

Rhetorics of Transcendence

[Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Milner, S. J. (2010). Rhetorics of Transcendence: Conflict and intercession in communal Italy 1300-1500. In K. L. Jansen, & M. Rubin (Eds.), *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Preaching, 1200-1500* (pp. 235-251). Brepols Publishers.

Published in:

Charisma and Religious Authority

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester's Takedown Procedures [<http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo>] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.



RHETORICS OF TRANSCEDENCE: CONFLICT AND INTERCESSION IN COMMUNAL ITALY 1300–1500

Stephen Milner

As a cultural historian interested in secular rhetoric in pre-modern Italy the concept of charisma was not one I was particularly accustomed to use in my own writing. Indeed, I have to confess that I had not really thought about charisma as a useful critical term for the analysis of pre-modern urban culture beyond registering the general use of the word by historical anthropologists writing about public life, the sacralization of civic space, and the charismatic centres of communal towns.¹ In terms of it being a personal attribute or indeed a word within the Italian lexis of the period, I knew of no applied usages. The only scholar I was conscious of using it as an organizing concept for the analysis of medieval culture was Stephen Jaeger in his examination of what he termed ‘charismatic pedagogy’ in the Cathedral schools.² In what follows, therefore, the aim is to return to Weber to examine the role of preachers and public speakers as mediators between actual and possible worlds and examine the political consequences of their alternative visions for the ordering of the earthly city in late medieval Italy. For the intralinguistic mixing of communal and theological discourses in this period furnished a variety of rhetorics of transcendence which imagined the citizen and Christian soul beyond the contingencies and tensions of the political sphere whilst

I would like to thank my colleagues at Bristol, Charles Burdett, Derek Duncan, and Beth Williamson, for their comments and critical insights on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ The concept is extensively used by Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

² C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe 950–1200* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

simultaneously adding to them. Such rhetorics had important consequences in terms of their impact in the socio-political realm. Particular attention will be focused, therefore, upon the role of preachers as both apologists for and critics of communal regimes, within the context of an examination of the ambivalence of charisma as a unifying and divisive phenomenon within the communes of late medieval Italy.

Weber himself showed a marked interest in the Italian communes of the late medieval and Renaissance periods. His doctoral dissertation of 1889, for example, analysed the evolution of the medieval guilds as the first instance of organized forms of free labour, a thesis he later revisited in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.³ To date the majority of writing that has drawn on Weber has concentrated attention on the legal and economic constitution of the late medieval communes and the emergence of the state in Renaissance Italy as part of a larger narrative concerning the growth of the executive and the process of state building in the West.⁴ In this context constant reference is made in the secondary literature to Weber's description of the bureaucratic machinery of the Northern Italian *signorie* as the harbinger of the modern rational state and to the Italian communes as political forms whose economies were driven by an early form of market capitalism. This emphasis has largely neglected the charismatic aspect of Weber's sociology which in my view is now due a renaissance of its own within the historiography of Italian urban development in late medieval and Renaissance Italy.⁵

Sadly for us, Weber never completed his intended study of medieval Catholicism, nor his promised work on the ancient and medieval bourgeois burgher citizen, nor his history of the great western revolutions which he intended to begin

³ For two useful summaries of Weber's principal sociological theses, see Frank Parkin, *Max Weber* (London: Routledge, 1982), and Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 119–84.

⁴ See W. Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks: Max Weber's "The City" Revisited', in *Athens and Rome, Florence and Venice: City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. by A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, and J. Emlen (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1991), pp. 19–30; P. Schiera, 'Legitimacy, Discipline, and Institutions: Three Necessary Conditions for the Birth of the Modern State', in *The Origins of the State in Italy 1300–1600*, ed. by J. Kirshner (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), pp. 11–33; and R. Burr Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureaucracy: The Florentine Patricians 1530–1790* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁵ For an analysis of Catholic medieval monastic asceticism from a Weberian perspective, see Ilana Friedrich Silber, *Virtuosity, Charisma, and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

with the communal movement of the Middle Ages.⁶ Such lacunae may account for the lack of an extensive treatment on Weber's part of the place of religion and religious preaching within the formation of the Medieval Italian commune. Yet Catholicism is actually accorded a central role by Weber in his account of the origins of the Western city in the posthumously published essay *Die Stadt*, usually translated into English as *The City*.⁷ Weber's thesis holds that it was the Christian practice of communion, the sharing of the Eucharist, which provided the model for the city understood in terms of a confraternity. According to Weber, this model of collective association found its first political expression when the people of the Medieval Italian communes swore oaths of association in self-consciously constituting their communities. For Weber the religious rite of communion provided the ritual form for the legalistic practice of oath taking whereby communes were constitutionally formed.⁸ And herein lies the key to reintroducing the charismatic dimension of communal belonging that has been relatively neglected by recent sociological, economic, and cultural materialist readings which have stressed the rationalism of the pre-modern Italian communes and their role in laying the foundations of modern western political forms and thought.⁹

Etymologically charisma and Eucharist share the same Greek root $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma$ $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\tau\omicron\varsigma$ $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\tau\eta$, meaning a beneficent disposition towards someone, goodwill, care, grace, benefaction, gratitude, a gracious deed or gift. Add the greek prefix $\epsilon\upsilon$, meaning 'well' or 'good', and EUCHARIST becomes 'thanks-giving', the celebration and recognition of God's gift of his only begotten son to save mankind, with

⁶ See Lutz Kaelber, 'Weber's Lacuna: Medieval Religion and the Roots of Rationalization', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), 465–85.

⁷ Max Weber, *The City*, ed. and trans. by Don Martindale and Gertrud Nuwith (New York: Free Press, 1958). See also H. Bruhns, 'La cité antique de Max Weber', *OPUS*, 6–8 (1987–89), 29–42.

⁸ On the Eucharist, charisma, and community, see J. Bossy, 'The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700', *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), 29–61; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Jack T. Sanders, *Charisma, Converts, Competitors: Societal and Sociological Factors in the Success of Early Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2000). On oath making and communal formation, see Paolo Prodi, *Il sacramento del potere: il giuramento politico nella storia costituzionale dell'Occidente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), and Diego Quaglioni, "'Civitas': Appunti per una riflessione sull'idea di città nel pensiero politico dei giuristi medievali', in *Le ideologie della città europea dall'umanesimo al romanticismo*, ed. by Vittorio Conti (Florence: Olschki, 1993), pp. 59–76.

⁹ Such a teleology is implicit, for example, in Quentin Skinner's classic *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Christ the figure who most directly mediated between this world and the next.¹⁰ The assumption of the example of God's love for mankind through the intercession and mediation of his son became a central plank of Italian communal preaching and writing as 'the' pattern for ethically virtuous social interaction within the lay culture of the communes. Once within the realm of gift exchange it comes as no surprise that the Italian vernacular 'carità', understood as the Christian love of one's fellow man, derives from the same etymological root hence 'charity as gift giving'. From Albertanus of Brescia's *De amore et dilectione Dei et proximi* of the 1240s to Giovanni Dominici's *Il libro d'amore di carità* of 1404, and beyond, the question of the regulation of civic life, the economy of human intersubjectivity, and one's relation to God and one's neighbour stood at the heart of the communal preachers' reflections upon the relation of social aggregation to individual salvation, although it should be stressed that the role of the preacher as spiritual go-between was as much about charismatic intercession as it was about sacerdotal mediation.¹¹ For prophecy was also a charisma, a God-given gift that enabled the recipient to foresee the future through divine revelation, the bestowal of which bore further witness to God's omniscience.¹²

Not surprisingly, therefore, the late medieval and Renaissance lexes of social interaction and divine intercession were homologous, as were the vocabularies of mercantilism and divine judgement. Conversations with the Lord (*Signore*) took place through the mediation of patrons or petitioners (*padroni* or *avvocati*) in the form of prayers or requests (*preghiere*). The dynamics of catholic intercession

¹⁰ See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edn, ed. by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 1079–81.

¹¹ See Albertanus of Brescia, *De amore et dilectione Dei et proximi et aliarum rerum et de forma vitae*, ed. by Sharon Hiltz (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980; now online at <<http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/DeAmore1.htm>>) and the comments of James M. Powell, *Albertanus of Brescia: The Pursuit of Happiness in the Early Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 37–55. For the Dominici text, see Giovanni Dominici, *Il libro d'amore di carità*, ed. by Antonio Ceruti (Bologna: Romagnoli-dall'Aqua, 1889), and Isabella Gagliardi, 'Il Libro d'amor di carità di Giovanni Dominici: alcune tracce per una lettura', in *Verso Savonarola: misticismo, profezia, empiti riformistici fra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Gian Carlo Garfagnini and Giuseppe Picone (Florence: SISMEL, 1999), pp. 47–81.

¹² See Franco Mormando, 'Signs of the Apocalypse in Late Medieval Italy: The Popular Preaching of Bernardino of Siena', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 24 (1997), 95–122, and the studies of Claudio Leonardi, 'La crisi della cristianità medievale, il ruolo della profezia e Girolamo Savonarola', in *Verso Savonarola*, ed. by Garfagnini and Picone, pp. 4–23, and Barbara Finlay, 'The Origins of Charisma as Process: A Case Study of Hildegard of Bingen', *Symbolic Interaction*, 25 (2002), 537–54.

replicated the dynamics of communal social interaction and patronage and vice versa.¹³ An important consequence of this fact, in terms of the current argument, is that the communal conceptualisation of exchange was not set within a mundane framework established by economic rationalism but rather in terms of the individual's dealings with God as well as his fellow men. The medieval marketplace, in contrast to the secular marketplace of modernity, encompassed transactions between both this world and the next, it was a marketplace in which God's gift of grace was on offer and where the virtuous disposal of wealth secured divine credit.¹⁴ For whilst religious preaching sought to instil a communal ethic which stressed sacrifice over contract it did so in the belief that ultimately each individual would have to literally account for him- or herself.¹⁵

The relation of savings to salvation was a perennial concern to medieval communal preachers, the penitential orientation of public preaching highlighting the conception of the final judgement as an exercise in accountability, one's future lying in the balance. The current tendency to concentrate upon the materialism of the Renaissance and its pursuit of wordly goods neglects the exchange between worlds initiated by God's gift of his only son as predicted — from *prae-dicere*, *predicato* (foretold/preached) — by the prophets and as symbolically enacted in the Eucharist.¹⁶ The transcendental element of the Catholic spiritual economy, therefore, the concern with social life after death (what the Italians refer to as the realm

¹³ The bibliography on Italian late medieval and Renaissance social patronage is vast but the following are particularly useful: *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by F. W. Kent and P. Simons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); B. Diefendorf, 'Family Culture, Renaissance Culture', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40 (1987), 661–81; the essays collected in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and more generally Sharon Kettering, 'The Historical Development of Political Clientelism', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18 (1988), 419–47.

¹⁴ On gift giving to monasteries see, for example, C. M. Miller, 'Donors, their Gifts and Religious Innovation in Medieval Verona', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 27–42.

¹⁵ A classic parody of such processes of accounting and self-narration through confession is found in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, novella I i, the tale of Ser Ciappelletto. See Millicent Marcus, 'Ser Ciappelletto or *Le Saint Noir*: A Comic Paradox', in *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga, CA: Anima Libri, 1979), pp. 23–51.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), and Lisa Jardine, *Wordly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996). Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) contains a section on the sale of indulgences and other challenges to the concept of commodification in the Renaissance period.

of the *oltratomba*), was central to the enchantment of everyday life. A conviction that the end of the world was nigh, as propagated by an apocalyptic preacher, or the explanation of the plague as divine judgement could, and did, radically alter people's demeanour, as the possibility of meeting one's maker became a distinct possibility.¹⁷ Boccaccio was not alone in his portrayal of how social behaviour was radically reconfigured by the spectre of immanent death.¹⁸ Often described as face-to-face societies, it is no wonder the communal period witnessed such interest in the beatific vision.¹⁹ Just as the lexis of social interaction was homologous with the language of divine intercession, so the lexis of earthly community was co-terminus with the language of heavenly communion as citizens sought to effect the transition from the secular *libertà* of the communal *patria* to the *santa libertà* of the *celeste patria*.²⁰

In it but not of it, the mendicant preachers of the Italian commune occupied a liminal place as mediators, go-betweens, intermediaries, intercessors, even brokers between this world and the next, imbuing civic life with a spiritual dimension. As textual and symbolic mediators, they deciphered allegory as figurations of God's truths, reading the world through the prism of God's word and thereby rendering both the Christian texts and Christian symbols meaningful.²¹ Simultaneously, they also served to warn of the danger posed by the temptations offered by the

¹⁷ See the fascinating case study by Lawrin Armstrong, 'Usury, Conscience, and Public Debt: Angelo Corbinelli's Testament of 1419', in *A Renaissance of Conflicts: Visions and Revisions of Law and Society in Italy and Spain*, ed. by John A. Marino and Thomas Kuehn (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004), pp. 173–214.

¹⁸ On reading the plague, see Olivio Capitani, *Morire di peste: testimonianze antiche e interpretazioni moderne della 'peste nera' del 1348* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1995), and John Henderson, 'The Black Death in Florence: Medical and Communal Responses', in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), [DAO1].

¹⁹ On the holy community of heaven, see Rona Goffen, 'Nostra Conversatio in Caelis Est: Observations on the *Sacra Conversazione* in the Trecento', *Art Bulletin*, 61 (1979), 198–222. On the iconography of the beatific vision, see Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), pp. 204–14.

²⁰ For an example of such intralinguistic mixing, see Lorenzo Polizzotto, 'Holy Women, the City and Salvation', in *Girolamo Savonarola: Piety, Prophecy, and Politics in Renaissance Florence*, ed. by Donald Weinstein and Valerie R. Hotchkiss (Dallas: PDQ Press, 1994), pp. 85–93 (p. 88).

²¹ See Judson Boyce Allen, *The Friar as Critic: Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971).

earthbound agents of the other transcendental would-be lord in exile, the devil.²² Instrumental in addressing the relation of this life to the afterlife in a public forum, through their preaching they addressed questions of individual salvation within a collective context thereby rendering the future perennially present in the minds of their congregations-cum-audiences. In the process, they carried something of the penitential discipline learnt within their own orders to a wider public.²³ This was not, however, the state-sponsored discipline of modernity identified by Weber and, more recently, Foucault, but rather disciplinary practices which sought spiritual well-being as part of the governance of the self. In this respect, the civic ethos of the Italian communes actually occupies a mid-point in Weber's narrative of western rationalism, located between the poles of monastic asceticism on the one hand and the secularized asceticism of modernity on the other. For the social and political world of the Italian communes equated to neither the enclosed worlds of medieval monastic orders nor the 'iron cage' of bureaucratic rationalization that saw governmental administration permeate all aspects of an essentially disenchanting society.²⁴ Rather, stated in Weberian terms, they constituted an early stage in the translation of such a disciplinary ethic from an exclusively religious to an exclusively secular setting. In Weber's own words, 'For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order.'²⁵

²² For a study of this aspect of Bernardino of Siena's ministry, see Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Bernadette Paton, *Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos: Siena, 1380–1480* (London: QMWC, 1992), pp. 264–306.

²³ On the sermon as medieval art, see *The Sermon*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 81–83 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), especially Carlo Delcorno, 'Medieval Preaching in Italy 1200–1500', pp. 449–560; and Marianne G. Briscoe and Barbara H. Jaye, *Artes praedicandi: Artes orandi*, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 61 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992).

²⁴ Marvin Becker in particular has charted what he characterizes as the alarming intrusion of the new impartial territorial states of late medieval and Renaissance Italy upon the private realm of feeling. See Marvin Becker, 'An Essay on the Quest for Identity in the Early Italian Renaissance', in *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. by J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 295–312, and Becker, 'Individualism in the Early Italian Renaissance: Burden or Blessing', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 19 (1972), 273–97. More broadly on Weber and the relation of culture to modernity, see Lawrence Scaff, *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

²⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904–05], trans. by Talcott

Nobody better represents the beginnings of this translation of catholic monastic aestheticism into the public realm and its encounter with nascent capitalism than the preaching friars of communal Italy. In fact, it could be argued that they actually embodied this translation as they moved between the closed spaces of their monastic cloisters and the streets and squares where they addressed the massed crowds of the self-determining mercantile communes, their monasteries constituting literal halfway houses between the communities of the Earthly City and the City of God. In moving into the communal sphere, however, some account needs to be furnished concerning their relation to political authority and the seeming susceptibility of the Italian communes to reformist preachers.

In addressing the issue of the relation of charisma to authority in the context of communal Italy there is no doubting that the public preachers had a massive impact upon social and political ordering throughout the communal period right up until Savonarola's political reforms in Florence of the mid-1490s. In large part this was a consequence of the lack of a clearly identifiable authoritative centre within such self-determining 'republics'. As 'public things' they were not subject to domination by any single individual or ruler, yet the flip side of such communal liberty was the agonistic nature of socio-political life.²⁶ The regular rotations of office, the appointment of judicial officials from outside the region, the *divieti* preventing repeated occupation of the same office by members of the same family, and the liberal use of exile for those considered inimical to the healthy functioning of the body politic all testify to the collective paranoia concerning the potential for the crystallization of factional interests or the pre-eminence of a particular family threatening to subject the commune to their domination. As has repeatedly been noted, however, by the late fifteenth century most had eventually succumbed to

Parsons (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 181. Weber actually mentions the medieval mendicant preachers in the context of his discussion of the urban nature of Christianity as a movement and the city as 'a major theatre for Christianity'. See Max Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 267–301 (p. 269).

²⁶ This agonistic portrait of Florentine social relations consequent upon an 'excess of community' within the city is the central contention of Ronald Weissman's work. See Ronald F. E. Weissman, 'Judas the Florentine: Social Relations in Renaissance Florence', in *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 1–41, and Weissman, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism, and Identity in Renaissance Florence', in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. by S. Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (London: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 269–80.

the control of a single dominant family.²⁷ The consequent political dynamics determined much of the subject matter treated by the communal preachers as well as much of their activity in securing peace between rival factions or warring families. Bernardino da Siena is perhaps the most studied of the peacemakers after the revivalist preachers of the Great Devotion of 1233, yet nearly all sermon cycles touched upon issues of social discord and the morality of such juridical institutions as the vendetta.²⁸

In terms of legitimacy too, it is a commonplace of the historiography of the period that the Italian communes, having declared their de facto independence of papal and imperial authority, faced a constant struggle in seeking to constitute themselves and fashion their, often competing, multiple groupings into a recognizable urban collective with a shared rationale. In this context it is worth noting that Weber had originally planned for his essay on the city to appear in his *Economy and Society* as part of the section on illegitimate forms of domination, for in general terms Weber characterized the people, or masses, as an illegitimate and revolutionary political entity that occupied a perennially critical stance towards established power structures.²⁹ Such a charismatic vacuum within the communes was partially filled by ritual forms in which the Church played a central role. In the case of Florence, as the work of Richard Trexler in particular has shown, the continual reiteration of communal values and the continual performance of communal rituals were central to the legitimation of a political form that, in his view, had no legitimate head, radiated distrust, and lacked honour.³⁰ Such attempts largely centred upon seeking to imbue the commune with a degree of charisma that

²⁷ The failure of many of the communes to find a solution is charted in Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For a consideration of the tensions inherent in communal aggregation, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

²⁸ See Cynthia L. Polecristi, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance [DAO2]Italy: Bernardino of Siena and his Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2000), and Augustine Thompson, *Revival Preachers and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Italy. The Great Devotion of 1233* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

²⁹ Nippel, 'Introductory Remarks', p. 24.

³⁰ See Trexler, *Public Life*, pp. 419–547, and Trexler, 'Honor among Thieves: The Trust Function of the Urban Clergy in the Florentine Republic', in *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (Florence: Sansoni, 1978), pp. 317–34. For a discussion of Weber's analysis of the role of charisma in legitimizing classical republicanism, see Christoph R. Hatscher, *Charisma und Res publica: Max Weber Herrschaftssoziologie und die Römische Republik* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2000).

would induce a sense of belonging and indebtedness towards an entity that was notably abstract in comparison to the more tangible obligations to family, friends, neighbours, patrons, fellow confraternity members, and so on. For Trexler the answer lay in the use of rituals that transcended particular interests and served to involve groups in the collective celebration of something greater than its constitutive parts. The commune was thus transformed into a highly personalized entity that encouraged participation and involvement and conditioned behaviour through the ordering of symbolic space. In the process charisma was transmuted into the permanent forms that sanctified the established, or reformed, socio-political order. The transitional status of the late medieval Italian commune within Weber's typology of forms of legitimation, therefore, is apparent from such a characterization of medieval urban life which is far removed from the disenchanting impersonal city of modernity.

Placed within this ritual of communal legitimation, and given the absence in most communes of a clearly identifiable patriarchal head, the figure of the public preacher was central to the routinization of charisma. There is no doubt that the clergy, and the mendicant preachers in particular, devolved their charismatic authority to the existing, or reformed, institutions of the commune. This was clearly the case with Bernardino and Savonarola, both of whom configured Christ himself as communal figurehead within their programmes of civic regeneration.³¹ Yet we must be careful not to conflate the charisma of the commune as entity with the charisma of the preacher as person. Indeed, returning to Weber's threefold typology of legitimation, the attributes accorded to the charismatic form of domination are personal not collective ones: possession of 'specific gifts of the body and spirit', a sense of what he terms 'divine mission', and separation from the routines of this world — no tenure of office, no regular income or stipend, no family or dependents.³² The charisma of a mendicant preacher, therefore, was always ambivalent in political terms, and it is noticeable the extent to which secondary literature seems to fall into the pattern of reading such figures politically as either

³¹ See for example the studies by Paton, *Preaching Friars*; Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001); and Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

³² For Weber's definition of charismatic domination, see [DAO3] *From Max Weber*, pp. 246–50.

apologists for, or critics of, a particular regime or social class, thereby reducing theology to ideology.³³

Here, however, the differentiation between what we might term perennial charisma and surge charisma is worth considering. For while the first concerns itself with the enchantment of the present by imbuing the everyday with a sense of the transcendent and the world to come, the second is associated with specific moments when such processes reached a fever pitch of evangelical intensity. Whilst the latter was more prone to confirm the prevailing form of social ordering, surge charisma was far more conducive to social reform and revolution. For it is my contention that preachers in a communal context furnished a charisma of the everyday, a seeming oxymoron, in imbricating both the symbolic repertory of community and urban ritual practices with transcendental meanings which were as critical as they were confirming of civic communion and the benefits of social aggregation.³⁴ As mediators of charisma, preachers were central to the evolution of a lexis of legitimation, in conditioning the behaviour of subjects living within self-determining political communities, and, in short, in the articulation and propagation of a communal ethic which rendered the political and the religious quasi-homologous.

This may be a function of the fact that the coming together of large crowds to witness the preaching of the mendicant friars, although a religious occasion, was saturated with political associations. For when large crowds gathered and were moved by persuasive speechmaking, the permanency of established forms of social ordering were often threatened. Indeed, the statutory rubrics of most Italian medieval communes reveal a perennial anxiety concerning the unregulated gathering of large crowds, there being some irony in the fact that sovereignty of the commune as *universitas civium* actually lay in the coming of such acts of mass communal aggregation to constitute a civic *parlamentum*, the idea being that communal government should be a process 'quod omnes tangit', to use the words of the Roman Law glossators.³⁵ The dividing line between legitimation and revolution,

³³ See for example Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

³⁴ On this ambivalence, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Preaching as Touchstone of Orthodoxy and Dissidence in the Middle Ages', *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 43 (1999), 19–54.

³⁵ See Stephen J. Milner, 'Citing the *Ringhiera*: The Politics of Place and Public Address in Trecento Florence', *Italian Studies*, 55 (2000), 53–82, and Milner, 'The Florentine *Piazza della Signoria* as practiced place', in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. by Roger J. Crum and John Paoletti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), [DAO1].

therefore, was always a thin one, and it is noteworthy that Savonarola took the step of outlawing such civic parliaments in Florence as instruments of tyranny whilst himself being dependant upon the following he garnered from such acts of communal aggregation.³⁶

How such large crowds acted when attending a public sermon, however, depended largely upon the affective potency of the preacher's rhetoric and his attitude towards the relation of moral to political regeneration. What power they had lay in their ability to persuade and convince, to secure an audience and a following, but in political terms questions arise concerning the permanency of this power and its hold over a collective, and the ability of periodic attendance at public sermons to secure a sustained programme of civic reform. For Weber charismatic authority was usually temporary and fleeting, and although a divine gift, support and a dedicated following were conditional upon the leader's ability to repeatedly prove his or her divine mission through works.³⁷ Domination of this form depended upon the subjection of an essentially passive crowd through the performance of awe-inspiring acts. It is here, in my view, that we encounter the limits within Weber's sociology of charismatic domination.³⁸ For however charismatic these preachers were, they were never in a position to coerce, a key limitation in Machiavelli's eyes when discussing armed prophets and the failure of Savonarola in *The Prince* and *The Discourses*.³⁹

What is required is a more dialogical model in which the crowd plays a more active part in the conferral of charisma in the acceptance, rather than passive reception, of religious rhetoric. For Weber's view of charisma is actually rather reductive (almost circus-like) in its portrayal of belief as being based upon performance and spectacle rather than psychological reform. In my mind, a far more nuanced analysis, and I use the term advisedly, of the relation between compliance, religious

³⁶ See the discussion in Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298–1532: Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 72–73.

³⁷ In this context one could argue that the art of preaching, the *ars predicandi*, actually involved education in a technology of charisma in order to secure its effective devolution. See the analysis of preaching instruction in M. Michèle Mulchahey, 'First the bow is bent in Study': *Dominican Education before 1350*, *Studies and Texts*, 132 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), pp. 397–479.

³⁸ See Parkin, *Max Weber*, pp. 71–89.

³⁹ See Alison Brown, 'Savonarola, Machiavelli and Moses: A Changing Model', in *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein*, ed. by Peter Denley and Caroline Elam (London: Westfield College, 1988), pp. 57–72.

authority, and leadership is provided in an essay that was published in 1921, the same year as Weber's *The City*. Written by Sigmund Freud and entitled 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', the essay provides a critique of Gustav Le Bon's famous book *Psychologie des Foules* (1895) as part of his analysis of the psychological processes at work when an individual joins a crowd and comes under the sway of a leader.⁴⁰ Freud rejected those explanations of crowd behaviour that spoke in pejorative terms of primordial and arbitrary herd instincts. Instead Freud chose to analyse these characteristics as consequences of active choices, even if subconscious, as effects rather than causes.⁴¹ For Freud, the bond that draws the individual to the crowd, and characterizes the relation of the individual in a crowd to a leader, was libidinal and based upon the pleasure principal. In place of domination and coercion Freud focused upon the compliance consequent upon the gratification of desires, the satisfaction and fulfilment felt in the surrender of a part of one's conscious self to an idealized love object. For a characteristic of the state of being in love is the extent to which the narcissistic libido of the subject is projected upon an idealized love object. The compliance of the individual, therefore, is a result of the object of desire supplanting the subject's own ego-ideal thereby impeding any self-criticism and inducing blind faith. Freud likens the psychological modification of the subject in such situations to hypnotism, where authority is transferred to the hypnotist as a consequence of the suspension of the rationalizing component of the psyche.⁴² What is particular about the experience of being in a crowd is the increased susceptibility of the subject to such irrational overvaluation and psychic modification on account of the weakening of the individual's self-consciousness when participating in such collective gatherings. By the same token the collective identification by the crowd with the same love object

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', in *Civilization, Society and Religion*, ed. by Albert Dickson, Penguin Freud Library, 12 (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 93–178.

⁴¹ There is a limit to the extent that Freud's analysis can be read as granting agency to the crowd given that their reactions/feelings are unconscious, and as such not compatible with agency as a self-conscious decision-making process. Similarly the leader's agency falls short of total control of the crowd. Indeed, it is difficult to apply a clearly identifiable causal line between agents and objects in such situations which depend on a prevailing mood as understood by Kristeva, namely as 'a generalised transference [...] a fluctuating energy cathexes' not 'in control' of/by anyone. See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leo S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 22.

⁴² Freud saw this repression of a part of the personality as a characteristic of all religions. It accounted for his lifelong hostility towards conscience-based belief systems. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Future of an Illusion', in *Civilization, Society and Religion*, ed. by Dickson, pp. 179–241.

serves only to reinforce their sense of shared identity and further enhance the sublimation of what Freud refers to as the leader's 'prestige', or what we might like to refer to in the current context as 'charisma'.

Freud's observations are very suggestive when applied to the analysis of the preacher/crowd dynamic as reported in contemporary chronicles and the observational notes made in the *reportationes* of communal sermons. Mary Carruthers and Lina Bolzoni, amongst others, have shown how the instrumentality of words and images when combined and mediated through preaching and meditation served to cognitively remap the individual, conditioning how the divine truths contained in biblical allegory and the world of symbols which surrounded them were to be received, read, and remembered through a mix of rhetorical techniques and monastic meditative practices which moulded the mind.⁴³ The mental maps that preachers constructed served as itineraries to spiritual elevation and contemplation of the divine for use in the present. The charisma derived from such a mediating function between the human and the divine is testified by the size of the followings many of these preachers secured, their presence amongst the crowd embodying the physical presence of the holy, their preachings leaving a lasting (mental/psychological) impression upon their audiences which endured beyond the transitory performance itself. By creating such mental images through their exemplary narratives they were capable of influencing the faculties of cognition, memory, and will.⁴⁴ To quote Bolzoni on Bernardino:

Using various means, Bernardino sets himself a single aim: to guide the reception of images and also to condition their future reception, to create a kind of automatic response system

⁴³ Lina Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from its Origins to St Bernardino da Siena* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), and Mary J. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ On the rhetorical use of exempla in medieval preaching, see C. Bremond, J. Le Goff, and J.-C. Schmitt, *L'exemplum*, *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 40 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1982), and J. Le Goff, 'L'exemplum et la rhétorique de la prédication aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles', in *Retorica e poetica tra I secoli XII e XIV: Atti del secondo convegno internazionale di studi dell'Associazione per il Medioevo e l'Umanesimo latini in onore e memoria di Ezio Franceschini* (Trento-Rovereto, 3–5 ottobre 1985), ed. by C. Leonardi and E. Menestò (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1988), pp. 3–29. For the use of *exempla* in the Italian context and discussion of secondary literature on the subject, see Carlo Delcorno, 'Forme dell'exemplum in Italia', in *Ceti, modelli, comportamenti nella società medievale (secoli XIII–metà XV)*, Diciasette convegno internazionale di studi, Pistoia 14–17 maggio 1999 (Pistoia: Centro italiano di studi di storia e d'arte Pistoia, 2001), pp. 305–36. For a study of Bernardino's use of *exempla*, see *Repertorio degli esempi volgari di Bernardino da Siena*, ed. by Carlo Delcorno and Saverio Amadori (Bologna: CLUEB, 2002).

in the observer. In this way the homily can endure, operating outside the bounds of the ephemeral time of its preaching: the city streets, the paintings that mark the most meaningful places of city life are transformed into a memory theatre of Bernardino's teachings.⁴⁵

Space mitigates against considering how the communal preacher's treatment of the subject of intercession between this world and the next found resonance within mainstream philosophical thinking of the period. Suffice to say, it was within the neo-platonism of Ficino and his circle that extensive parallels are discernable.⁴⁶ For Ficino, writing in his *Theologia Platonica*, it was not speech or the rational intellect that divided man from the beasts as the Ciceronian and Aristotelian traditions held, but rather religion and man's ability to know divine truths.⁴⁷ In the *Dereligiōne Christiana* Ficino actually argues that such were the values upon which Christianity was based that not even the reasoning speech of Cicero or Demosthenes was capable of persuading people to follow them.⁴⁸ For the truth of religion was vouchsafed by revelation as it was through prophecy and miracles that the divine interceded with human affairs. For Ficino the fullest wisdom was passed through Christianity, although divine revelation was available to all no matter what religion was followed. What is striking about Ficino's analysis is the manner in which he sets up his contrast between theology and rationalism, between belief and scepticism, between piety and doubt in psychological terms. For Ficino's analysis shares startling similarities with Freud's in terms of religion's ability to cognitively remap the subject. A lack of belief was a disease of the soul, a consequence of over rationalization, a failing particularly prevalent in intellectuals whose reluctance to participate and join in resulted in melancholia, bitterness, and

⁴⁵ Bolzoni, *Web of Images*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ On Ficino's own preaching, see Cesare Vasoli, 'Le *praedicationes* di Marsilio Ficino', in *Letteratura in forma di sermone: I rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII–XVI*, Atti del seminario di studi, Bologna 15–17 novembre 2001, ed. by Ginetta Auzzas, Giovanni Baffetti, and Carlo Delcorno (Florence: Olschki, 2003), pp. 9–27.

⁴⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. by Michael J. B. Allen and ed. by James Hankins, 4 vols, I Tatti Renaissance Library, 13 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), IV, Book XIV, caps. ix–x, pp. 290–329.

⁴⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Della religione christiana* (Florence: Giunti, 1568), pp. 36–37: 'Hor crediamo noi che Demostene et Cicerone havessin potuto in questo modo con ragione alcuna cosa mai ad alcuno persuader [. . .] la verità non hà bisogno di liscio di parole'. See also G. Castellaneli, 'Il cristianesimo e le altre religioni nel *De pace fidei* di Nicolò Cusano e nel *De Christiana religione* di Marsilio Ficino', in *Cristianesimo e religioni in dialogo*, ed. by G. Canobbio (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1994), pp. 45–77.

depression.⁴⁹ Extending his use of faculty psychology, Ficino argued that love of God followed from the love of self, as a pious disposition was the result of balanced humours. The Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity (*carità*) provided the disciplining structures of the healthy soul. Good mental health, therefore, was a healthy soul striving for union with its maker, a soul capable of moments of transcendence through the experience of ecstatic transport.⁵⁰ Preachers and prophets were the efficient causes of such processes and central to furnishing such disciplining structures to a mass audience.⁵¹

Until recently the tendency has been to find in the pre-modern period the shoots of economic rationalism, the foundations of modern political thought, the origins of western secularism, and the beginnings of nation-state bureaucracies. Yet such a teleology is at odds with the sense of nostalgia and loss apparent in the writings of the likes of Weber and Burckhardt for whom the finding of the modern in the pre-modern was no cause for celebration.⁵² It is notable that many of Weber's contemporaries like Nietzsche, Burckhardt, Freud, and later Benjamin all developed categories which enabled them to discuss the extraordinary, using terms such as charisma, aura, prestige, and genius to describe the attributes of individuals who stood out from the crowd as possessors of a gift or ability which transcended the commonplace and routine. Yet we should remember that too much enchantment and too much charisma can be a bad thing. Within decades of both Weber's and Burckhardt's writings charisma itself underwent a renaissance in the guise of

⁴⁹ See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey, Pelican Freud Library, 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 247–68, and Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, Book XIV, cap. x, pp. 306–09.

⁵⁰ For a comparison of Ficino's and Savonarola's views on the soul, see Frank La Brasca, 'Combats pour l'âme: les deux 'théologies' de Savonarole et Ficin', in *Savonarole: enjeux, débats, questions*, Actes du Colloque International (Paris, 25–27 janvier 1996), ed. by A. Fontes, J.-L. Fournel, and M. Plaisance (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997), pp. 199–221.

⁵¹ See the comments of S. Toussaint, 'Profetare all fine del Quattrocento', in *Studi Savonaroliani: Verso il V centenario*, Atti del primo seminario (Firenze 14–15 gennaio 1995), ed. by Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: SISMEL, 1996), pp. 167–81, and Franco Buzzi, 'I "motivi di credibilità" del cristianesimo nell'apologetica di Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) e Girolamo Savonarola', *La scuola cattolica: Rivista di scienze religiose*, 123 (1995), 723–64.

⁵² See J. Rüsen, 'Jacob Burckhardt: Political Standpoint and Historical Insight on the Borders of Post-Modernism', *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 235–46. For an insightful assessment of the role of pre-modern categories in the generation of contemporary cultural critique, see Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

a wholly secular politics that glorified in the cult of the leader, namely National Socialism and Fascism. Whether Weber would have seen such an ideology as providing an antidote to the disenchanting rationalism of modernity, however, is another question. It was left to the next generation of Austro-German critics like Benjamin, Mannheim, and subsequently Popper and Adorno to reconsider the relation between the massification of culture, political ideology, and individual freedom of expression.⁵³

By way of conclusion, and bearing in mind the ecumenical orientation of this collection of essays, it is worth recalling that medieval preachers in Italy were also instrumental in increasing fear and intolerance of those at the margins of society and those they considered beyond redemption: sodomites, Jews, Turks, and heretics.⁵⁴ In the context of the current move away from the scepticism of post-modernism and the return within the Academy to a consideration of the big questions concerning the nature of faith, truth, and love in the global village it is worth reflecting upon what historical insights drawn from past experience can teach us concerning the dangers of charisma's claims to divinely sanctioned truths.⁵⁵ Foremost amongst these must figure the need to create spaces for continual dialogue and the accommodation of multiple voices in the face of the univocal pronouncements of fundamentalism of all kinds. For the creation and protection of such spaces within the Academy is an essential precondition for the pursuit of humanistic criticism as understood by Edward Said, and central to the evolution of an ethics of intersubjectivity, as outlined by Emmanuel Levinas, in which the self accepts the challenge of difference rather than seeks its erasure.⁵⁶

⁵³ See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 114–35, and Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1945).

⁵⁴ See Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*; Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and the essays collected in *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Premodern Italy*, ed. by Stephen J. Milner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ On the return to ethics in the post-postmodern era, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Calvin Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and Geoffrey Hill, *Style and Faith* (New York: Counterpoint Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ See Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. by Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

