded a very important one in England. We should mention that Leonardo da Vinci himself intended to found a Platonic Academy in Milan. It was overtaken by the invasion of the French and he never got around to it. All we have left of that Academy is the design for the tapestries which were to hang around the room. It is done by Leonardo himself. There you can see; it says Academia Leonardo da Vinci and that is what would have decorated his Academy in Milan.

Around the walls of the Academy was this inscription:

All things are directed from the light to the light. Rejoice in the present. Seek no honors. Avoid excess. Avoid business. Rejoice in the present.

The Academy was a light that is always there and it has shown down through the centuries. It is in fact, as St. John puts it, "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." This light is the Renaissance. I think that is all I shall say at the moment. I had intended to say more about Ficino's character, but it does seem to be getting rather late. Let us finish with a quotation.

He was not governed by desire but raptured by love, just as Socrates was, and he used to debate and discuss the subject of love in the Socratic manner with young people. When he

was engaged with them in this way, the more he cared for them, the more they honored and respected him. He was content with simple clothes and possessions and was sparing with food, but he did select the most excellent wines, yet he never went away from parties drunk, though often more cheerful. He was mild and gentle in discussion and always a cheerful and excellent conversationalist, second to none in wit.

That was written by Giovanni Corsi who wrote this nice little biography of him very shortly after his death.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have an idea how many people took part in the Academy?

Mr. Salaman: There are about forty names that Ficino gives in one of his letters. There is reason to think there were many more members than that. I would think it would have been eighty to a hundred. It is only guessing. Fairly small but they were all fairly notable people.

Q. Did Ficino ever research Asia?

Mr. Salaman; Well he does use the expression, ‘as the Indian philosophers say...’ What he meant by that or how he knew about the Indian Philosophers, I don’t think anybody knows, but he does mention them quite often. We have never been able to really discover what he meant by that.

Q. What was the name of the Academy?

Mr. Salaman: Ficino just refers to it in his letters as the Academy. We call it the Platonic Academy and as I mentioned last night we are criticized for this by a local Professor Hankin who reviewed the last book. There was in fact an Aristotelian Academy which was going at the same time, but as soon as Ficino got his Academy going the Aristotelian Academy just collapsed, but for a time they were going together. He doesn’t give it any name. He just calls it the Academy. After Ficino’s Academy there was a proliferation of academies and after a time the word lost its

meaning and it just came to mean an ordinary school for children and the Academia Della Bella Arte comes in that category really.

Q: Do we know about the curriculum and was there more than one class?

Mr. Salaman: We don't know. We don't know at all about how it worked beyond what I read.

Q. What about Hermes?

Mr. Salaman: That is also very interesting. The tradition was accepted without question right down to the seventeenth century that he was an ancient Egyptian who lived about the time of Moses if not earlier. It was first questioned by a man called Cassebaum writing in the seventeenth century, who said, 'did this chap really exist?' Because the only texts are in Greek and the Greek was clearly written in about 200 AD was this not just a collection of neo-Platonic writings? This argument was applied to a lot of other people as well including Pythagoras, Orpheus and others. The argument just rests on the fact that as there are no texts it is likely this character didn't exist. That argument doesn't seem a very strong one to me because it entirely ignores the tradition that he did exist quite apart from the context of his works which is full of references to things Egyptian. It just seems unlikely. Moses is supposed to have lived about 1500 - 1600 BC.

Q: What was the relationship with the Catholic Church?

Mr. Salaman: Well, as I tried to indicate Ficino succeeded in persuading the Church that what he was teaching was true and the Church welcomed the Academy. Many members of the Academy were Bishops and even Archbishops and Ficino himself corresponded with the Pope, with Sixtus the Fourth. The relations were good. There wasn't any disagreement at all, although later on the Church didn't like this *Book of Life* and it looked as though he was going to have to go to Rome to explain certain things in that. The general work of the Academy the Church accepted with agreement.

Q: What was the role of Cosimo de Medici?

Mr. Salaman: As I said last night, Ficino almost worshiped Cosimo. He had the highest possible regard for him and he regarded Cosimo as getting the whole thing in motion, founding the Academy and getting it into existence. So his relationship was very, very close. He personally selected Ficino and he was absolutely key in starting the Academy,

Q: How about Lorenzo?

Mr. Salaman: Lorenzo was a bit more ambivalent really. Ficino was Lorenzo's tutor for a time. When they were young men they got on very well, but there are signs that in later life Lorenzo didn't look after Ficino or the Academy anything like as well as his father and grandfather had. So it is a little bit more dubious.

Q: Was he a member of the Academy?

Mr. Salaman: Yes, I read you that letter asking for Lorenzo's help because the Academy couldn't exist without Lorenzo's protection so he never deserted it, but he wasn't as enthusiastic as Cosimo or his son, Piero.

Q: How was the Academy supported financially?

Mr. Salaman: Through the de Medici. The de Medici were responsible for that. Cosimo gave Careggi and he gave the residence in the town, and it entirely depended on them.

Q: My question is whether the effect of the Academy was during the Academy's time or really after?

Mr. Salaman: I think it started with Ficino because Ficino corresponded with so many people. It wasn't only colleagues that he corresponded with, but he corresponded with the Pope and the French President, a number of German humanists. He had this enormous correspondence going. What the Academy was saying was being broadcast, as it were, and being received and taken up all over Europe, even by the end of "Ficino's lifetime this was certainly happening.

Q: Did Ficino leave the Church to start the Academy?

Mr. Salaman: No. He was ordained a priest in 1473 and he never left the church. He was a priest all the time...

Q: After Ficino's death to what extent did the Academy live, in what ways did the light continue to shine to bring it to this day?

Mr. Salaman: The Academy closed when the French invaded Italy in 1496 and they took Florence and sacked Milan. After that the Academy closed it was being taken up in other places. The way it has come down is indirect. For instance, in education through Ficino's correspondence with Colet who established this new kind of boarding school, St. Paul's was a new kind of public school. It worked like that, so the influence was not direct.

Q: You spoke of liberal arts...

Mr. Salaman: Yes, There are seven liberal arts. There were the trivium and the quadrivium which had been the liberal arts from time immemorial, going back to the Roman Empire, music, mathematics, geometry, grammar, logic, rhetoric, I can't remember them all. With Ficino they took on an entirely new significance. This was really the point about Ficino's education was the fact that it was a humanist education. What humanist really means is to do with being a human. What makes one a human is the practice of the virtues and the idea of the humanist education was that it should practice and inculcate these virtues, by which one is human. This gave the seven

liberal arts of the Middle Ages and antiquity an entirely different kind of slant, because suddenly it became relevant to study Homer and these great heroes and get people to try and behave like them, Virgil and Plato, which hadn't been on the curriculum at all because these things hadn't been considered to be the province of education. So that is how it changed.

Q: Who were Ficino's teachers?

Mr. Salaman: One can't easily find one. Ficino says he first got hold of Plato through Cicero. There are some lovely things in Cicero like the Dream of Scipio which are very Platonic in their nature, but there is no human teacher that one can find. He had certain teachers of grammar and one of the delightful things about the letter is to see how carefully he looked after his teachers when he was a child and how hard he worked by writing to famous people to try and get their financial hardships relieved. There is no real teacher in the sense of a teacher of philosophy that one can detect at all except for Cosimo.

Q: What gave rise to the task of translating Ficino's letters?

Mr. Salaman: The leader of the school in England was shown one of these letters and said, 'the man who wrote this must have been a realized man. Let's have these works translated.'

Q: Is there any thread that can be found from School to the musicians of the Seventeenth Century.

Mr. Salaman: Ficino's music was mainly improvised and he said it was the music of Orpheus. A change does come over music, doesn't it? I am not well qualified to speak about it but one finds in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is a music based on chords which is based on these intervals that I was talking about last night by which architecture was actually constructed. The intervals of the double, the three over two, four over three and to some extent the other proportions. These seem to come out in the music and give it that sort of rather noble sound

which it did not seem to have before then and certainly does now have how. This is all one can say about it.

Q: Discuss the link between Christianity and Plato.

Mr. Salaman: Only in terms of what I have said before about it going back to Hermes Trismegistus, the whole Judaic religion being based on that. Also there is no real reason there should be any kind of conflict. Religion really is to do with love. We read about how he drew people by his love and philosophy has to do with reason. It is love that gets anybody moving because the emotions are filled and you want to do something about it. You are moved by the distress of other people or by yourself. It is reason that actually instructs you what to do and what not to do. The properly balanced individual needs to be moved by reason and by love. Otherwise he can't operate to his full potential. The one is symbolized by religion and the other by philosophy. They really lead in the same direction which is the freeing of the soul from its impediments which really turn out to be how it thinks itself limited when in fact it isn't limited.

This is a good place to stop.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen, it is so nice to have such a lively audience.

