



The Warburg Institute – The University of London, School of Advanced Studies

DEUS EST CARITAS:

THE THEOLOGICAL VOICE
OF GABRIELE BIONDO AS A
PROGRAMME OF PERSONAL
AND SOCIAL REFORMATION

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2016–2021

I declare that the work hereby presented is mine, and I am responsible for it.

Νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη τὰ τρία ταῦτα· μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη

1 Corinthians 13:13

I thank all the people who, directly or indirectly, have accompanied me on this journey. I start with my supervisor and invaluable mentor, Guido Giglioni, whose support has always encouraged me, both in times of peace and in times of need and distress, and Professor Alastair Hamilton, whose passion and interest in reformation studies have been the primary catalyst and inspiration. I want to thank Professor Jill Kraye, whose comments and suggestions have vastly improved my approach and clarified my many doubts and perplexities. I would also like to thank Professor David Lines and Dr Lydia Schumacher for their invaluable advice. I wish all the best to my friends at the Warburg Institute: Gemma Cornetti, Sarah Coviello, Valentina Cacopardo, and Antonia Karaisl von Karais. I am incredibly grateful to Fabio Tonomi, a friend of immense honesty, with whom I spent many hours in uplifting discussions. I thank the library staff of the Warburg Institute, who patiently accommodated my many requests, and the archivists and librarians from whose expertise I benefitted during my research travels. They set the foundations of this study. I thank the wonderful people I met at conferences and symposia, who gladly shared their knowledge and welcomed me with friendship, particularly those who attended my seminar 'Freedom and necessity'. I thank my friends who encouraged me and whose words of affection have guided me through difficult times; in particular, I thank Veronica, Riccardo, Thiadora, Toni, Roz, Jelena, Mona, Zahra, and Liliane. I thank I., my light, my soul, my shoulder. Finally, I thank my family, who have always supported me in all my endeavours, never stifled my love for knowledge, always been my harbour and shelter, who, with laughter, have always driven me towards a brighter future. I thank you all. Without you, I would not be who I am.

Abstract

For Biondo, the Johannine statement ‘God is love’ defined the Christian God and every divine action, established the parameters of the relationship between God and human beings, and gave purpose to human existence. Moreover, it was believed there would be a final judgement at the end of time: a divine action that would forever divide human beings into the saved and the damned. Starting with what was perceived as an irreconcilable dichotomy between love and justice, my dissertation explores how the secular priest Gabriele Biondo, who lived between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, confronted this problematic antinomy both theologically and practically, that is, how he elaborated on this topic in his writings and how, as a charismatic leader, his thoughts influenced his close followers.

In Chapters 1–3, I outline the main philosophical, theological, and anthropological categories on which my argument is built. In these sections, I also investigate the historical context, the sources, the nature of Biondo’s output, and the rationale behind my approach. In Chapter 4, I continue with an analysis of how unsettling the relationship between God and human beings could grow. I examine how the example of Lucifer shaped human rebellion against God’s orderly universe. Lucifer was not perceived as an abstract idea, but as a real entity having actual catastrophic effects on the lives of human beings.

Chapter 5 studies Biondo’s views regarding God’s grace and how it could mend the relationship between God and human beings. Biondo defined grace as an ontological substance and a divine Thou, capable of speaking personally to human beings. He believed the reformation brought about by grace within each individual was a form of self-annihilation. Biondo considered the ideas of poverty and *kenosis* (self-emptying) as the soteriological paradigm for human reformation. The requests and commitments that Biondo imposed on his followers were highly demanding: the model to embrace was that of the cross. The reward, however, was a temporary vision of divine glory, which would then be fulfilled in eternal salvation.

While in Chapters 4 and 5, the tension of love and justice seemed to disappear or, at least, was coherently balanced – sinners were punished, and the elect were rewarded – in the ecclesiastical dimension, investigated in Chapter 6, Biondo’s understanding of love and justice became problematic. Biondo’s predilection for inward piety led him to criticise the religious orders. Once the shortcomings of the ecclesiastical institutions are established, I identify the principles that defined Biondo’s understanding of the Church: friendship, universality,

mystery, reciprocity, and finally, adoption in God through Christ. These principles were challenged by the notions of the biblical remnant, predestination, and the abrogation of universal grace. These elements deeply affected Biondo's ecclesiology and understanding of God: God moved from honesty to deception, truth to falsehood, and unitive love to separation.

Abbreviations

Manuscripts:

- Add.: London, British Library, MS Additional 14088.
- ASB: Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Corporazioni Religiose (Fondo Demaniale) 220–2127, *Memoriale di notizie attinenti all'archivio delle reverendissime monache del Corpus Domini raccolte da diverse scritture. Nel quale si tratta dell'origine e privilegi del monastero, chiesa, altari, reliquie, indulgenze, obliqui di messe, legati perpetui, crediti di monte, crediti diversi, debiti, et altre cose con le sue tavole*, Bologna, 1700.
- ASF: Florence, Archivio di Stato, Corporazioni Religiose soppresse dai Francesi, 78 Badia Fiorentina, vol. 321.
- For.: Forlì, Biblioteca Comunale 'Aurelio Saffi', MS III 84.
- Fra.: Frascati, Archivio dell'Eremo Tuscolano, MS II.
- Mag.: Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano XXXV 214.
- Nap.: Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS Vittorio Emanuele 57, Paulus Porcius, *Poemata*, c. 1475–1500.
- Sev.: Seville, Biblioteca Capitulare y Colombina, MS 7–1–9.

Other sources:

- Dic. Spir.*: 1937–1995. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, ed. by Marcel Viller, with the help of Ferdinand Cavallera and Joseph de Guibert, 17 vols (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses fils). Example: *Dic. Spir.*, 'Charite', II, cols 507–691.
- DS: Heinrich Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer. 1963. *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 63rd edn (Freiburg: Herder).

FAED: 1999–2002. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. by Regis J. Armstrong, J. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short, 4 vols (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press), available online at <https://franciscantradition.org/early-sources>. For the titles of the single works, I have adopted the same abbreviations used in this edition.

Ist. Perf.: 1974–2003. *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, ed. by Guerrino Pelliccia and Giancarlo Rocca, 10 vols (Rome: Edizioni Paoline). Example: *Ist. Perf.*, ‘Direzione spirituale’, III, cols 530–548.

Laude: JACOPONE DA TODI. 1930. *Le laude, secondo la stampa fiorentina del 1490*, ed. by Giovanni Ferri, revised by Santino Caramella (Bari: Laterza).

The works of Thomas Aquinas are quoted from the website *Corpus Thomisticum* (<http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/>, directed by Enrique Alarcón, University of Navarra). Where it was possible, the editors of the *Corpus Thomisticum* used the *Editio Leonina*. Except for the *Summa theologia*, for which I use the abbreviation *STh*, all other works are referred to by short titles.

References from the Bible are from the King’s James Bible and the Vulgate, depending on the context.

Translations both from Latin and other languages into English are mine unless otherwise stated.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The title of this dissertation connects the statement ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8) with the idea of the human reformation, which was suggested by or, at least, associated with Gabriele Biondo, a secular priest who lived in Northern Italy between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. His lifetime coincided with a period of profound crisis in Italy. The so-called Italian wars had just begun, and political peace was replaced by devastation, plague, famines, and economic instability.¹ Some worries were tangible; others less so. The looming threat of the Turks never materialised, yet one could not stop worrying. The crisis was also religious.² The authority of the Papacy, which had reached its pinnacle with Innocent III, had gradually been eroded by unending conflicts, principally among them the Western Schism.³

The crisis was epitomised by the arrival of the Antichrist, which was regarded as imminent. This also meant that God’s ineluctable judgement was close. Whether referencing Joachim of Fiore’s works or one of the many spurious texts attributed to him, the Joachimite prophecies, condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), still played a significant role.⁴ The expectations connected to the arrival of the age of the Spirit and the rise of an order of spiritual men (*virī spirituales*), whom some identified with the Franciscan Order, the hopes for the end of all tribulations and a total reformation of the Church were widespread.⁵ Prodigious signs such as the birth of monsters, the appearance of ominous comets, and miracles became the norm.⁶

Contemporary chronicles are filled with meteorological events that supposedly were signalling God’s wrath. The Forlivese Leone Cobelli († 1500), for example, reported in his *Chronicles* the sighting of a star that moved in the sky of Ravenna ‘like a butterfly’.⁷ Prognosticators attempted to decipher these events.⁸ Understandably, astrology, history, and politics were closely tied. Andrea Bernardi’s *Cronache forlivesi*, which recounted the political

¹ For the problems related to wars and mercenaries, see HAY AND LAW 1989, pp. 75–96. For the economic problems, see HYDE 1973, pp. 178–186.

² See MICCOLI 1972–1976, pp. 875–975. MERLO 2012, pp. 97–190.

³ ULLMANN 2003, pp. 201–332.

⁴ DS 803–808.

⁵ See the various papers in CAPITANI AND MIETHKE 1990 and CAMPAGNOLA 1999, pp. 147–202.

⁶ See NICCOLI 1987.

⁷ COBELLI 1874, p. 295: ‘Apparve una matina dui hore inance di una stella granda, la quale venia de verso la montagna e andava verso Ravenna: certo pareva una pavagliotta che volasse per l’aria.’

⁸ See, for instance, AGAPITUS PORCIUS 1492.

and social troubles of Romagna (the region where Modigliana is located and where Gabriele Biondo spent most of his life) from 1476 to 1517, was punctuated by astrological summaries.⁹ Innumerable hermits (*romiti*) and wandering preachers urged repentance (*agite poenitentiam*).¹⁰ Some, like the monk Theodore, identified themselves with the angelic Pope.¹¹ Sometimes their identity remained a secret; they dressed in rags, like John the Baptist, and did not accept money.¹² Poverty undeniably added to their charismatic presence; God, after all, spoke through the humble and the outcast. Others were simply impostors.¹³

Not all prophets travelled. The Dominican Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), for example, thundered from the pulpit of San Marco in Florence.¹⁴ To give voice to God’s wrath, Savonarola employed every available means: preaching in public squares, social reforms aimed specifically at women, gangs of boys recruited to pressure the less zealous, bonfires of vanities, and numerous publications, which his followers (disparagingly called *Piagnoni*, Weepers) made sure were readily available on the market.¹⁵ An important role was played by the local *beate* and *sante vive* (living saints), who also prophesied great renewal. They were mainly attached to princely courts, where they acted like sacred relics and talismans meant to keep all sorts of evil at bay. Historian Gabriella Zarri compared their relationship with the prince to a contractual obligation: the prince bought their spiritual protection with material gifts; the nuns reciprocated with prayers.¹⁶ One of them was Osanna Andreasi (1449–1505), a Dominican tertiary close to the Gonzaga of Mantua; another was Lucia Brocadelli (1476–1544), who reportedly had received the stigmata and was highly revered by the Duke of Ferrara Ercole I.¹⁷ The prince was not shy about defending her (and affirming himself as the prestigious paladin of faith) against any who disputed her sanctity.¹⁸

⁹ The numerous passages are reported in the index of subjects at the voice ‘astrologia’ in BERNARDI 1895, III, p. 479.

¹⁰ On the evolution of public preaching, see RUSCONI 1994, especially pp. 584–603; CASAGRANDE 1996.

¹¹ On Theodore, see DALL’AGLIO 2006, pp. 87–98. Others pretended to be the angelic pope. For instance Giorgio Benigno Salvati (see VASOLI 1989). Some identified him with Pope Celestin V (see MARINI 2004).

¹² COBELLI 1874, p. 221: ‘arivò in Forlivo uno romito vestito bianco de stran paese (credo sia albaneso); lo quale non porta scarpe ni zoccoli ni calzi, va discalzo e non porta camisa, dormi in terra supra un asse con una barba, non tocca dinari’.

¹³ GIOVANNI DI MASTRO PEDRINO 1929–1934, II, pp. 353–354: ‘Uno frate romitano ferarexe venne con una bolla falsa a la gieza de Santa Maria da Foronuo de Forli uno cattivo ribaldo frate remitano vene a la giexa la qual se chiama Santa Maria da le Gratie, e portò una bolla falsa contrafatta, e disse che ‘l papa Pio gle la mandava per alcuno grande miracolo.’

¹⁴ On Savonarola, the literature is immense. See at least WEINSTEIN 1970 and 2011.

¹⁵ On the editorial battle between Savonarola’s supporters and his opponents, see DALL’AGLIO 2005. As Dall’Aglio shows, these battles continued well beyond Savonarola’s death.

¹⁶ See ZARRI 1990, p. 56.

¹⁷ On Osanna Andreasi, see ZARRI AND GOLINELLI BERTO 2006; on Lucia Brocadelli, see HERZIG 2013.

¹⁸ See ZARRI 1990, pp. 58–61.

Despite the numerous symptoms of an impending religious crisis, devotional writings remained exceptionally optimistic. Troubles did nothing but confirm God's inscrutable providence: the wars would end, the Turks would convert, the hungry would be fed, and peace would be re-established. According to the preacher Pietro da Lucca († 1522), salvation remained easy to obtain: one only needed '*un certo modo breve di orare*', some brief prayers.¹⁹ A latent Pelagianism pervaded these writings, which assigned a central role to the faculty of the will and the merit of works but also expressed immense hope and trust that God would eventually compensate those who suffered unjustly.²⁰

How did Gabriele Biondo respond to this overwhelming crisis? Where can we place him within this highly complex society? As the title of my dissertation implies, Biondo affirmed the absoluteness of God's love, and this love demanded a reformation, which had to be actualised on both personal and social levels. Several legitimate questions arise at this point. Who was Gabriele Biondo? What kind of connection did he assert between divine love and human reformation? Why choose the definition 'God is love' and not others? Assuming that the definition 'God is love' is a reasonable starting point, how did Biondo use it to shape his pastoral effort? How did he translate his ideas, informed by the principle that God is love, to those he wished to reform? What sources did Biondo use? Did he rely exclusively on the Bible? Did he find the Old Testament (OT) as valuable as the New Testament (NT)? Which biblical books did he quote more often? What were the principles of his hermeneutics? If he used other sources than the Bible, what were they? What was the response to his religious proposition? What was his legacy? Most of these questions will be answered throughout the body of this dissertation. Others, such as an evaluation of Biondo's legacy and the reaction to his ideas, are reserved for the conclusion.

In this introduction, I explain the present state of the research concerning Biondo, situating my investigation and clarifying what it adds when we look at Biondo from the point of view that God is love, the principle that informs the entire structure and approach of this inquiry. In Sections 1.2 and 1.3, I analyse the tensions originating from attempts to define God's love. In Section 1.4, I explore how these tensions affected the ecclesiastical dimension, which required a thorough reassessment of the Church. Finally, in Section 1.5, I outline the purpose of this study and describe how I pursued it.

¹⁹ In ZARRI 1990, p. 28.

²⁰ See GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, pp. 138–176, where the two historians examine the connection between the Pelagian tradition and God's forgiveness.

1.1 The *status quaestionis*

Before beginning with this summary, a caveat is in order: I will mention several aspects of Biondo's life, some of his works, and controversial elements and connections with which readers might be unfamiliar, for Biondo's life and works will be duly examined in Chapter 2, and the sources and intellectual categories Biondo used will be investigated in Chapter 3.

Studies on Gabriele Biondo began in 1968 with an article written by the historian Carlo Dionisotti.²¹ This study summarised the results of a project in which the interests of Dionisotti, Augusto Campana, and Delio Cantimori converged. Unfortunately, this project was later interrupted. The article remains, however, exceptionally dense and rich with insight. Dionisotti stressed that a conventicle grew around Biondo thanks to his 'obsessive questioning and religious preaching'.²² He also highlighted the divergence between Biondo and the Roman institutions and the fierce criticism Biondo levelled at Savonarola. Finally, Dionisotti emphasised the close connection between Biondo and several spiritual Franciscans (i.e. Angelo Clareno, Peter John Olivi, Ugo Panziera, Jacopone da Todi, Ubertino of Casale, and John of Parma). From this point of view, Biondo appeared as a dissenting figure who was more inclined towards the inward experience of faith.

Drawing on considerations noted by Dionisotti, in 1969 the historian Aldo Stella briefly mentioned Biondo in his *Anabattismo e antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo* in connection with the heresy of the Free Spirit.²³ Stella's brief but exciting discussion sparked my interest in Biondo. Stella focused on the trial concerning the heterodoxy of one of Biondo's writings, the vernacular *Ricordo (Memorial)* and the possible connection between this text and allegedly heretical Franciscans (Francesco Zorzi above all, who seemed to have defended Biondo during the trial and whose works would later be listed in the *Index of Forbidden Texts*).²⁴ The historian Adriano Prospero, however, placed Zorzi among the accusers.²⁵

After Dionisotti and Stella, the historian Cesare Vasoli wrote a short article exploring the connections between one of Biondo's brothers, Francesco, his son, Paolo, and the *Apocalypse nova* written by Amadeus of Portugal (1420–1482).²⁶ Despite many significant

²¹ DIONISOTTI 1968.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 261: 'ossessiva ricerca e predicazione religiosa'.

²³ STELLA 1969, pp. 3–4. On the characteristics of this largely unregulated group, see GUARNIERI 1965.

²⁴ STELLA 1969, pp. 105–106, 109.

²⁵ PROSPERI 2003, pp. 147–148.

²⁶ VASOLI 1969.

elements, Vasoli's article did not focus on Gabriele Biondo but rather on the transmission of the *Apocalypse nova* and its prophecy of renewal. According to various sources, Francesco copied the *Apocalypse* while Amadeus dictated it. Furthermore, Vasoli pointed out that the manuscripts of the Camaldolese monk Paolo Giustiniani contained two letters written by Gabriele Biondo in a dossier Giustiniani was preparing against some heretical figures. I will return to the relationship between Giustiniani and Biondo when dealing with Gabriele's life.

The historian Giovanni Miccoli assigned a place in his extensive *La storia religiosa* to Biondo.²⁷ In my view, the most interesting aspect of Miccoli's account was to recognise that dissent and personal faith hint at the coexistence of multiple interpretations of Christianity.²⁸ Although Miccoli did not add much to what Dionisotti had already written, his study was significant in that it placed Biondo within a long tradition of dissent originating from the discrepancies between faith understood as a personal experience and ecclesiastical institutions. Miccoli read Biondo's dissent as an example of the tension characterising the history of religious piety in Italy. The advantage of this approach was to see the entire period from the eleventh century to the early decades of the sixteenth century as one unique current. Despite the many merits of Miccoli's account, which cannot be discounted, one risks losing sight of the individual, who did not necessarily or consciously act in relation to his past and certainly not in anticipation of the future development of religion in Italy.²⁹ At the end of this introduction, I will return to this significant point as I summarise my approach.

Adriano Prosperi also dealt with Biondo in a couple of instances. First, we find Biondo's name in a short article on orthodoxy and lay piety in the Venetian territories.³⁰ In talking about Biondo, Prosperi highlighted the various connections between lay people; the simplification of dogmas and doctrines; the opposition of the friars, who acted on behalf of the oppressive ecclesiastical authorities; the role of physicians, who often might work as unauthorised preachers; and the audience to whom this message was directed (aristocratic women). His main source was an entry in the journal of the Venetian Giovanni Bembo (1473–1545), which had been published by the classical scholar Theodor Mommsen.³¹ Secondly, Biondo's name surfaced in an illuminating article that I will refer to again at the end of this

²⁷ MICCOLI 1972–1976, pp. 965–966.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 445: 'il vero problema sta nell'analizzare e capire i vari e multiformi tipi di cristianesimo che si intersecano e si succedono nel corso dei secoli, inseriti o meno in quella società organizzata che è costituita dalla Chiesa cristiana o dalle varie e diverse Chiese di confessione cristiana'.

²⁹ On the limits of the *longue durée* approach, see also SOLFAROLI CAMILLOCCI 2002, pp. 9–10.

³⁰ I refer to the version in PROSPERI 2003 (for Biondo, see pp. 147–148).

³¹ MOMMSEN 1861. See also DONAZZOLO 1928, p. 70.

section. Concerning Biondo, Prosperi said that he ‘expressed a radical heresy, similar to those of the *fraticelli*, who upheld the necessity to withdraw and hide, while refusing obedience to the corrupt Church of Rome’.³²

The studies on Biondo reached their maturity with the recent works by the historian Michele Lodone. Lodone’s research on Biondo was summarised in a doctoral dissertation on apocalypticism, dissidence, and prophecy in late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento in Florence, which resulted in the first monograph on Biondo’s life and works.³³ Lodone elaborated many possible lines of inquiry mentioned in Dionisotti’s article (for instance, the influence of the spiritual Franciscans, the struggle with Savonarola’s followers, the trial, Biondo’s vernacular poetry, and the relationship with the *fraticelli* in the Rome of Sixtus IV).³⁴ He also wrote about several figures closely connected to Biondo (namely, Giannozzo Sacchetti, Ubertino of Casale, and Antonio Trombetta).³⁵ Further, he attempted to rectify some of the misunderstandings of the previous research. For example, he neither believes that Biondo should be studied in connection with the movement of the Free Spirit nor that Biondo withdrew his obedience from the Church of Rome.³⁶

What transpires from the earliest studies is a complex figure who sits at the junction of many paths. Biondo inherited from the past, especially from the Franciscan Olivi and Clareno, a vision of the Church that diverged deeply from the actual state of Roman institutions (this was the Renaissance Rome that the popes tried to place at the centre of Italy both culturally and militarily) and seemed to anticipate or foresee what will happen with the Protestant Reformation. These studies have also focused on the conflict between major ecclesiastical institutions, understood as repositories of tradition but also as an expression of power to retain this position at all costs, and the local Churches, which endeavoured to express their own understanding of Christ.³⁷ By local Church, I mean both unregulated conventicles, established by the activity of pivotal and charismatic individuals, and groups of individuals (for instance, nuns, monks, and members of religious companies), whose passion and faith, while inoffensive, placed them in opposition to institutional bodies. According to Dionisotti, Stella, Vasoli, Miccoli, and partially Prosperi, Biondo exemplified subversion and disobedience. He

³² PROSPERI 2007, p. 607: ‘Gabriele Biondo [...] dette espressione a un’eresia radicale simile a quella dei fraticelli, che sosteneva la necessità di ritirarsi e nascondersi rifiutando ogni obbedienza alla corrotta Chiesa di Roma.’

³³ LODONE 2016b, 2020a.

³⁴ See LODONE 2012, 2013, 2017a, 2017c, 2019.

³⁵ See LODONE 2017b, 2020b, 2020c.

³⁶ See LODONE 2016b, pp. 78–79; 2020a, p. 133, n. 208.

³⁷ This approach is particularly evident in MICCOLI 1972–1976 and PROSPERI 2007.

became a companion of all the heretics whose voice was silenced, of witches and magicians whose bodies were burnt at the stake or drowned, of *fraticelli* and spiritual Franciscans, who, unable to follow the rule of Saint Francis as they wished, were persecuted until, hidden in caves and hermitages, they died bearing witness to Christ with their own suffering.

In my view, however, the emphasis on open conflict does not do justice to the complexity of Biondo. In his several studies, Lodone has rightfully pointed out the limits of an approach that too conveniently privileges abstract categories and looks for conflicts at all costs. In his illuminating article published in 2007, Prosperi distinguished those who fled Italy but were unable to subscribe to the Protestant solution (for them, in the end, there was no Church) from those whose aspiration was to preserve their obedience to the Roman Papacy while, at the same time, creating local Churches.³⁸ For the latter, there were two Churches, and their tragic struggle lay in making them compatible.

In this dissertation, I argue that the tension between the local Church and the universal Church *did indeed reflect* the tension between the group that grew around Biondo and the Roman institutions' desire for universality, *but not entirely*. In my view, a more fundamental tension originated from the gap between the human aspiration to participate in God's love and the sad state of affairs in the Italian world at the end of the Quattrocento. In this respect, I argue that the Johannine definition of God as love can help us gain a more nuanced perspective on Biondo, his actions, his writings, and the results of his religious proposition. My reading of Biondo does not intend to deny what was previously said about him; rather, it adds a further interpretative layer, one in which political and institutional conflicts exist, but their importance is subservient to the role played by ideas, passion, personal dedication and, above all, faith in God. This investigation on how the notion of God's love was understood and actualised is not the history of an abstract idea but an attempt to examine the lives of men and women, their real suffering, hope, fear, and desires, and the significance that their ideas *and* emotions had on their existence. As historian Delio Cantimori noted when discussing the humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), the adoption of a philological-critical method in relation to religious matters was revolutionary; Valla's need for precision of meaning and clarity was a declaration of war against his adversaries, who concealed themselves behind tradition and abstruseness, and his struggle was not rhetorical but concerned 'the foundations of existence, the relationship between man and man and man and God'.³⁹ To clarify my position further I would like to quote

³⁸ PROSPERI 2007, p. 607. On this point, see LODONE 2020a, p. 133, n. 208.

³⁹ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 2.

the theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu, who invited historians not to stop at the rational reflections of some well-known thinkers but to consider also ‘the concrete decisions, the state of life adopted, the ideals of sanctity, the evangelical work, that the Church, *in capite et membris*, approves, inspires, promotes, or defines’.⁴⁰ The reality of this conflict between ideas and practice, the individual and society, faith and Church, can be demonstrated empirically in many ways. The example of Francesco Spiera, who died at the hand of the Inquisition on 28 December 1548, will suffice: the actual cause of his sorrow and desperation was not his imminent death but to have abjured his faith and denied God.⁴¹

1.2 The Connection of Love and Reform: God’s Love Is Revealed in Suffering

In the following three sections, I explain the tensions that animate the definition ‘God is love’ and its role in Biondo’s thought. Let us begin by focusing on the first half of the title, which suggests that understanding God as love requires a thorough re-evaluation of how people see themselves, both as individuals and as a society. Only when human beings are transformed, will they be able to see God’s love. What does this transformation mean? What or who causes it?

For Plato, the transformation occurred through catharsis, a sort of medical operation to eliminate impurities from the soul.⁴² The result was health and soundness (*hygieia*), a state of harmony with the cosmos, from which all excesses had been eliminated. In this sense, health was connected to reasonableness and moderation. Although the process was not harmless, human beings were invited to accept a modicum of suffering in order to rise to a higher state. Based on the same medical principles (pure-impure, health-sickness), a similar association between cure and pain persisted in Western Christianity in various guises and forms.⁴³ Given the overlap of health and salvation (both indicated by the Latin *salus*), the connection between suffering and cure was decisive in defining the Christian relationship with God.

For Christians, the soteriological meaning of suffering is expressed in terms of love. Christian love can mean three different things: firstly, divine agape love – God’s unconditional, selfless, and communicative love; eros, a love driven by desire and yearning, which can lead

⁴⁰ CHENU 1966, p. 225.

⁴¹ See PROSPERI 2007, p. 620.

⁴² PLATO 1921, p. 300–303 (*Sophist*, 226c–e) and PLATO 1926, pp. 76–77 (*Cratylus*, 405a–b). See also PETERS 1967, pp. 98–99, ‘kathársis’.

⁴³ On the meaning of purification, see *Dic. Spir.* ‘Pureté-Purification’, XII, cols 2627–2652.

humans towards each other but also to God, rendered into Latin as *affectio* and *affectus*; and *caritas*, a term that can indicate both agape and neighbourly love. In this last sense, *caritas* can also refer to charitable works toward fellow human beings.⁴⁴ On the other hand, we have *philautia*, self-love, *amor proprio*, *amor sui*.⁴⁵ For Christians, the connection of love, suffering, and reformation indicates the will to eradicate what does not belong to human nature – in the sense that God did not want it – in order to fulfil what is considered to be human destiny, that is, union with God. In early modern Italy, we can safely speak of a *iustitia salutifera* (salvific justice) that inflicted a *poena purgativa*, a therapeutic punishment, which redeemed human beings and led them to participate with God, to be adopted as children of God.⁴⁶ The mystic and writer Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) made God say: ‘I want you to know that not all sufferings given in this life are given for punishment, but rather for correction, to chastise the child who offends’.⁴⁷ Archbishop Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) explained that the cure, however distasteful it might be, must be accepted, for ‘merciful God, the best physician, does not give what pleases the infirm, but what is useful’.⁴⁸

For Christians, the cure to human sinfulness was realised by the fire of love (*ignis caritatis*), the Holy Spirit, and came directly from Christ, commonly regarded as a physician. According to the Franciscan and philosopher Matthew of Aquasparta (1240–1302), a pupil of Bonaventure (1221–1274), ‘Jesus is the physician, he is the remedy (*medicina*), and he did not make the salve if not from himself’.⁴⁹ Unlike Plato, who placed catharsis within human capabilities, for Christians, the redemptive reformation experienced as suffering was actualised by Jesus’s love and not by them.

⁴⁴ For agape and divine love, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Charite’, II, cols 507–691. On the enormous significance of *affectus cordis* and *theologia cordis* for the development of Western mysticism, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Cor et cordis affectus’, II, cols 2278–2307.

⁴⁵ On the notion of self-love, see *Dic. Spir.* ‘Amour-propre’, I, cols 533–544. For way in which the matter is examined in Augustine (who influenced Biondo with the radical opposition between divine love and self-love), see O’DONOVAN 1980.

⁴⁶ See MCGRATH 2005, pp. 6–21, where salvific and distributive justic are examined.

⁴⁷ CATHERINE OF SIENA 1980, p. 28.

⁴⁸ PIEROZZI 1866, p. 5: ‘il misericordioso Iddio, come ottimo medico, dà non quello che piace allo infermo sempre, ma quello che gli è più utile’.

⁴⁹ MATTHEW OF AQUASPARTA 1962, p. 132: ‘Ipse igitur Christus medicus, ipse medicina, nec aliud conficit emplastrum nisi de semetipso’.

1.2.1 The Search for a Personal Experience

One of the significant points in talking about God in terms of love and suffering is that emotions and feelings hint at the believers' need to access God intimately and personally.⁵⁰ This goal became especially evident among lay people.⁵¹ As a translation for the Greek *pathos* and Latin *passio*, suffering did not indicate only the negative experience of pain, but also that of making personal experience of something, of having a sensuous encounter with the divine. Suffering and love (and each emotion that God can elicit) turned the abstract notion of faith into a somatic experience.⁵² Once God was experienced in this way, He could become an irrefutable presence: one was truly in God's hands if one suffered or loved.

Biondo regarded this inference as highly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it undermined divine freedom, the substantial element of Christian reformation, by making it subservient to human emotions and ascetic practices.⁵³ Similarly, the Franciscan Peter John Olivi (highly esteemed by Biondo) had stressed the dangers of asking for personal visions and revelations obtained as compensation for bodily penitence, prolonged meditation, or severe chastisement.⁵⁴ Secondly, the emphasis on personal experience could lead to radical subjectivism, where one's own affections corresponded to the truth.⁵⁵ Imagination, which 'is often at work', as philosopher Martha Nussbaum noted in her accurate study on that faculty, helps human beings establish a connection with a source of pain, compassion, or grief; but for Biondo, imagination could also replace the object of these emotions.⁵⁶ The risk was not simply to misunderstand the object but to render each human being a prisoner of their own feelings. When Thomas the Apostle was permitted to touch the wound of the resurrected Christ (John 20:24–29), the mystery of the resurrection became concrete and palpable to him: a true *cognitio experimentalis*. Significantly, while the Apostle gained a tactile knowledge of Christ, there was no way that Thomas could verbalise this experience for others; as Jesus pointed out, this translation can only happen in faith.

⁵⁰ The passage from public to private dimension can also be witnessed in the move from public to private confession. See CAPITANI 1996.

⁵¹ See DE SANDRE GASPARINI 1996.

⁵² For a general study on affective knowledge, see NUSSBAUM 2001. See also FURTAK 2018, who, starting from Pascal, strongly emphasised how emotions led to a form of knowledge inaccessible to reason. For the role of emotions in piety, see the various papers in LAUGERUD, RYAN, AND SKINNEBACH 2016.

⁵³ See MCGINN 2020, where he examines the cases of mystics.

⁵⁴ See Olivi's *Remedia contra temptationes spirituales* (edited in MANSELLI 1959, pp. 282–287), a text that Biondo translated in vernacular. I will return to this text in a later chapter.

⁵⁵ The problem was already evident to Jean Gerson, who confronted it in several works. See TAYLOR 2014.

⁵⁶ NUSSBAUM 2001, pp. 64–67 (65).

In this perspective, where affective knowledge is pivotal, the spiritual counsellors and preachers who were contemporary or close to Biondo were mainly concerned with offering practical advice (*remedia*) that could exploit the role of imagination. Despite the centrality of God's freedom, the believer was encouraged to imagine the life of Christ, mainly his Passion, and identify with him, thus embodying Jesus's suffering and accepting it as a remedy for their own sinfulness. A decisive aspect of this programme of reformation for the masses was that directors purposefully did not delve into the intricacies of dogmas and sacraments, the nature of which remained, as their very name indicated, an inaccessible *mysterion*. Religious women emphasised the same point. At the beginning of her *Dialogue*, Catherine of Siena explained that, before the mystical ascent, the soul must undergo a lengthy preparation in virtue, during which the soul comes to know itself and its limits.⁵⁷ Numerous studies have shown how widespread the acceptance of suffering and self-annihilation was among religious women, but they also became spiritual directors who promoted these very principles.⁵⁸ This practice was not confined to nunneries. Following the example of Catherine of Siena, Dominican penitent women actualised their faith in the world.⁵⁹ At times these practices could degenerate.⁶⁰ Some humanists adopted a similar stance. Petrarch (1304–1374), for instance, fiercely rejected the systematic method of scholastic theology. Focusing instead on the Augustine of *The Confessions*, he based his religious views on his own existential and personal experiences.⁶¹

As historian Herbert Grundmann showed in his seminal work, personal engagement began to be emphasised when various lay movements (Humiliati, Waldesians, and others, among them the early disciples of Saint Francis) appeared at the end of the twelfth century.⁶² From then onwards, active and immediate participation defined the development of Western Christianity. These groups mainly sought permission to personally read the Scriptures and exercise a genuine faith, free from complicated structures. These groups generally took refuge in rural communities. An example is the Humiliati in Lombardy, but this was similarly true for the early *fraternitas* that formed around Saint Francis.⁶³

⁵⁷ CATHERINE OF SIENA 1980, pp 25.

⁵⁸ See HERZIG 2008; ZARRI 2016.

⁵⁹ LEHMIJOKI-GARDNER 1999.

⁶⁰ See SCHUTTE 2005.

⁶¹ See TRINKAUS 1979; LANGER 2015, pp. 21–48.

⁶² GRUNDMANN 1995, Chapters 1, 2 and 3. See also MERLO 1989.

⁶³ On the Humiliati, see ALBERZONI 1991. DELUMEAU (1990, p. 31) also mentions the Communion of Brethren. The same is true for many of the various heretical groups examined in CANTIMORI 1939. In this case, however, we should not forget that these groups privileged secluded areas for political reasons and because of relentless persecution.

Regarding the first aspect – the possibility to read and preach – Chenu has shown that there had been a change in the very meaning of apostle and apostleship.⁶⁴ According to him, whereas monks sought a cenobitic life (*vita communis*), lay people and members of the new religious orders and movements privileged proselytism and itinerancy: ‘*C’est l’apostolat qui fait l’apôtre*’, apostleship makes the apostle.⁶⁵ Chenu’s emphasis on the shift in preaching and movement is justified, but it appears to imply that lay people and the members of the new religious orders wanted to replace the clergy. In the vast majority of cases, they neither wanted a break from Rome and the Papacy nor to deny the clergy’s role. To underline this point, many of them joined the fight against heretics.

On the contrary, the primary aspiration of these lay people was the liberation from the encumbrance of legislative and canonical subtleties, which was not necessarily a renunciation of the role of institutional mediation but rather, as historian André Vauchez referred to it, a ‘clericalisation’ of society.⁶⁶ Far from being abandoned, the main elements of the monastic *vita communis* – the continuous *lectio* of the Scriptures, the access to a supposedly perfect life, and an intimate and prolonged relationship with God – erupted from the enclosure of the cloister and invaded the lay world. The Premonstratensian Anselm of Havelberg (c. 1110–1158) provided an apt observation: ‘Why these new orders? Who can count them? Who does not gasp before *so many kinds of monks?*’⁶⁷ The emphasis is mine, but it stresses how Anselm saw these lay people and friars as monks: adopting a communal life, reading the Bible, living on manual hard labour, and personally paying the cost of suffering and redemption were fundamental features of their spiritual experience. It was no longer the duty of the monks to gain their salvation – as had happened during the Middle Ages when society was divided into well-defined orders, and the monks prayed for the salvation of all. Now, everyone had and wanted to take responsibility for their own salvation.

This yearning for personal participation found fertile ground in the numerous lay congregations.⁶⁸ Here, the experience of suffering, charity, prayer, meditation, and reading meant the passage from religious *ordines*, where each person was subsumed under a social rank, to profane *status*, with porous and fluid borders. It also implied the disintegration of the previously conceived static and ossified hierarchy and the possibility for everyone to ascend

⁶⁴ CHENU 1966, pp. 225–273.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶⁶ VAUCHEZ 1987, p. 143.

⁶⁷ In CHENU 1966, p. 236.

⁶⁸ See CHENU 1966, pp. 267–268.

the route to perfection.⁶⁹ Furthermore, suffering meant accepting the burdens of shame and poverty despite social prejudices. Emblematic is the case of the congregations that looked after those sentenced to death (*compagnie dei battuti*). However, as highlighted by Prosperi, shame is an ambivalent notion: even in the most dishonourable act of charity, social prestige and public renown remained central.⁷⁰ Moreover, as noted pragmatically by the economist Vera Negri Zamagni, charitable works and the construction of hospitals do not negate self-interest.⁷¹

1.2.2 *Fides caritate formata*

Reformation, suffering, and divine love were, therefore, inextricably intertwined. Christians in early modern Italy understood this entanglement as a mystery of faith depending on divine grace. The latter aspect – the divine grace and gift – was closely connected to the Holy Spirit, who burned with love, the fire of charity (*ignis caritatis*), the old man who, through the pains of labour, gave birth to the new man (Galatians 4:19; Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9–11).⁷² The element of faith echoes the mystery of the resurrection of Christ, who, through the crucifixion, was cast down to Hell and then rose. Christians must pass through the same event: they die to be risen; they burn in a faith made of love (*fides caritate formata*) in order to be reborn. In both cases, the personal dimension was fundamental. As noted by the theologian Jean Mouroux: ‘The grace in question here is not grasped from above in its ontological and dogmatic aspect, but *from below*, in its psychological aspect, as something lived and clearly known’.⁷³ Mouroux also added that ‘the Christian experience, in fact, interiorises the truth of faith, awakens desire and aspiration, sustains and nourishes faithfulness; it enables us to see, touch, and taste God’.⁷⁴ This principle, *fides caritate formata*, was the scholastic definition for a faith based on divine love that materialised in works of love and charity.⁷⁵ This concept was the definition of faith that Martin Luther (1483–1546) would eventually reject.⁷⁶

In this dissertation, I argue that Biondo worked firmly within this framework, yet he was not entirely comfortable with it, especially with the value of works and the possibility of

⁶⁹ On the distinction between *ordo* and *status*, see CHENU 1966, pp. 241–244.

⁷⁰ PROSPERI 1996, pp. 18–19. See also DE SANDRE GASPARINI 1991, who examined the rise of leper hospitals and colonies; and PROSPERI 2013, especially pp. 190–325.

⁷¹ In ALBINI 2002, p. 10.

⁷² On the pneumatological reformation, see CUOMO 2001, where the works of William of Saint Thierry are investigated.

⁷³ MOURoux 1955, p. 303. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁷⁵ See HAMM 2004, pp. 128–152.

⁷⁶ WANNENWETSCH 2003, p. 128.

defining faith *from below*. In one sense, he worked within the *religione della carità*; in another, he undermined it from within.⁷⁷ According to Prosperi, this divided approach led to a renovation of ecclesiastical institutions, not to a radical rethinking of the Christian faith.⁷⁸ To a converted Jew, for example, Biondo explained that this suffering was a ‘curative beating’ and that everything that God wanted ‘must seem to him honey and sugar, seasoned with the sweetest spices’.⁷⁹ Biondo’s treatise entitled *Commentarius* cast its author in the role of a physician who offered various *remedia* to heal the spiritual illnesses of his followers. To one of his closest friends, the Florentine Giovanbattista Bartoli, Biondo explained, however, that Jesus – not Biondo – remained ‘the compassionate physician who, for you, has turned everything into a healthy cure’.⁸⁰ Consequently, my decision to place at the centre of my investigation the Johannine statement ‘God is love’ is meant to highlight the fact that, despite the undisputed significance of love, Biondo felt the urgency to re-evaluate works (for example, the actualisation of love in charitable works or vocal meditation) and emphasise more strongly the Christological moments of faith (spiritual disrobing and interiorisation).

1.3 The Possibility of Failure and Human Ineptitude

The title of this dissertation equally addresses what is implicit within the connection between the divine revelation as love and human reformation. If there is the need for a reformation, there is also the chance that the reformation might not occur; and if the reform is not realised, humankind must face the prospect of God’s adverse judgement. Hidden underneath the belief in God as love, there is, therefore, the idea of God’s wrath. The concept of reformation suggests a latent tension between God’s love and justice, potentially negating the idea that God is love. Is this connection between reformation (or the lack thereof) and love/revelation entirely valid? Can the human tension between love and justice affect the terms of the divine revelation? In other words, and from a salvific perspective, is God’s love dependent on whether we respond to it or is it independent of our reaction?

⁷⁷ PROSPERI 1996, p. 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Add., fols 174v: ‘medicinale et sanative battiture’; 177v: ‘debbevi tutto parere melo et zuccaro, cum spetiarie suavissime condito’.

⁸⁰ Add., fol. 211r: ‘el pietoso medico che ve ha facto de ogni cosa medicina salutare’.

1.3.1 Too Much Suffering and Human Inadequacy

The above questions are all significant and extremely serious, for they potentially challenge the definition of God's love. I would like, however, to return to the role that suffering plays in Christian reformation: What happens when God's wrath reaches the point that suffering seems to outweigh human endurance? In other words, what happens when the connection between cure and suffering is no longer perceived, and yet God should still be understood as love? How might this 'excess of evil', which seems to come directly from God and point not to a collective body (e.g. an institution, state, society, people) but straight to a single individual, be justified if God intentionally intends to harm someone?⁸¹ In short, what happens if human failure originates from God Himself?

The Book of Job dealt with these questions. Safe in his prosperous life, Job was shaken and cast down, annihilated and humiliated. He lost everything. Job was shocked, and his faith was shaken to the foundations. What baffled Job was the confidence that he had done everything right (in an orthodox way), and therefore God should not have treated him poorly. Job asked: How can a supposedly good man come to terms with his total demise? Eventually, Job was redeemed. He persisted in his faith, and in a eulogy to God as the Creator of all, Job confessed his minuteness, his total dependence on God, his inequality to God, the limits of his offerings, and the unlimited freedom of God that no catharsis or purification could ever match.

However, not everyone is like Job, and the same point can be expressed in more problematic terms: How can an ordinary person continue to trust God when they encounter evil from every side? How can human beings maintain their faith despite the cumbersome presence of evil? As theologian and historian Berndt Hamm has shown in his study on religious piety in late medieval and Reformation Germany, this sense of inadequacy was shared by many.⁸² Anxiety and faith went hand in hand. The Dominican Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) pointed out that faith provided the 'gift of the intellect to see clearly in all the matters of faith'.⁸³ Even for someone like Thomas, who expressed a profound trust in man's intellectual capabilities, the ultimate answer rested on faith. This answer, however, belonged to those who had faith; for others, it may have resembled a vicious circle: people believed due to their faith, and they had faith because they believed. Nevertheless, this is precisely the logic of faith, a mysterious

⁸¹ On this personal aspect of evil, which cannot be shouldered by social solutions, see NEMO 1998.

⁸² HAMM 2004, pp. 88–127.

⁸³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Isaiam*, cap. 11: 'donum intellectus, quod facit aliquo modo limpide et clare intueri quae sunt fidei'.

paradox in which God guides and believers follow. The question remains, though it is now cast in different terms: How can one enter the circle of salvific grace?

1.3.2 The Centrality of Love

In the writings of Gabriele Biondo, we find all the themes that I have just mentioned: recognition of human limits, the superabundance of the divine gift, inequality between God and humankind, God's unlimited freedom, the insufficiency of human offerings and rituals, the distinction between creation and God, time and eternity, purification as a means of personal ascent, and the paradoxical nature of grace. I will deal with each of these themes as I progress, but before I do so, let me reaffirm again that for Biondo God was and remained primarily love. In support of this position, he called God 'the greatest, sole, and true good', 'pure love and true charity', and 'supreme mercy'.⁸⁴

The centrality of love was hardly an innovation on Biondo's part. As historians Bernard McGinn and Francesco Zambon noted, from the twelfth century onwards, love became the point of convergence where all lines of thought and inquiry met.⁸⁵ Courtly poetry (*fin'amor*) explored carnal love and its conflicting aspects. However disputed the idea of a *dolce stil novo* might be among scholars, the fact remains that there was a group of poets who placed the idea of love at the heart of their poetry.⁸⁶ Dante Alighieri (c. 1265–1321) called his friends and these poets worshippers of love (*fideli d'amore*).⁸⁷ The biblical commentaries on the Song of Songs, the biblical book about love par excellence, multiplied.⁸⁸ As mentioned earlier, religious writers privileged the works of *caritas* in their doctrinal and moral writings. The centrality of love was constantly promoted. If many believed that love was decreasing and that the fire of charity was cooling (Matthew 24:12), it was less a matter of concern than a sign that the end was close and that the true kingdom of love would soon emerge.⁸⁹ Adriano Prosperi spoke of a *sistema della carità*, a social and cultural system where the pivotal element was the virtue of charity.⁹⁰ Love and charity provided the foundation for the evolution of social care: the birth of the *monti di*

⁸⁴ Add., fols 127v–128r: 'Dio sommo, solo, et vero bene [...] Dio è puro amore et carità vera.' See *ibid.*, fol. 161v: 'somma clemenza'. A description of the manuscripts follows this thematic introduction.

⁸⁵ MCGINN 1994, pp. 149–421; ZAMBON 2008, I, p. xi.

⁸⁶ See PIROVANO 2014, pp. 15–38.

⁸⁷ DANTE 1999, p. 18.

⁸⁸ For an overview of this phenomenon up to the twelfth century, see GUGLIELMETTI 2006. See also the various papers in GUGLIELMETTI 2008.,

⁸⁹ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 49.

⁹⁰ PROSPERI 1996, p. 20. See, however, the whole chapter, pp. 16–34.

pietà (charitable pawnbrokers), the construction of hospitals and hostels for pilgrims, the Oratory of Divine Love, and the *misericordie* (the congregations devoted to assisting those sentenced to death).⁹¹ Love defined not only God but also men and women and the relationship they entertained with God. These three dimensions were interconnected: theology could not be separated from anthropology, and both concurred with the development of ecclesiology, the study of the space where the relationship between humankind and God was fulfilled.

As a Christian, Biondo placed God's love in Jesus: 'God wanted his rightful people to be placed in the heart of Jesus, who died for us'.⁹² In every moment, God acted 'for us' (*pro nobis*) through Christ. Thus, God's acts were all seen in the light of human redemption from its state of perdition. Forgiveness and mercy were qualities that unquestionably belonged to God. Love dominated every aspect of life, and this, supposedly, was a good thing. Where did then the problem lie?

1.3.3 The *Presciti*

The problem lay in the connection between God's love and reformation. In other words, not only were humans defective and in need of reparation, but there was also a real possibility that some could not be redeemed. Historian Jean Delumeau recounted the development of conceptions of sin in the Middle Ages and its close connection with fear; most importantly, however, he highlighted a severe affliction that concerned all levels of society: the failure of redemption and its connected anxiety.⁹³ In the NT, the storm was calmed only by Christ, who asked his disciples not to despair but to have faith in him.⁹⁴ Some, however, could not look straight into the eye of the storm and retain a firm belief in God's providential love. As a result, an often unuttered doubt could arise: What if the grace of salvation had not been given? After all, according to Antonio of Bitonto (c. 1385–1465), a prominent Franciscan of the Observance and a contemporary of Bernardino of Siena and Giacomo della Marca, 'barely one in four souls escape the sea of this world'.⁹⁵ The point of Antonio's hyperbole was to stress how difficult it was for secular people to gain salvation surrounded as they were by dangers and temptations.

⁹¹ See CROTTI PASI 2002, who examined the highly developed welfare system in Lombardy. On the Oratory of Divine Love, see *Ist. Perf.*, 'Vernazza, Ettore', IX, cols 1933–1935; SOLFAROLI CAMILLOCCI 2002. On the *misericordie*, see PROSPERI 2013.

⁹² Mag., fol. 13v: 'In centro igitur cordis Iesu pro nobis morientis locari voluit unitum simul hunc Dei populum rectum.'

⁹³ DELUMEAU 1990, especially pp. 282–303.

⁹⁴ Matthew 8:23–27.

⁹⁵ In FOIS 1969, p. 264 n. 13: 'In mari huius mundi de quattuor animabus vix evadit una'.

Nevertheless, having doubts did not mean that they were not Christians; their legitimate questions needed, in fact, a more robust answer or a different solution altogether.

Biondo, too, was aware of this tragic possibility. Even though God remained the God of love, he insisted that ‘some men are given in possession to the devil’.⁹⁶ He said that ‘pride makes human beings members of Lucifer’s body: spiritual reprobates like the apostate angels’; through his followers, ‘Lucifer rules over the dark world of the *presciti* in time or eternity’.⁹⁷ Elsewhere Biondo wrote that Christ ‘did not reject all but only the *presciti*, because he had elected some of them to be predestined and not to be *presciti*’.⁹⁸ For Biondo, a *prescito* was someone God foresaw would fall into eternal damnation. As reprobates, the *presciti* would become the recipients of God’s anger and punishment.

Therefore, underneath the empire of love lurked the worm of justice: the distressing suspicion that mercy would be replaced by retribution. This situation emerged because *justice* and *mercy* were inextricably intertwined and *evenly opposed*. There was no doubt that God’s *will* for *justice* and God’s *love* of *salvation* were *connected* while being *divergent*.⁹⁹ Justice and mercy worked like the x- and y-axes of God’s operational field (traditionally called the economy of salvation).¹⁰⁰ An unresolvable contradiction pervaded the faith of those who could no longer unite justice and love in God.¹⁰¹ The Apostle did not deny this tension; instead, he embraced and found consolation in it. Historian Karl Löwith stated that, ‘instead of accepting the Stoic maxim *nec spe nec metu*, Paul asserts that we are saved by hope—in fear and trembling’.¹⁰² To use the words of the poet Dante, how can we connect God’s ‘*duro giudicio*’ with ‘*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*’?¹⁰³ Petrarch felt similar distress: ‘I confess the mercy of God is infinite, but I profess that I am not fit for it [...] He is potent to save: I am unable to be saved. For however great the clemency of God, certainly it does not exclude justice’.¹⁰⁴ Luther exemplarily confessed that he felt distressed for a long time by what he

⁹⁶ Add., fol. 122v: ‘Per quale casone iustissimamente da Dio sono dati in possessione al Diavolo’.

⁹⁷ Mag., fol. 90r: ‘la humana superbia, concorporali a Lucyfero suo capo li reprobri spirituali como angeli apostati faciente [...] el mondo tenebroso de li presciti nel tempo o nella eternità da sè recto et governato, regna la imperiale maiestà de Lucyfero’.

⁹⁸ Mag., fol. 68r: ‘non omnes reprobaverat, sed praescitos tantum, quoniam ex ipsis quosdam non praescitos sed praedestinos elegerat’.

⁹⁹ On this profound tension, see LEVERING 2011, p. 7–8. See also CARSON 2000, pp. 65–84.

¹⁰⁰ See Hosea 6:1: ‘for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up’.

¹⁰¹ See PELIKAN 1971–1991, III, pp. 108–118.

¹⁰² LÖWITH 1949, p. 204. Rom. 8:24.

¹⁰³ DANTE 1988, I, p. 28 (*Inferno*, II, 96); III, p. 554 (*Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145).

¹⁰⁴ For Petrarch, see TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 3–50 (the passage quoted is at p. 29).

perceived as God's unmerciful justice.¹⁰⁵ In one of his poems, Gabriele Biondo voiced a similar inner turmoil: 'reason always doubts, fears, and hopes simultaneously'.¹⁰⁶

Significant questions arise from this tension of connected yet divergent notions: Where does mercy end and justice begin? Are they mutually exclusive? Are they equal? Can *iustitia* be at the same time *salutifera* (salvific) and *distributiva* (distributive)?¹⁰⁷ To what extent can we confidently speak of God as love if, eventually, justice must present itself in the form of a judgement? The issue is further complicated by Biondo's use of the term *prescito*, which seems to imply that both the elect and the reprobate are predestined. As we will see later in this dissertation, the question concerning justice, love, and predestination had severe implications for the meaning of prayer. Biondo repeatedly invited his readers to turn to God in prayer. Yet, what impact can prayer retain when the divine partner has preemptively closed his mouth and shut his ears, as the idea of predestination seems to suggest? Is it possible to do away with the tension between the universal grace of love and the separation implied by predestination?

In Section 2 of this chapter, I showed that the idea of God's love was not simply appreciated as a static dogma; once it emerged from the cloister, it became the foundational principle of Biondo's society. The duality of divine and neighbourly love did not only reflect the Gospel (Matthew 22:34–40) but shaped daily life, ideals, aspirations, human relationships, and ultimate goals. Biondo, however, felt uneasy with the connection between interior love and exterior works of charity; furthermore, he contested the validity of a faith born *from below*.

In this section, I have illustrated that, even if God's love were to be acknowledged in all its power, the possibility of failure affected the very definition of God as love. Delumeau put it succinctly: 'Is God more good or more just?'¹⁰⁸ If He is more just than good, all human beings are utterly condemned. However, if He is more good than just, all men are saved. What then happens to the human sense of justice? Jesus had already posed this problem to his disciples (Matthew 20:1–16). Therefore, the idea that God is love summarises the entanglement of election (God's inscrutable will), human faith, and the futuristic hope of salvation, the success of which nobody can vouchsafe. All these ideas, with meanings that are utterly evasive and eschatologically defined (that is, they are either placed in a remote past or an inaccessible

¹⁰⁵ LUTHER 1883–1929, LIV, pp. 185–186. See also MCGRATH 2011, pp. 127–135, where this passage is analysed.

¹⁰⁶ Add., fol. 168r: 'però dubita sempre / et teme et spera in seme'. These sentiments were widespread and encompassed almost every aspect of the religious life, on both the Catholic and the Protestant side. See DELUMEAU 1990, especially pp. 282–303.

¹⁰⁷ On the semantic development of the notion of *iustitia*, see MCGRATH 2005, pp. 6–21.

¹⁰⁸ DELUMEAU 1990, p. 4.

future), are inextricably tied to fear and doubt. The result is an explosive compound that risks undermining the very idea of God's love.

1.4 The Ecclesiastical Dimension

In Sections 2 and 3 of this chapter, I have shown how the Johannine statement 'God is love' concerns the personal relationship with God. To illustrate properly how the tension between love and justice, hope and fear, and election and damnation played out in Biondo's thought, I also need to illustrate how this multifaceted tension affected his idea of the Church. The title of this dissertation connects the so-called 'voice' of Biondo to a hypothetical audience. This link constitutes the phenomenon of spiritual and pastoral direction.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the title alludes to a fundamental role played by Biondo in the realisation of God's economy of salvation (that is, God's actions within the world).

From this point of view, there are two significant foci of interest. On the one hand, we have Biondo, who attempted to understand how doctrinal and abstract notions such as those of creation, divine will, grace, predestination, providence, and judgement – all expressions of God's love – affect human nature and elicit a reaction that, ultimately, results or not in reformation. On the other hand, we have the receiver (i.e. a Church the actualisation of which is in progress), which struggled to realise Biondo's religious proposition. One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to investigate the problems that Biondo encountered in passing from the individual sphere to the ecclesiastical dimension. Specifically, I argue that there was a set of traditional ideas, given assumptions, established structures, and validated frames of reference that Biondo applied both to individuals and to the Church in a non-critical way and, consequently, this approach led to problematic conclusions that conflicted irreparably with the premise that God is love.

In my view, it is precisely in the passage from the individual to the ecclesiastical dimension that we can appreciate the value of the definition 'God is love', as it becomes clear that the idea of love subsumes all the other definitions of God. For instance, Exodus 3:14, 'I am who I am', seems closest to an ontological definition of God and, therefore, to His very being. Biondo used it, and we will see how; yet, its importance was diminished by the lack of

¹⁰⁹ For a general overview of this phenomenon, see *Dic. Spir.*, 'Direction spirituelle', cols 1002–1214; *Ist. Perf.*, 'Direzione spirituale', III, cols 530–548. For a closer examination of the period examined here, see GUARNIERI 1986; MALINA AND SOLFAROLI CAMILLOCCI 1998; CATTO 2004; COAKLEY 2006; ZARRI 2010 and 2016. For a more exhaustive look at Biondo's spiritual direction, see LODONE 2016a; GUIDA 2021.

any evident ecclesiological import. I could have used Exodus 15:26, where God says: ‘I am the Lord that healeth thee’. This definition has the advantage of highlighting the connection between reformation and cure. However, I will argue that this connection is inappropriate when brought into the ecclesiastical dimension regarding what Biondo thought about healing and sickness. I could have used the definition ‘God of hosts’, recurring several times in the Books of Samuel, as a metaphor for the fight that Christians waged against self-love, the true enemy of Christian agape love. However, we will see that the idea of predestination and the notion of *prescito* compel us to redefine what Biondo meant by the enemy. Furthermore, we will see that Biondo neither sought an open war against self-love nor wanted a political reformation as Savonarola did, for instance, I could have given prominence to the definition ‘God is Spirit’ in John 4:24, given that, for Biondo, piety developed mainly as a subjective event and, therefore, supposedly concerned private spiritual matters. The Spirit, however, was not just a mental abstraction; in Christianity, the Spirit is the fire of love that burns inside *and* propagates outside.

The truth is that I will refer to all these biblical definitions as they become relevant during this exploration of Biondo’s positions. Consequently, the ideas these definitions suggest (i.e. the ideas of being, healing, enemy, and spirit) will also appear. However, as we will see, the Johannine definition and the idea of love remain central precisely because of its centrifugal nature. As stressed by Cantimori, despite all the inward tendencies, the prominence given to love and charity – together with the Joachimite expectations of the age of the Spirit (therefore of love) – demanded a practical realisation of the love that pushed beyond the conventicles and aristocratic circles, removed any self-concealing strategy, and invaded the whole world.¹¹⁰ To what extent Biondo answered the demands of love remains to be seen.

As a consequence of the centrality given to the idea of love, the problem becomes eminently theological and pastoral: since Biondo’s proposition can be rightly considered ‘one of the many Christianities’ – to use an expression of Miccoli – tasked with the salvation of men and women, it is incumbent on us to explore how Biondo confronted Christian doctrine, how he taught it, and how he applied it to resolve the practical needs of his parishioners.¹¹¹ These three dimensions are inseparable. For instance, Biondo’s ecclesiology matters not because it brought to the fore the conflicts with the Roman institutions, but because, from Biondo’s understanding of the doctrine, a specific historical instantiation of the ideal Church was

¹¹⁰ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 49.

¹¹¹ MICCOLI 1972–1976, p. 445: ‘il vero problema sta nell’analizzare e capire i vari e multiformi tipi di cristianesimo che si intersecano e si succedono nel corso dei secoli, inseriti o meno in quella società organizzata che è costituita dalla Chiesa cristiana o dalle varie e diverse Chiese di confessione cristiana’.

pursued. For Biondo, the Church was eschatologically oriented towards the end of time and the final judgement – and it was from this perspective that the world was rejected in favour of the eternal life to come. However, it is also true that, as a historical event, the Church was substantiated in the elect, who were not abstract entities, but living human beings. My efforts are not meant to wash away a history of errors, to defend the Church against accusations, to focus on the conflict *per se*, to validate Biondo’s position against the Roman Church, or to assess to what extent Biondo could be deemed heterodox or orthodox.

Starting from the affirmation that God is love, I intend to examine the features of a Church that was both proleptically oriented towards God’s kingdom and that strove to fulfil the commandment of love from a historical point of view. In this respect, I completely agree with Miccoli’s criticism of those historians who confuse history with apologetics.¹¹² The same point was reiterated by Cantimori, who lamented how historical analysis had been set aside in favour of theological discussions.¹¹³ At the same time, however, I think that a type of history that only deals with the dynamics of power leaves out important aspects. An interesting case is that of the miller Menocchio, studied by Carlo Ginzburg.¹¹⁴ If one were to focus exclusively on the trial and persecution, Menocchio would be no different than any other victim of the Inquisition’s secular arm. But if his ideas are examined, then Menocchio matters significantly. At the same time, if one were to investigate only his ideas, one would quickly reach Menocchio’s intellectual limits. Furthermore, it would be only in the conflict with the institutions that his ideas reach their true value. I am aware that Menocchio is an extreme case; however, I refer to him to highlight the fact that different approaches are required to understand his figure correctly.

Consequently, my attention is placed neither on abstract ideas (i.e. *sola Scriptura, sola gratia*, God’s love, or the principle that Christ died for the salvation of human beings) nor on the undeniable conflict between institutions and individuals but on the dynamics between divine love and human response. These two categories, which were connected in Biondo’s ‘spiritual charisma’, indicate that we are dealing with a theological programme that was also characterised by ‘politically charged’ intentions. They did not only challenge religious institutions – the challenge may have arisen but in my view, it was not the primary motive that pushed Biondo to speak – but they dealt with the *polis-civitas* in its truest sense, that is, with

¹¹² MICCOLI 1972–1976, pp. 431–447.

¹¹³ CANTIMORI 1967.

¹¹⁴ GINZBURG 1976.

its inhabitants, the personal other. From the Christian point of view, they dealt with the definition of the *civitas Dei* on Earth, the Church.¹¹⁵ It was a theology for the pulpit that demanded a public reaction. *Ite, missa est*: it was genuinely the case that the congregation was invited to go out and realise in their own lives the mystery of Christ that had been celebrated during the mass.

1.5 The Purpose and Structure of the Dissertation

Biondo was not unique in experiencing a tension between his faith and an ecclesiastical institution. As historian Massimo Firpo stressed, the period between the end of the Quattrocento and the first decades of the Cinquecento was characterised by ‘anomic restlessness and diffused religious experimentalism’.¹¹⁶ Cantimori listed the main elements of the religious sentiments that shaped Italian faith at the end of the fifteenth century and that would inform the Italian approach to both the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation: a rush towards simplification, indifference to dogmas and doctrinal speculation, and a desire for private experiences (which sometimes resulted in nicodemite tendencies).¹¹⁷ As Prospero succinctly noted, for many Italians who left Italy in search of religious freedom, there was no Church at all.¹¹⁸ They could neither conform to Rome nor Zurich, Geneva, or Wittenberg. The historian Charles Trinkaus found the same tension among humanists.¹¹⁹ The answers given by scholasticism were deemed insufficient. Nominalists revolted against the systematic approach of the *summae*. Their purpose was a total affirmation of God’s unfettered freedom. However, their love of subtleties led them to an even more intellectualist position. The humanists felt uneasy with both. They searched for a relationship with God that adhered closely to the Gospel and the Church Fathers. Against the general contempt with which monks and friars seemed to look at the world, humanists stressed the significance of the image of God within human beings, the role of the human will, the importance of industriousness, human responsibility, and the idea that man could shape his destiny and actively work towards the realisation of God’s kingdom.

¹¹⁵ On charisma as a devotional rather than a destabilising force, see ZARDIN 2016, p. 278. In the context of women’s piety, the same point is stressed by MALINA AND SOLFAROLI CAMILLOCCI 1998, p. 448.

¹¹⁶ FIRPO 2003, p. 8. See also GUIDI 2007, who examined fifteenth-century restlessness extensively and in various contexts.

¹¹⁷ CANTIMORI 1939.

¹¹⁸ PROSPERI 2003.

¹¹⁹ TRINKAUS 1995.

As noted by the historian Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, the rise of penitential piety and lay congregations in Italy did not necessitate an elusive influence of the *Devotio moderna*; much more significant was the Bianchi spirituality, the preaching of Jesuates and Giovanni Colombini, the sermons of Giovanni Dominici and Bernardino of Siena in Venice and Florence, the charisma of Catherine of Siena and the *Caterinati*, whose example shaped the lives of many men and women, both in and outside of the Dominican Order. The truth is that the amalgam of movements, devotions, and confraternities reveals the most peculiar aspect of Christian religion at this point in history: the fragmentation of the religious experience originating from internalisation and personal involvement and yet the desire to be part of the Roman Church, its rituals, ceremonies, and sacraments.¹²⁰ While there was the desire to reciprocate God's love with one's innermost feelings, there was also the irrepressible need to be part of the Church, incontestably heading toward Gods and the kingdom of God. The idea of the people of God substantiated these two tendencies: it united the two commandments of love.

If Biondo was not unique, and this tension between personal faith and the institutional Church had become one of the defining features of religion in Italy at the time, then why focus on Biondo? There are three main reasons. Firstly, this investigation can shed light on the particular religious milieu of early modern Italy and the complex landscape of faith at a time when the boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy had blurred and, as the imminent Reformation would show, were ready to be challenged. Secondly, as these problems were not exclusively doctrinal, this investigation can also help us dissect how theological disputes impacted ordinary life, shaped the phenomenon of spiritual direction, and regulated the relationship between clergy and laity. The third reason is more complex and directly concerns the structure of this dissertation and its attempt to connect inward piety, works, divine love, predestination, and failure. As Ginzburg and Prospero observed in their fascinating essay entitled *Giochi di pazienza* ('Puzzles'), both *Augustinians and Pelagians* praised the merciful God: it was here that the two historians located the '*grado zero*' of Italian sixteenth-century spirituality.¹²¹ Despite abuses, doubts, and troubles, faith in God's love remained valid both for Pelagians, those who affirmed the merit of works and the validity of the human will, and

¹²⁰ On this aspect, see SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, pp 22–23, who stressed the *poliedricità dottrinale* of the religious piety before the *disciplinamento* of the ecclesiastical authorities both in Italy and in Europe.

¹²¹ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 120: 'L'esaltazione esclusiva di un Dio misericordioso, pronto a soccorrere, mediante il sacrificio del proprio figlio, la fragilità umana, poteva soddisfare (per motivi e in contesti diversi) *agostiniani e pelagiani*. Intravedevamo qui quello che ci venne spontaneo chiamare "grado zero" della religiosità italiana del Cinquecento.' Emphasis added.

Augustinians, those who affirmed God's unrestrained will. As the study of Ginzburg and Prosperi has shown, two major currents characterised the human relationship with God: the first, in which God's forgiveness was paramount and capable of extraordinary acts and which led ultimately to impeccability; the second, in which God's predestination decided everything, and human beings were utterly powerless.

In my view, the extraordinary merit of *Giochi di pazienza* surpasses the ability to cast the reader within the vibrant experience of discovering. Its distinction lies within the clarity with which it explained how then book entitled *Beneficio di Cristo* ('The Benefit of Christ's Death'), the masterpiece of Cinquecento Italian spirituality, was the result of two opposing minds: the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova, who believed in God's absolute forgiveness, and the humanist Marcantonio Flaminio, who utterly despaired of human capabilities. Thus, I intend to show that this duality was present in Biondo, that it shaped his understanding of God and, consequently, the religious proposition he offered to his followers. Furthermore, in the conclusion of their study, Ginzburg and Prosperi lamented that they did not find any evidence to support the diffusion of the *Beneficio* in the countryside.¹²² However, while the initial data at their disposal showed that the *Beneficio* did not reach the peasants, their religious history followed a different path. It is currently beyond my ability to contest this point, nor do I desire to do so. Nevertheless, I would be satisfied with showing that the duality of Pelagianism and Augustinianism that underpinned the construction of the *Beneficio* was already present in the countryside in the person of Gabriele Biondo, who spent most of his life in Modigliana, a small town hidden in the Apennine mountains, preaching the religion of love (*fare la carità*) and advocating absolute trust in God's will.

In sum, Chapter 1 of this dissertation clarified the context of the world in which Biondo lived, summarised the state of the research, and clarified my choice for the definition of God is love as an appropriate tool to understand Biondo's piety. Chapters 2 and 3 enlarge this introduction and provide us additional elements to contextualise Biondo. Chapter 2 deals with the life and the works of Biondo, so we can appreciate the main events that shaped his life and how he responded to them in his writings. This chapter will also allow me to describe the codices where we find Biondo's ideas and thus can define the sort of works Biondo wrote and their subject matter. Chapter 3 analyses the authorities and sources beyond the Bible that

¹²² GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 188: 'Non avevamo alcun dato su una eventuale diffusione del Beneficio nelle campagne, ma tutto ciò che sapevamo portava ad escluderla. La storia religiosa delle campagna italiane aveva seguito vie proprie e diverse.'

shaped Biondo's thoughts; I focus on both direct and indirect sources, including those which Biondo valued and those he criticised and rejected.

Chapter 4 begins my exploration of Biondo's religious proposition, the objective of which was salvation and redemption through God's love. As the notion of salvation history implies, human beings are placed in a condition of sinfulness from which they must be redeemed. This journey starts, therefore, from an analysis of how human beings either refuse God or attempt to achieve salvation on their own terms. In Section 1 and 2 of this chapter, I show how Lucifer was understood by Biondo as the prototype in both cases. In Section 3, I explain how Biondo's understanding of Lucifer was not merely doctrinal. In his eyes, there were two groups of human beings who followed the example of Lucifer. The first group comprised theologians and scholars who attempted to clarify the mysteries of faith through their own intellectual categories. The second group consisted of those who aimed to obtain God's approval through exterior means of religious piety. Finally, Section 4 examines how self-love negates God's love.

Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on Biondo's understanding of the work of grace within the economy of salvation. Chapter 5 discusses the question of the fulfilment of grace within a single individual. Section 1 of this chapter examines the meaning of Christ as the formative and normative principle of human existence. The pre-eminence of Christ placed insurmountable limits on the faculties of the intellect and will. Biondo, however, did not consider it a problem. Section 2 moves towards a definition of grace. After establishing the distinction between sanctifying and general grace, I emphasise how Biondo understood grace both in ontological substantial terms and in communication and personalistic terms. Section 3 examines how grace involves a factual reformation of a living being and not only the acknowledgement of an abstract doctrine. Here I look at the kenotic aspect of grace, which formed a significant part of Biondo's definition of grace and its connection to suffering. Finally, Section 4 of Chapter 5 examines Biondo's understanding of the divine blessed vision given to those who adhered more firmly to God's will and fulfilled the process of *spogliamento* (another word for *kenosis*) more authentically.

Chapter 6 scrutinises grace's actualisation in the ecclesiastical dimension. In section 1 I examine how Biondo understood various religious orders. In particular, I look at how personal inspiration and public vocation interacted. Following Biondo's radical criticism of the religious orders, Section 2 investigates the principles underpinning his spiritual direction: friendship,

harmony, mystery, and reciprocity. Section 3 discusses the notion of adoption, which is the goal of human reformation. Section 4 addresses two highly problematic notions: remnant and predestination. A particularly critical issue arises from how Biondo connected God's universal call to salvation to the notion of election, which seemed to disaggregate natural unity. Finally, Section 5 considers how Biondo's ecclesiology affected the principal assumption that God is love.

Chapter 7 discusses the legacy of Biondo's thought and summarises the results of this investigation.

CHAPTER 2: The Life and the Works

In Section 1 of this chapter, I will detail the life of Biondo, since it still remains unknown to many. The purpose is to provide an overview of his movements, the people he met during his journeys, and the conflicts that arose from his activities. In Section 2, I will review the manuscripts in which his works are preserved. After this brief examination, I will note the variety of genres about which Biondo tried his hand. I also intend to show the major issues that captured his attention.

2.1 The Life of Gabriele Biondo

2.1.1 Youth in Rome

Gabriele Biondo († 1511) was one of the children born to the famous historian and humanist Biondo Flavio (1392–1463) and Paola di Giacomo Maldenti. His siblings were Gaspare († 1493), who enjoyed a remarkable ecclesiastical career; Girolamo, who became a priest at Castrocaro in Romagna; Clemente, also a priest; Francesco, the only son of Biondo Flavio to marry (he died before 1536); Eugenia, who became a Poor Clare nun at Ferrara; and finally Castora and Cassandra, who married Niccolò degli Albizzi and Scipione Ariosti, respectively.¹ We know neither Gabriele's birthplace nor the year he was born, though he was undoubtedly younger than his brothers.

The first document that mentions Gabriele refers to the visit of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III to Rome in 1468. According to this source, Gaspare, Francesco, and Gabriele received various ecclesiastical benefices.² During these early years, Biondo also obtained a diploma in both canonical and civil laws (*doctor utriusque iuris*).³ From the poems of one of Biondo's friends, the Roman Paolo Porcari, we learn that the young Biondo also had literary ambitions.⁴ Examples of Biondo's early poetry appear in folios 216v and 217r of the

¹ On Biondo Flavio, see FUBINI 1968. On the various brothers and sisters of Gabriele Biondo, see LODONE 2007, pp. 29–52. A little more is known about Gaspare Biondo; see FANELLI 1968; CHERUBINI 2007. For an interesting document written by Castora, see BISCHETTI AND LODONE 2016.

² The document is already quoted in GASPARE DA VERONA AND MICHELE CANENSI 1904, p. 165 n. 7, but see now CHERUBINI 2007, pp. 84–91.

³ LODONE 2020a, p. 52.

⁴ On Paolo Porcari, see MODIGLIANI 1994, pp. 106–108, 455–458. Paolo Porcari wrote several poems for Gabriele; see Nap., fols 52v–54r, 75v, 83v, 88v–90r. One of them has been cancelled (fol. 87r–v), perhaps to be repositioned. On Paolo Porcari's literary activity, see DANESI SQUARZINA 1987.

London manuscript Addition 14088. I will provide a description of this and the other manuscripts containing Biondo's works after this biographical account. One of these poems is an epitaph for Leonardo della Rovere († 11 November 1475), a nephew of Pope Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere, 1414–1484). Another is dedicated to the humanist bishop Iacopo Ammannati Piccolomini (1422–1479).⁵ These short texts allow us to place these poetical compositions around the first half of the 1470s.

Biondo was not unique in producing this sort of encomiastic poetry.⁶ Another example is Aurelio Lippo Brandolini (c. 1454–1497), a contemporary of Biondo who enjoyed a remarkable career as a humanist and later joined the Augustinian Order.⁷ His eulogistic poetry brought Brandolini first to Naples, then to Rome, and finally, before he returned to Florence to become a friar and use his literary skills for preaching, to Buda (present-day Budapest) at the court of King Matthias Corvinus. Ecclesiastical benefices, proximity to the Roman Curia, education and knowledge in both humanistic (thanks to his father Biondo Flavio) and religious matters, and a high level of ambition that could drive him forward indicate that the young Gabriele was set to enjoy a promising ecclesiastical career.

However, Biondo's turn to the demands of faith took place much earlier than Brandolini's. In a long letter to his nephew Paolo, a son of Biondo's brother Francesco, who highly enjoyed the *studia humanitatis* and the study of Greek and Latin, Biondo recounted how he used to relish the 'puerile studies of poets and songs'.⁸ From the same letter to his nephew Paolo, we learn that Biondo was deeply dissatisfied with Roman ecclesiastical institutions. This disappointment resulted in a religious conversion that forced him to set aside humanistic studies and become a 'servant of God'; notably, this *metanoia* happened 'thirty-four years' before he wrote the letter to his nephew Paolo.⁹ Agapito Porcari, a brother of the poet Paolo Porcari mentioned earlier, recorded the same sentiments of frustration and dissatisfaction in letters written in 1474 or 1475.¹⁰ Unlike his brother Gaspare, who held various eminent positions

⁵ On Iacopo Ammannati, see PÀSZTOR 1960; AMMANNATI PICCOLOMINI 1997.

⁶ On the specific connection between Sixtus IV and the humanists, see LEE 1978. For a larger overview, see D'AMICO 1983 and the various papers in RAMSEY 1982.

⁷ Brandolini's poems to Sixtus IV and his various nephews are in the manuscripts Vat. Lat. 5008 and Urb. Lat. 739 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome. On Brandolini, see ROTONDÒ 1972.

⁸ Mag., fol. 72r: 'Grate sunt enim mihi in te future littere tum latine tum grece', and fol. 86v: 'puerilia studia poetarum et carminum'. On Paolo Biondo, see the document in the appendix of VASOLI 1969.

⁹ Mag., fol. 87r: 'Dei dono infusa consilia et desyderia ac studia, primo et maximo Dei auxilio, habuere me hactenus a triginta et quattuor propemodum annis habentque ac tenent et possident ut suum, hoc est eius qui illa infundit et spirat, servum verum.'

¹⁰ Two letters written by Agapitus to Gabriele survive. See AGAPITUS PORCIUS 1474–1475. Agapitus's collection of letters were addressed to personal friends, but also public figures and scholars, such as the physician Piero

under Paul II and Sixtus IV, Gabriele abandoned his wordly aspirations and directed all his energies towards exegetical studies and pastoral care.

2.1.2 Modigliana: An Unusual Crossroads

The change in his attitude towards Rome and its environment coincided roughly with Biondo's move from Rome to Modigliana, a little town in Central Italy hidden in the Apennine mountains, which occurred between 1469 and 1470. The reasons behind this move are unclear. It is also uncertain whether Biondo's religious conversion resulted from the move or vice versa or whether they influenced each other. At Modigliana, Biondo became a secular priest for the ancient church of Santo Stefano.¹¹ As early as 1473, he was involved in a dispute about tithes between one of his brothers, Girolamo, a priest in the nearby town of Castrocaro, and the Florentine canon Diociaiuti d'Antonio di Bartolomeo Moriti, who was closely connected to the humanist and bishop Iacopo Ammannati, mentioned earlier.¹²

From Modigliana, Biondo frequently travelled to Rome, Bologna, Ferrara, and Florence, visiting friends and nunneries. When he was unable to travel, connections were maintained by letters. Biondo's missives were addressed to nuns, friends, relatives, and even prisoners detained in the Venetian jails. Interestingly, apart from a letter in which he defended his orthodoxy, none of the surviving letters was addressed to a male cleric.¹³ Apart from giving spiritual support through letters and most probably confessions, Biondo also wrote religious treatises, translated various texts into vernacular and vice versa, and exchanged devotional objects. What emerges clearly from his intense activity is that, whereas other contemporary country priests expressed a diffused lack of concern for their parishioners and a general lassitude and ignorance, Biondo was prepared and willing to reform his parish.¹⁴ We will see during this dissertation the sort of reform he had in mind. It suffices here to say that Biondo's ideal Church had nothing to do with the highly educated Church he had experienced in Rome, more similar to a court interested in patronage than to a pious community, nor with the relaxed

Leoni (c. 1445–1492), the historian Stefano Infessura (c. 1440–before 1500), or the chronicler Gaspare da Verona (early 1400s–1474). AGAPITUS PORCIUS 1474–1475, p. 12. See DIONISOTTI 1968, p. 269.

¹¹ The town of Modigliana belonged to Florence since 1377. See THEINER 1861–1862, II, p. 507. For the history of this church, see VASINA 1977; MANCORTI 1991.

¹² See ASF, fol. 315r: 'ipse pro plebe Castri Cari, ego pro plebe Mutilime [...] Gabriel Blondus prior sancti Stephani de Mutilane'. For the canon Diociaiuti, see SALVINI 1782, p. 50. For his connection to Iacopo Ammannati, see LODONE 2020a, p. 36, n. 53.

¹³ This letter is in Add., fols 25r–28v.

¹⁴ On the general ignorance of the clergy and laity, see HAY 1977, pp. 49–71; MASSA 2005, pp. 203–209.

country Church he found at Modigliana, which accepted the evangelical message pragmatically as something inconsequential. On the contrary, Biondo sought a conscious confession of Christ from his readers and friends.

Let us now look at the people Biondo met at Modigliana and during his journeys. At Modigliana, Biondo became the spiritual counsellor of various secular women.¹⁵ For many of them, Biondo represents the only source that allows us to remember them, though what remains is just their name and some minor details. For instance, we know that a certain Dianora suffered from catarrh for over three years.¹⁶ Another was the victim of demonic possession, and Biondo advised treating her with care.¹⁷ What this ‘possession’ implied is open to conjecture. The ambiguity of this term does not help: Does it indicate a medical condition? Was the woman simulating sanctity?¹⁸

The most important women Biondo met at Modigliana were Barbarina and Diambra. In Biondo’s eyes, Barbarina (1465–1494) was a living embodiment of the *sequela Christi*, for she exemplified how a Christian believer ought to follow in Christ’s footsteps with her own life. To use an expression by Zarri, she could be regarded as a *santa vita*, a living saint; however, the label is not entirely appropriate: Barbarina never played any political role, nor was she attached to a specific prince and his court.¹⁹ Despite Biondo’s admiration for her, most of what we know about Barbarina comes from a letter Biondo wrote to describe her passing.²⁰ Her cult (if there ever were one) disappeared soon after her death. The letter is an example of hagiographical literature, with all the limitations related to this genre. The description of several miracles, the total acceptance of God’s will, and the interpretation of her life as a reflection of biblical statements are all devices meant to celebrate the saint and encourage emulation among the readers. The death of Barbarina was accompanied by the death of two other young secular women, Magdalena (1472–1494) and Lucretia (1463–1494). Biondo wrote for them a highly laudatory epitaph.²¹ Two years later, he added a couplet of verses to remember the death of Margherita, a deaf woman.²²

¹⁵ For a more exhaustive examination of the relationship between Biondo and women, see GUIDA 2021.

¹⁶ Add., fol. 204r: ‘La Dianora che la haveva [rehumana o descasa] quasi continua, sì che rare volte tre di senza et havevala portata ultra tre anni.’

¹⁷ Add., fol. 188r: ‘La fanzulla demoniata vorei fusse libera, ma io non ho tale arte nè gratia.’

¹⁸ On the ambiguities concerning demonic possession, see COUDERT 2014; DALL’OLIO 2015.

¹⁹ ZARRI 1990, see both Chapters 2 and 3.

²⁰ Sev., fols 98v–100v. See Appendix, 1.

²¹ Add., fol. 212r. Same text in Sev., fol. 101v. See Appendix, 2.

²² Sev., fol. 81v.

The second important woman Biondo met at Modigliana was Diambra. She is mentioned in various letters.²³ Biondo regarded her as a ‘true daughter’ of Christ.²⁴ According to the letter describing Barbarina’s passing, Diambra was also a mystic. She experienced two visions that endorsed Barbarina’s sanctity.²⁵ She also acted as a trustworthy messenger for Biondo.²⁶ Later in the dissertation we will have the opportunity to point out how vital the reliability of the messengers was for Biondo.

At Modigliana, Biondo also had the chance to look after and educate a young lay brother of the Camaldolese Order, Giovanni da Bologna.²⁷ Pietro Dolfin (1444–1525), the general of the Camaldolese Order, had been favourably impressed by the piety of the secular community that grew around Biondo.²⁸ Therefore, he allowed Giovanni to remain with Biondo for a limited time beginning in 1496. According to Dolfin, Biondo’s duty was to strengthen Giovanni’s faith. Four years later, in 1500, Giovanni was growing ever more reluctant to return to his convent, and Dolfin was forced to intervene aggressively and commanded that Giovanni return immediately. The event is significant to us less for the various contingencies and more because it underscores, as Lodone noted, that Biondo did not necessarily connect religious piety with membership in a religious order.²⁹ We will return to this significant point in Section 1, Chapter 6, for it profoundly shaped Biondo’s ecclesiology.

2.1.3 Bolognese Corpus Domini

Biondo was able to spread his influence to Bologna and Florence. At Bologna, the centre of his activity was Corpus Domini, the nunnery founded by Caterina Vigri (1413–1463) in 1456.³⁰ The institution had grown exponentially, and the prestige that it enjoyed among the high echelons of Bolognese society is reflected both in the many endowments that it continuously received and in the significant number of exemptions to the rule (especially the vow of poverty, cardinal in the rule of Saint Claire) the Papacy accorded to the nuns.³¹

²³ Add., fols 104v, 188r, 189v, 194v, 218r; Sev. fols 100v, 135v.

²⁴ Add., fol. 218r: ‘Sor Diambra è mia figliola vera.’

²⁵ Sev., fol. 100v. On visions and dreams as hagiographical devices, see GOODICH 2007.

²⁶ Add., fol. 194v.

²⁷ LODONE 2020a, pp. 79–83. On the role of the conversi within the Camaldolese Order, see CABY 1996.

²⁸ On Dolfin, see ZACCARIA 1991.

²⁹ LODONE 2020a, pp. 82–83.

³⁰ For a history of this nunnery, see ASB, pp. 295–354; ZUCCHINI 1912; LEONARDI 2004; ARTHUR 2018.

³¹ See ASB, pp. 295–315.

Biondo's primary connection at Corpus Domini was the nun Alessandra degli Ariosti († 1518), who took her vows in 1466.³² Unfortunately, we do not know the exact circumstances of the initial encounter between Biondo and Alessandra. In 1484, Innocent VIII had granted the nuns the right to choose their confessor.³³ The first letter addressed to Alessandra is dated 22 February 1486, two years after Innocent's ruling. Even though this decision might have favoured their encounter, it still does not explain how Alessandra and Gabriele first met. According to Dionisotti, they could have been relatives since one of Gabriele's sisters, Cassandra, married a member of the Ariosto family.³⁴

Biondo maintained a long relationship with Alessandra, which is not extraordinary in itself. One may look, for instance, at the connection that the Dominican Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419) entertained with the Florentine Bartolomea degli Obizzi (also degli Alberti, after her husband, Antonio Alberti).³⁵ Dominici first wrote for her *Il libro d'amor di charità* ('The Book of Spiritual Love').³⁶ Dominici intended to lead the reader, Bartolomea, towards a faith where doctrinal doubts had less importance and actions (*operae*) were not regarded as secondary. According to Adriano Prosperi, this sort of faith upheld the *sistema della carità*, that is, a systematic organisation of society, congregations, individuals, institutional and welfare bodies, and religious dogmas (mainly 1 Corinthians 13) driven by the exaltation of the virtue of charity.³⁷ However, the risk of reverting to Pelagianism against the absoluteness of faith was always present. The work enjoyed a wide audience. In later editions, however, the references to Bartolomea were dropped, turning it into a work suitable for any reader.³⁸ A few years later, between 1401 and 1403, Dominici wrote the *Regola del governo di cura familiare* ('Rule for the Management of Family Care') to help Bartolomea cope with her husband's exile, advising her to remain in the world and not to join a convent.³⁹ Meanwhile, Dominici wrote several letters to her.⁴⁰ At a certain point, Bartolomea ignored Dominici's advice and became

³² LODONE 2020a, pp. 48–49.

³³ ASB, p. 327: 'Nell'anno 1484, Papa Innocenzo Ottavo concesse alle dette monache del Corpus Domini di potersi elegere un confessore idoneo prete secolare or regolare di qualsivoglia ordine'.

³⁴ DIONISOTTI 1968, p. 261, n. 1. On this issue, see also LODONE 2020a, pp. 48–49.

³⁵ On Dominici, see CRACCO 1963; AGRESTI 1970. On the relationship between Dominici and Bartolomea degli Obizzi, see GAGLIARDI 2019.

³⁶ DOMINICI 1889.

³⁷ PROSPERI 1996, pp. 16–34.

³⁸ GAGLIARDI 1999, p. 55.

³⁹ DOMINICI 1860. On this work, see GAGLIARDI 1999; BATTISTA 2002.

⁴⁰ They are collected in DOMINICI 1969, pp. 196–217.

a nun. She joined the Dominican convent of Saint Lucia in Florence and became a spiritual guide for her fellow nuns.⁴¹

As for Alessandra degli Ariosti, she was the recipient of many of Biondo's letters. The London manuscript preserves two letters (dated respectively 1501 and 1502) clearly addressed to her, with two more possibly written to her.⁴² Moreover, except for the last item, the Forlì manuscript contains letters and extracts of letters addressed exclusively to Alessandra. It might not be too far-fetched to imagine that this compilation of epistles was used within the community that Biondo organised.⁴³ Lodone speculated that the Forlì manuscript had initially been part of the Seville manuscript.⁴⁴ Biondo also bought a book for Alessandra by Ubertino of Casale (1259–c. 1330), which he intended to translate to make it easier for her to understand and 'amend the Latin'.⁴⁵ Regrettably, we do not know if he ever completed the translation. We will return to this topic in the following chapter on Biondo's diglossia and his activity as a translator. His most extended treatise, entitled *De amore proprio* ('On Self-Love'), which Biondo finished in 1506, is in fact a letter to Alessandra in which Biondo investigated how false piety originate from self-love. Finally, he wrote for her a series of solutions to various religious doubts.⁴⁶ Even in this respect, Biondo was doing what other directors ordinarily did.⁴⁷

It was probably thanks to or through Alessandra that Biondo met two other nuns at Corpus Domini, Cecilia († 1511) and Chiara Gozzadini († 1526). Not much is known of Biondo's relationship with the two sisters, yet the little we know is worth paying attention. Of the relationship with Cecilia, we have a fascinating letter to which we will return in Chapter 6.4.4, where we will see how Biondo encouraged Cecilia to reject all emotions and pursue the perfection of impassibility, though not without contradictions.⁴⁸ Concerning Chiara, we only know that Biondo wanted to write a commentary on the Lord's Prayer for her.⁴⁹ Biondo's wording suggests that the commentary still needed some work. We do not know whether the text was lost or was never completed. In either case, its absence is unfortunate, for if, as

⁴¹ BORNSTEIN 1995.

⁴² Add., fols 199v–208v and 192r–194v.

⁴³ See LODONE 2020a, p. 74.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 161 n. 65.

⁴⁵ For., fol. 22v: 'Mandovi uno Ubertino portato da Roma qua; non sono correcti, pure tali quali aiutano. È dui anni che son facti o tre. Laus Deo utinam siano bene intesi et usati cum effectu. [...] Voria et emendare lo latino, et farlo volgare.'

⁴⁶ Sev., fols 13v–20r.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, DOMINICI 1957.

⁴⁸ For., fols 29v–34r.

⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 24r: 'El Pater Noster che voria Sor Chiara è a Ferrara adesso, è più mesi. Se io non vengo là, nol credo mandare a bon fine. Perdonatime.'

suggested by Isabella Gagliardi, the commentaries on the Lord's Prayer were becoming more and more involved with the intimate and private aspects of faith, Biondo's commentary would have helped us clarify further his severe censure towards all outward expressions of piety.⁵⁰ This theme shaped both private piety, as we will see in Chapter 5, and Biondo's ecclesiology, as will emerge in Chapter 6.

Another aspect that should be pointed out is that, most probably, the Clare nuns Alessandra, Cecilia, and Chiara represented the most educated members of the circle that formed around Biondo. We should not be surprised by this fact. As stressed by Zarri, Clare nuns came mostly from noble families and were widely educated, able to read and write (sometimes both in vernacular and Latin), and more than capable of entertaining a mutual dialogue with their religious guides.⁵¹ I will stress the element of reciprocity in a later chapter. Before moving forward, it should also be pointed out that thanks to Caterina Vigri's prolific literary activity, Corpus Domini built a very extensive library over time, a *unicum* for which there is no equivalent in other Clare nunneries. Most of the items were acquired after the period that concerns us (the first decade of the sixteenth century), but it is still important to note that we do not find only devotional items but also books on Latin grammar. The writings of the Church Fathers are accompanied by authors who were closer in time (such as Domenico Cavalca and John van Ruysbroeck); vernacular items number as many as Latin ones.⁵²

2.1.4 Florentine Friends

In Florence, Biondo managed to meet at least two families, that of Giovanni Battista Bartoli di Bernardo Bartoli and that of Strinato degli Strinati. Seven letters are addressed to Giovanni Bartoli from 1491 to 1493.⁵³ From them, we learn that Bartoli, who temporarily owned a wool shop, had suffered the loss of a son.⁵⁴ Biondo tried to comfort him; at the same time, he lamented that Bartoli's presence in Modigliana was sorely missed. We will return to a specific letter to Bartoli in Chapter 5.3.1, for this document illustrates what sort of disposition Biondo adopted in his faith. Giovanni Bartoli does not seem to have held public offices, but Strinato degli Strinati held various offices in Florence and, more importantly, was *podestà* at

⁵⁰ GAGLIARDI 2010.

⁵¹ ZARRI 1990, pp. 21–50.

⁵² See SPANÒ MARTINELLI 1986.

⁵³ Add., fols 179r–186r and 210v–211v.

⁵⁴ LODONE 2020a, p. 76.

Modigliana in 1493.⁵⁵ Biondo's letters to Strinato (seven in total, from 1494 to 1498) follow this date.⁵⁶ The Strinati family was wealthier than that of Giovanni Bartoli. Nonetheless, Strinato met some financial difficulties, which Biondo advised him to endure with patience and utmost confidence in God. Foremost, he should learn the value of being obedient to God's will:

Learn therefore, my Strinato, at least as an old man, the true sense of losing your knowledge, which is minimal or only apparently large, but in fact is all true foolishness. With this true sense, also learn true love, and therefore abandon at every moment all ideas of justice, virtue, and goodness that you have foolishly imagined and falsely believed and assumed; leave it to Him [God] to will and not to will in you, to act or to desist, to the extent and in the way He wanted from eternity.⁵⁷

More will be said later about obedience, for it was a crucial category of Biondo's thought. We will also examine the several implications that God's election *ab eterno* suggests.

Biondo's relationship with Strinato also included his wife, Alessandra. Most probably spurned by Biondo, Alessandra had become a devotee of Barbarina. However, her devotion for the saintly woman was not expressed only with words but also with actions, meaning an unreserved acceptance of God's will regardless of personal desires. In Chapter 5.3, we will return to what this intimation to accept divine will fully meant for Biondo. Biondo referenced Alessandra several times in his letters to her husband. In the London manuscript, we also find a letter, dated 1495, specifically to her, which she was supposed to share with Piero da Forlì and his wife Costanza, whom Biondo regarded as 'true friends of God'.⁵⁸ Biondo's advice to share his letters was often repeated.⁵⁹ For example, he said to Strinato that his letter to him was also directed to all those who were 'eager for the truth'.⁶⁰ Biondo's injunction was not uncommon among spiritual directors who, in some cases, had to look after entire convents and,

⁵⁵ LODONE 2020a, pp. 75–76.

⁵⁶ Add., fols 187r–191v and For., fols 25v–28v.

⁵⁷ For., fol. 26v–27r: 'Imparate adonca Strinato mio, almeno da vecchio, el vero senno in perdere el vostro poco o molto apparente sapere, tucto vera pazzia, et cum quello, cioè vero senno, imparate anco vera bontà, perdendo tuctavia più de momento in momento ogni vostra pazzamente imaginata et falsamente creduta et presumpta iustitia, virtù, et bontà; lasciando in voi Lui volere et non volere, operare et cessare quanto et come chi ha voluto ab eterno.'

⁵⁸ Add., fols 94r–104v. Ibid., fol. 104r–v: 'Legete spesso et con attentione tutte le parte, et finalmente ne cavarete como spero con constructo de vostra sufficiente illuminatione a molte parte. Chiamate anco in aiuto et Piero da Furli et mona Constantia a li quali voglio che sia comune questa lettera. Et in meggio de voi, nel suo nome congregati, serà el Signore como in lui spero illuminararvi.'

⁵⁹ Add., fol. 180r: 'Questa lettera et tutte sempre posseti mostrare a Ser Ieronimo, al nostro Fabrino et Guglielmo.' Ibid., fol. 203v: 'Lei la rescriva et a voi la remandi et voi la remandate a noi cavatone copia.'

⁶⁰ For., fol. 28v: 'Questa lettera serà comune a voi et a Piero da Furli, et li altri a voi noti de la verità avidi.'

therefore, regularly wrote letters addressing all of the nuns.⁶¹ A similar collegial approach was also adopted in the secular houses where religious texts were read and discussed together.⁶²

Notably, Biondo's preference for collective engagement can be inferred by his completion of the treatise *De amore proprio* in the house of Strinato and Alessandra, where Biondo was helped by his secretary, Filippo. If Biondo was dictating the long letter and Filippo writing it, we could not discount the possibility that others (for instance, Strinato, Alessandra, Piero, or Costanza) listened during its composition and asked for further clarification. I do not want to suggest that *De amore proprio* resulted from a collective effort nor that Biondo's writings have multiple authors. However, the circumstances of the composition of the text (not the solitude of a monk's cell, for instance, but the open environment of a lay house) invited discussion even before the text reached completion. We will review Biondo's preference for a communal approach towards religious matters in Chapter 6.2, highlighting the theological principles that informed it.

At times, even a brief sentence can be invaluable, for it reveals a hidden dimension of contacts, problems, and ideas. For instance, Biondo mentions a Fabrino, of whom little is known, except that he had problems with 'the spirit of Leviathan'.⁶³ What was this spirit, and what were its symptoms? What did it cause? The answer to these questions will have to wait, but what matters here is to underscore how abstract ideas, literary devices, and biblical imagery were not relegated to exegetical commentaries but were brought to life and used to exemplify tangible problems and indicate how to solve them. I should point out that Biondo was in no way exceptional in this approach, common to both preachers and authors of spiritual works. Nonetheless, the example is important because it shows the ideas – the lens, so to speak – through which Biondo looked at the world. This representation is the kind of 'porous self' the philosopher Charles Taylor referenced in his discussion of the human condition in the sixteenth century: Fabrino was sick, and his sickness was connected to a spirit, an alien force that now resided in him.⁶⁴ Just as evil depended on an external element (without eliminating personal responsibility), the ideas of salvation and reformation relied on elements independent of human action. The duality of inwardness and outwardness will be paramount in examining Biondo's

⁶¹ See DOMINICI 1969, where numerous letters are addressed to all the nuns of Corpus Christi in Venice; and AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, who was the spiritual advisor of female convents in Pisa, Siena, and Florence, and who similarly at times addresses the whole convent.

⁶² See FIRPO 1990; GUI 2002.

⁶³ Add., fol. 181r: 'spero darà el Signore intelletto et fortezza contra el spirito di Leviathan'.

⁶⁴ TAYLOR 2007, p. 38.

understanding of grace (Chapter 5.2); however, we will also see how it collided with the notion of love (Chapter 6.5).

Biondo encountered many other people. There is a Filippo da Savurana; a Francesco da Savignano, who played a key role in an issue that we will examine shortly; a Francesco Fabrini; Paolo, the son of Biondo's brother Francesco, to whom Biondo wrote a valuable letter and to whom we will refer several times in this dissertation.⁶⁵ For some, their names are now nothing else but mere sounds: Biliotto Biliotti, Geronimo, a Guglielmo, and a certain *comare* of Giovanni Bartoli. For others, what remains is a small detail: a Zorzo del Bello, who on one occasion delivered letters for Biondo; a Rombello, who dispatched a letter of Strinato to Biondo; a don Salvatore, perhaps another local priest at Modigliana; and a messer Zuanne, whose name comes up several times and who appeared to have left Modigliana or Florence for Rome. Moreover, the recipients of some extensive and illuminating letters are anonymous. There is, for instance, a letter to a non-identifiable Jew who converted to Christianity.⁶⁶ The letter is primarily a peroration on the value of suffering, and for this reason, we will return to it in a later chapter. It suffices here to note that Biondo constantly reminded the convert of his Jewish past. His purpose was to establish an unbridgeable gap between the Synagogue and the Church, the bodies of Satan and Christ, the bodily pleasure and the spiritual beatitude, the eternal suffering in Hell and the temporal suffering in life, and natural reason and divine grace. In this group, we could place the letter to an unnamed religious man mentioned above, in which Biondo defended himself and his orthodoxy.⁶⁷

2.1.5 Conflicts: Preachers, Savonarolians, and Venetian Authorities

Why did Biondo have to write an apology? What were the accusations, and who were the accusers? Life at Modigliana did not always run smoothly. For Biondo, the constant arrival of *romiti* and itinerant preachers was highly problematic. In two letters to Giovanni Bartoli, dated 17 May and 17 August 1492, Biondo lamented their influence upon the inhabitants of Modigliana. In the first letter, Biondo spoke of a Salviato whom these preachers had affected to such a degree that now only God could save him: 'I believe he is immersed and sunk too much in that colour [*tincta*]'.⁶⁸ What kind of colour paints images that obfuscate the mind and

⁶⁵ These letters are in Add., fols 208v–210v (to Filippo da Savurana), 197r–199v (to Francesco da Savignano), 218r–219v (to Francesco Fabrini), Mag., 71r–87v (to Paolo Biondo).

⁶⁶ Add., fols 174r–178v.

⁶⁷ Add., fols 25r–28v. See Appendix, 3.

⁶⁸ Add., fol. 185r: 'A mio credere lui è immerso et attuffato troppo in quella tincta.'

deny divine will? We will examine later how this *tincta* was related to the human faculty of the imagination. What is relevant now is that the *tincta* was also associated with empty words that confused the listener and led them away from God: ‘The hermits are dressed in sound outside and inside’.⁶⁹ In other words, the deceptions of the hermits not only pertained to them individually but spread to others; thus, they abused the primary function of the apostolate, the evangelising mission, and misappropriated God’s Word.

A much bigger problem was posed by the support that the local officials, the *castellano* Marco di Bernardo di Piero Vespucci and the *podestà* Niccolò di Luigi di Giovanni Quaratesi, gave to Savonarola.⁷⁰ Thanks to his thunderous preaching, his vigorous writing activities, and his relentless and inspiring speeches, Savonarola had become a prominent figure in the Florentine city.⁷¹ He advocated for a complete renovation of Christianity, which was supposed to start in Florence and spread worldwide. In 1494, siding with King Charles VIII, Savonarola eventually gained the favour of the people, took control of the city, expelled the Medici, and established a new government.

Savonarola encountered many setbacks, such as the threat of the interdict, the plague (1497), a ban from preaching (May 1496), divisions among the friars, the factionalism of the citizenry, challenges from the Franciscans, continuous attacks by the Pope, culminating with Savonarola’s excommunication (May 1497). Nonetheless, Savonarola continued tirelessly for four years to write and preach. At the beginning of 1498, Savonarola commented on Exodus, drawing a parallel between the Florentine faithful to him and the enslaved Jews, between the inimical Pope and the Pharaoh.⁷² Savonarola’s fortune, eventually, turned. After a long siege, the opposing factions of the *Arrabbiati* (‘the rabid dogs’) and *Compagnacci* (‘the rowdy companions’), close to the Medici, prevailed over the *Piagnoni* (‘the weepers’, who were Savonarola’s followers), and, on 8 April, Savonarola, together with the friars Domenico Buonvicini of Pescia and Silvestro Maruffi, was arrested. After a speedy trial, the three friars were burnt at the stake on 23 May 1498

The movement initiated by Savonarola did not die with him. On the contrary, the influence of the *Piagnoni* continued for a long time, even outside Italy. It is not improbable

⁶⁹ Add., fol. 183v: ‘Furono a di passati qua due heremiti vestiti de suono dentro et fuora.’ See also the letter to Strinato Strinati in Add., fols 190r–191v, now edited in LODONE 2013.

⁷⁰ The issue is examined in LODONE 2013.

⁷¹ The literature on the Savonarolian movement is vast. See at least POLIZZOTTO 1993; DALL’AGLIO 2005; WEINSTEIN 2011.

⁷² WEINSTEIN 2011, p. 250. See also SAVONAROLA 1955–1956.

that some of the itinerant preachers whom Biondo so fiercely criticised were indeed *Piagnoni* spreading Savonarola's message. A letter to Strinato, dated 22 August 1495, mentioned a frate Silvestro, who was none other than Silvestro Maruffi.⁷³ On another occasion (a letter dated 28 April 1498, twenty days after Savonarola's arrest), Biondo spoke of a Dominican friar who, defiantly, supported Savonarola, and preached and confessed at Modigliana.⁷⁴ The friar was openly supported by the *castellano* Marco Vespucci, who had turned the people of Modigliana against Biondo and refused to uphold the orders of the *Signoria*, the Florentine government. Biondo decided, therefore, to read those orders himself. In the same letter, Biondo recounted being threatened in his church with a *bombarda*.⁷⁵ The fear of suffering a violent death did not only have to do with the followers of Savonarola. In another letter to Strinato, dated 19 December 1494, Biondo had to comfort Strinato, Giovanni Bartoli, and Biliotto Biliotti, for they feared that he had been torn to pieces on his way to Ferrara.⁷⁶ The chances of being brutally assassinated were by no means extraordinary. Let us remember that, the year before, Gaspare Biondo had been ambushed and violently killed by the *soldato di ventura* Guido Guerra da Bagno. We will return on the reasons why, despite several points of agreement (mostly concerning religious reform), Biondo fiercely disagreed with Savonarola, to the extent that he wrote: 'To believe him [Savonarola] a martyr is a heresy and is the same as rejecting the faith in Jesus Christ, whom he [Savonarola] truly rejected, just as he also was a true confessor, martyr, and witness of Lucifer and Antichrist'.⁷⁷

Another significant setback originated with the Venetian ecclesiastical authorities, who questioned the orthodoxy of one of Biondo's vernacular writings, the work entitled *Ricordo*.⁷⁸ We will return to the nature of this text in the following section. What matters now is to see that the religious authorities had been alerted by the zealous activities of Giovanni Maria Capucci, a physician from Città di Castello, who exercised his profession in the Venetian territories. According to the diary of the Venetian Giovanni Bembo, Capucci had met several women, including Bembo's mother, while teaching the Gospel.⁷⁹ As a result, a friars'

⁷³ Add., fol. 189v.

⁷⁴ Add., fols 190r–191v. The letter is discussed extensively in LODONE 2013.

⁷⁵ Add., fol. 190v.

⁷⁶ For., fols 25v–26r.

⁷⁷ Add., fol. 63r: 'Credere ipsum martirem heresis est et negatio fidei Iesu Christi cuius ipse fuit negator verus quemadmodum etiam fuit verus confessor martir et testis Luciferi et antichristi.'

⁷⁸ On the whole issue, see LODONE 2019.

⁷⁹ MOMMSEN 1861, p. 588: 'Medicum quendam Joannem Mariam Bononiensem empiricum magis quam doctum accusatione fratris Francisci Georgii ordinis mendicorum in carceribus detrusum, quia evangeliorum simplicem doctrinam vulgari sermone idiotas docebat, in cuius auditoribus fuerat mater mea cum [unreadable] matronis.' On the identity of the physician, see both LODONE 2020a, pp. 77–78, and GIOS 1977, p. 305, n. 37.

commission was appointed to judge both Biondo's *Ricordo* and Capucci. Regarding Capucci, Biondo confessed in a letter to an unknown religious man that he was aware that Capucci was explaining Biondo's doctrine using his own words and, as happens when one has not mastered a subject, Capucci spoke impetuously rather than with clarity. For this reason, Biondo had already chastised him several times, for the physician appeared to have substantially misunderstood both the Gospel and Biondo's words.⁸⁰ Despite the rebuke, Biondo did not seem to abandon Capucci. In a letter from 1502, Biondo called the physician 'a truthful witness' of God and claimed that God would save, in His eternal election (and therefore mysterious ways), both the physician and the book.⁸¹

Biondo, who referred to Giovanni as *magister*, *maestro*, and *medico*, accused the friars of pursuing an empty accusation without any substantial evidence: '*cum meggi debilissimi et vanissimi*'.⁸² A letter survives that Biondo wrote directly to Capucci when the latter was already in jail.⁸³ There is evidence of a copious exchange between the two; letters were sent almost daily.⁸⁴ In the letter to a Piero Augustino da Fabriano, Biondo advised Piero not to show any letter to the friars, for they could quickly come up with new fancy accusations.⁸⁵ After Capucci's arrest, Diambra, who was travelling to Ravenna, where her family lived, was supposed to visit the physician.⁸⁶ The Bolognese Francesco da Savignano, an agent of the Bentivoglio family, had been asked by Biondo to look after the family of Capucci.⁸⁷ Alessandra degli Ariosti also knew the physician. Biondo stated that Capucci could have alleviated some of her health problems if the physician were free.⁸⁸ In a letter written in 1505 to three Florentine women, Biondo's concern about the doctor's situation re-emerges: 'This morning I dreamed that the physician was all happy out of prison, although he did not seem to be entirely free'.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Add., fol. 25r-v: 'acri censura non semel impositum est illi a me, ut multi sciunt, eorum, quae non sunt artis propriae seu naturalis notitiae, maxime vero eorum, quae ex me audivit, silentium, quia certum sit mihi non capere eum plurima ex verissimis et purissimis Christi sanctorumque sensibus'.

⁸¹ Add., fol. 198r: 'Quando a Dio piacerà, Lui usarà li meggi eternalmente electi a la liberatione del medico, suo vero testimonio, et del libro.'

⁸² Add., fol. 197v.

⁸³ Add., fols 194v-195v.

⁸⁴ Add., fol. 197r: 'Ho havute anco quelle del maestro de 10 et 11 al quale responderò.'

⁸⁵ Add., fol. 196v: 'Al frate non havete mostrate mie lettere, harò caro non le mostrate, per non li dare materia de colorire busie et argento de fare archimia de quale sono grandi artifici.'

⁸⁶ Add., fol. 194v: 'Sento che sor Diambra è venuta là, cioè andata a Ravenna cum intentione de venir là, se lasciati serà da li suoi.'

⁸⁷ LODONE 2020a, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Add., fol. 204r: 'La vostra reuma o descesa a voi tornata, se piacerà a Dio che esca fuora el nostro medico, spero serà curata.'

⁸⁹ Fra., fol. 239v: 'Ho sognato stamatina che el medico è uscito di carcere tuto alegro, non pareva però che fusse in tutto libero.'

It seems that the commission was unable to reach a unanimous verdict. The Franciscan Antonio Trombetta (1436–1517), a renowned teacher at the Padua *studium*, was called to give his opinion.⁹⁰ Trombetta wrote a *quaestio* in which he argued that Biondo's Ricordo was in line with Christian orthodoxy.⁹¹ This *quaestio* is also important because its appendix preserves the most problematic passages of the *Ricordo*.⁹² While the orthodoxy of the *Ricordo* was seemingly acknowledged, and Biondo did not suffer any consequences – so much so that he translated it into Latin a few years later, Giovanni Capucci remained in prison until February 1507.⁹³ Did Capucci return to Biondo's community? We cannot say for sure. What we can say, however, is that in the letter of the copyist at the end of the Seville manuscript, the copyist called don Filippo 'my lord and master', *sor* Diambra 'my most honourable mother' and Giovanni Maria Capucci 'my most beloved father'.⁹⁴

2.1.6 Final Notes

Among the last of Biondo's writings, we can count the two letters to three Florentine women, Maddalena, Caterina, and Dianora, sent within three weeks of one another in November and December 1505, interspersed by a lost letter written by Caterina to Biondo on behalf of all three women.⁹⁵ These letters were preserved in a dossier on various heretical figures that was assembled by the Camaldolese monk Paolo Giustiniani (1476–1528).⁹⁶ These figures were Girolamo Savonarola, Amadeus of Portugal, the author of the *Apocalypsis nova*; Francesco da Meleto (1449– after 1517), who predicted the year 1517 would see a great renewal of all the Abrahamic religions; and the Greek monk Theodoro, who called himself *Papa Angelicus*.⁹⁷ Giustiniani wrote a letter to three women in which he severely criticised Biondo's doctrine –

⁹⁰ On the activity and figure of Antonio Trombetta, see POPPI 1962; LODONE 2020c.

⁹¹ TROMBETTA 1504, fols 108r–111r. Edited in LODONE 2020c.

⁹² For the correspondance between the Latin and vernacular passages, see LODONE 2020a, pp. 220–256.

⁹³ GIOS 1977, p. 305, n. 37: 'Iohannem Mariam de Caputiis, phisicum de civitate nostra Castelli [I adopted here Lodone's interpretation, Gios reads 'vestra'] qui, tanquam de fide catholica male sentiens, in carcere detinebatur et per collegium paduanum doctoresque theologos Venetiis elatos ac deputatos catholicus fuerat declaratus, relaxari libere faceres. Nuper autem nobis fuit relatatum quod, licet idem Iohannes relaxatus carcere fuerit, tamen fideiussores dare coactus est se quotidie custodi carcerum representando, quod ei valde incommodum ac molestum est. Quo circa eidem fraternitati tue mandamus ut, si ipse Iohannes catholicus declaratus fuit, ut prefertur, eum ab huiusmodi obligatione se representandi liberes.'

⁹⁴ Sev., fol. 135r: 'Don Philippo, et mio patrone et mio maestro [...] misser Gian Maria, mio cordialissimo padre. Et honorandissima in Christo matre mia sor Diambra.' See Appendix, 4. I return to this important document in Chapter 7.

⁹⁵ Fra., fols 237r–239v. The letters are now edited in LODONE 2016b.

⁹⁶ On Giustiniani, see TABACCHI 2001.

⁹⁷ Fra., fols 156r–169r (on Amadeus), 172r–197r (on Savonarola), 197bisr–233r (on Meleto), 236r–241bisr (on Biondo), 242r–243bisr (on Theodoro). On Francesco Meleto, see ARRIGHI 1991; DALL'AGLIO 2006, pp. 75–98. On Giustiniani's activity against Savonarola, see IGNESTI 1952; DALL'AGLIO 2006, pp. 135–178.

he called it ‘a cult of the devil’ – and urged the women to abandon Biondo’s ideas immediately.⁹⁸ We will return to this point in the conclusion, for it pertains to the reception of Biondo’s ideas.

What is relevant to us now is that these letters connect Biondo to the Florentine nunnery called ‘Il Paradiso’.⁹⁹ This convent was an important place for both textile and book production.¹⁰⁰ It is unclear how Biondo came into contact with Il Paradiso. However, although the letters are dated 1505 and therefore were written relatively late in Biondo’s life, we cannot discount the possibility that Biondo had been close to this nunnery for a while and found some of his sources there. We also learn of a particular nun, Scolastica, that a certain Iacopo was not very well, that a Zanobi was impatiently awaited, and that Biondo had recovered from some illness thanks to some sage the women had sent to him. Although most of these people are just names, it is significant to note that, even close to the end of his life (the year is 1505), Biondo never abandoned his pastoral duty or lost the desire to spread his influence. Gabriele Biondo died on 14 May 1511, on the day of Saint Boniface, as indicated by a side notation in the Seville manuscript, perhaps jotted down by the same copyist who wrote the affectionate letter we find at the end of the codex.¹⁰¹ Biondo was buried at Modigliana, in the Church of Santo Stefano.¹⁰²

2.2 The Works of Gabriele Biondo

In this section, I review the source material. First, I concisely describe the codices where Biondo’s works have been preserved. I then examine the variety of genres in which Biondo experimented. Finally, I note some of the difficulties concerning these sources and explain the method employed to overcome them.

2.2.1 The Codices

Biondo’s writings survive in five manuscripts:

⁹⁸ LODONE 2016b, pp. 129–132. See also GIUSTINIANI 1967–2012, I, p. 115: ‘perversissimam heresim, detestabilem idolatriam, imo demonislatriam’.

⁹⁹ Fra., fols 237r–239v. For Biondo’s specific case, see LODONE 2016a.

¹⁰⁰ On the ‘Il Paradiso’, see DELCORNO BRANCA 2005; MIRIELLO 2007; STROCCHIA 2009, pp. 135–140 and 144–145.

¹⁰¹ Sev., fol. 81v: ‘D. Gabriel die 14 Maii in die sancti Bonifatii 1511 volavit ad Dominum.’

¹⁰² LODONE 2020a, p. 64.

2.2.1.1 *Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano XXXV 214 (hereafter, Mag.).*

- 1) 1r–17v: *Incipit*: ‘Gabrielis Blondi de igne sacro sermo’. A commentary on 2 Maccabees 1:19–36.
- 2) 18r–v: Blank pages.
- 3) 19r–22v: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem reverendi patris domini Gabrielis Blondi. Ratio triplicem actum facit’. See Appendix, 5.
- 4) 23r: Blank page.
- 5) 23v–24v: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem Gabrielis Blondi. Bonitas divine nature preter actum intrinsecum’. See Appendix, 6.
- 6) 25r–v: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem reverendi patris domini Gabrielis Blondi. Pars superior et inferior hominis’. See Appendix, 7.
- 7) 26r–27v: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem reverendi patris domini Gabrielis Blondo. De potentia volitiva hominis, quotuplex sit’. See Appendix, 8.
- 8) 28r–33r: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem reverendi patris domini Gabrielis Blondi. De libertate arbitrii’. See Appendix, 9.
- 9) 33v–36v: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem reverendi patris domini Gabrielis Blondi. De gaudiis beatorum’. See Appendix, 10.
- 10) 37r–48r: *Incipit*: ‘Eiusdem domini Gabrielis Blondi. Quid est habitus in anima?’ See Appendix, 11.
- 11) 40v–50r: *Incipit*: ‘Super illud: Veh mihi quia tacui vir pollutis labiis ego sum’. See Appendix, 12.
- 12) 50r–53r: *Incipit*: ‘Gabrielis Blondi. Super illud ultimi capituli Esaie’. These are various attempts to comment Isaiah 66:2–3.
- 13) 53v–54r: *Incipit*: ‘Super illud Hieremie 20. G. B.’. A cursory commentary on Jeremy 20:14–18.
- 14) 54v–58r: *Incipit*: ‘Ad intelligendum quomodo gratia operetur, illam ex toto vel ex parte perficiens, multa sunt prius consideranda et discutienda’. See Appendix, 13.
- 15) 58v–63v: *Incipit*: ‘Quoniam necesse est rerum diffinitiones precedere tractatum ipsarum’. See Appendix, 14.
- 16) 64r–70v: *Incipit*: ‘Da alia materia sequitur: Declaratio quare Christus prohibuerit demonibus et discipulis ne manifestarent ipsum esse Christum’. An examination of Jesus’s injunctions to demons, disciples, and healed people not to disclose his identity.

- 17) 71r–87v: Letter in Latin to Paolo Biondo. No date or location; however, given that Biondo noted that he was writing thirty-four years after his religious conversion, we can safely assume that the letter was written after 1500.
- 18) 88r–v: Blank pages.
- 19) 89r–94v: Letter in vernacular to a woman, probably Alessandra degli Ariosti or another nun, 4 October 1486, sent from Modigliana.
- 20) 95r–v: Blank pages.
- 21) 96r: *Incipit*: ‘Ad amicum super questione facta de causa adventus’. A vernacular sonnet by Biondo.¹⁰³
- 22) 96r–v: *Incipit*: ‘Glorioso mio padre Paulo mio’. A vernacular sonnet by Biondo.¹⁰⁴
- 23) 97r–98r: *Incipit*: ‘Fuggian fuggian fuggiamo o car fratelli’. A vernacular sonnet by Biondo that he referred to as the *Second Mystical Hymn*.¹⁰⁵

2.2.1.2 Forlì, Biblioteca Comunale, MS III 84 (hereafter, *For.*).

The codex is formed by two distinct codicological units belonging to different authors. I describe only those collected under the rubric ‘*Alcune lettere di Mons. Gabriele Biondo scritte a Suor Alessandra delli Ariosti a Bologna e ad altri*’.

- 1) 17r–18r: Letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti, 22 February 1486, from Rome.
- 2) 18r: *Incipit*: ‘Extracti più notabili delle epistole a Sor Alexandra. Le persone grave et composte, et de naturale prudentia’. Fragment of a letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti. No date or location.
- 3) 18v–19r: *Incipit*: ‘Extracti di epistole di Sore Alixandra de li Ariosti. O sorella et figlola, chi da Dio è afflicto straordinariamente’. Letter to Alessandra. The same letter is also found in fols 24v–25r. No date or location.
- 4) 19r–20v: *Incipit*: ‘D’un’altra epistola. Laudo la vostra bona affectione peroché è dono naturale et gratiagratisdata’. Another fragment.
- 5) 20v–21v: *Incipit*: ‘A sor Lexandra messer Gabriel Blondus ex plebe missa. Venerabile et cetera, io combatto chon uno diavolo incarnato a ferri polito, é uno frate spurcissimo et iniquissimo, como a mi pare heretico, quale qui è adorato per sancto et fanne mille

¹⁰³ See also Sev., fol. 92v. Edited in LODONE 2017a, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ See also Sev., fol. 27r. Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 54–55.

¹⁰⁵ See also Sev., fols 125v–127r. Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 72–73.

viste'. Letter to Alessandra from Modigliana. No date is given but from the mention of the 'filthy friar' (Savonarola), we can place it before 1498.

- 6) 22r–v: *Incipit*: 'Vorreste Ubertino; tale electione ai curiosi è veneno'. Letter to Alessandra. No date or location (see, however, next item).
- 7) 22v–23v: *Incipit*: 'Ex plebe Mutiliane 8 febr. 1488. Venerabile et dilecta figliola et sorella il Signore sia con voi, mandovi uno Ubertino portato da Roma qua, non sono correcti, pure tali quali aiutano'. Letter to Alessandra, 8 February 1488, from Modigliana.
- 8) 23v–24r: *Incipit*: 'Di messer G. B. a sor Lexandra ex plebe 25 Maii 1489. Venerabile et dilecta sorella et figliola el Signore sia cum voi sempre'. Letter to Alessandra, 25 May 1489, from Modigliana.
- 9) 24r–v: *Incipit*: 'Particula. Veh omnibus obstinate aliquid volentibus'. Fragment of a letter.
- 10) 24v–25r. Identical to item 3.
- 11) 25r–v: *Incipit*: 'Parte d'una epistola a sor Lexandra. Sento el mal vostro non esser pericoloso, et però spero che 'l Signore ve lascerà ancora per qualche dì'. Fragment of a letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti.
- 12) 25v–28v: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 24 December 1494, from Ferrara.
- 13) 28v–29v: *Incipit*: 'Parte di epistola a sor Lexandra consolatoria de la morta d'uno'. Fragment of a letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti. No date or location.
- 14) 29v–34r: Letter to the nun Cecilia Gozzadini. No date or location.

2.2.1.3 *London, British Library, MS Additional 14088 (hereafter, Add.)*

The manuscript consists of two distinct codicological units: the first, folios 2r–24v, comprises the epigrams of Prosper of Aquitain (the rubric says: '*Prosperi Equitanici liber*'), and the second unit, which concerns us, consists of various works by Gabriele Biondo.¹⁰⁶

- 1) 25r–28v: Letter in Latin to an unnamed friar, most certainly a Franciscan. No date is given, but since the letter deals with the *Ricordo* and the physician Giovanni Maria Capucci, we can place it after 1501. The letter indicates that it was sent from Modigliana.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Don Filippo, Gabriele Biondo's *scriptor*, is responsible for writing the whole manuscript. See LODONE 2020a, p. 143.

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix, 3.

- 2) 29r–63v: *Commentarius*. As the rubric states, this is the 1503 Latin translation of the *Ricordo*, originally written in 1498.¹⁰⁸
- 3) 64r–93v: *De meditatione et deceptionibus*. This treatise is written in vernacular.¹⁰⁹
- 4) 94r–104v: Letter to Alessandra di Strinato degli Strinati, 16 March 1495, from Modigliana.
- 5) 105r–159r: *De amore proprio*. This treatise is addressed to Alessandra degli Ariosti and written in vernacular. The *explicit* states that it was finished by Biondo, assisted by his secretary Don Filippo, in 1506 in the house of Strinato degli Strinati.¹¹⁰
- 6) 160v–173v: *Incipit*: ‘Comenza el terzo hymno mistico’. A poem in vernacular by Biondo, 1508 lines, ABBA.¹¹¹
- 7) 174r–178v: *Incipit*: ‘Spectabilis vir tanquam frater honorabilis salutem’. Letter in vernacular to a Jew who converted to Christianity. No date or location.
- 8) 179r–180r: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 7 September 1491, from Modigliana.
- 9) 180v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 16 May 1492, from Modigliana.
- 10) 180v–181v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 13 June 1492, from Modigliana.
- 11) 181v–182v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 22 June 1492, from Modigliana.
- 12) 182v–184v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 17 August 1492, from Modigliana.
- 13) 184v–185v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 17 May 1492, from Modigliana.
- 14) 186r: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, 3 January 1493, from Modigliana.
- 15) 186v: Blank page.
- 16) 187r–188r: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 19 July 1494, from Modigliana.
- 17) 188r–v: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 16 August 1494, from Modigliana.
- 18) 189r–v: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 23 September 1494, from Modigliana.
- 19) 189v: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 26 July 1495, from Modigliana.
- 20) 189v–190r: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 22 August 1495, from Modigliana.
- 21) 190r–191v: Letter to Strinato degli Strinati, 28 April 1498, from Modigliana.
- 22) 192r–193v: Letter to a nun, most probably Alessandra degli Ariosti. No date is given or location; however, Biondo mentions that the *Ricordo* will be ready soon and then delivered to her. If this is so, then the *terminus ad quem* is 1498.

¹⁰⁸ Edited in LODONE 2020a, pp. 213–257.

¹⁰⁹ Edited in LODONE 2020a, pp. 163–212.

¹¹⁰ Edited in LODONE 2020a, pp. 259–341.

¹¹¹ Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 74–97. An incomplete version of it is in Sev., fols 118r–125v.

- 23) 193v–194v: Letter to a nun, most probably Alessandra degli Ariosti. No date or location.
- 24) 194v–195v: Letter to Giovanni Maria Capucci, 20 December 1501, from Florence.
- 25) 195v–197r: Letter to Piero Augustino da Fabriano in Venice, 20 December 1501, from Florence.
- 26) 197r–199v: Letter to misser Francesco da Savignano in Venice, 29 January 1502, from Florence.
- 27) 199v–203v: Letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti, 18 December 1501. No location, but it could be Florence given items 24 and 25.
- 28) 203v–208v: Letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti, 23 April 1502, from Florence.
- 29) 208v–210v: Letter to Filippo de Savurana, 30 January 1501; no location but most probably from Florence (see item 26, above).
- 30) 210v–211v: Letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, probably interrupted.
- 31) 212r: *Incipit*: ‘Benedictis Domino, Magdalene ac Lucretie, secularibus virginibus Mutillianensis consanguineis e vico violano, ac Barbarine earum consocie, loci eiusdem accolae’. An epitaph for three women.¹¹²
- 32) 212v–216r: *Incipit*: ‘Apologia domini Iesu Christi quod humanos actos et precipue electorum, sapientissime, amantissime atque optime gubernet’. A poem in Latin.
- 33) 216v: *Incipit*: ‘In Leonardum de Rovere divi Xisti IIII nepotem. Epitaphium’. An epitaph for Leonardo della Rovere.
- 34) 216v: *Ad libellum*. A poem in Latin.
- 35) 217r: *Reverendissimo Domino Papiensi*. A poem in Latin to an unnamed bishop, identifiable as Iacopo Ammannati Piccolomini.
- 36) 217r: A funeral inscription for Leonardo della Rovere.
- 37) 218r–219v: Letter to Francesco Fabrini, 24 November 1506, from Florence.

2.2.1.4 Seville, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, MS 7–1–9 (hereafter, *Sev.*)

The manuscript belonged to Fernando Colon, son of Cristoforo Colombo (Cristobal Colon). A later rubric says: ‘*Magistri Domini Gabrielis Blondi opuscola spiritualia et contemplativa. Metrice in vulgari*’. It also includes works by Jacopone da Todi, Giannozzo Sacchetti, and others.

¹¹² See *Sev.*, fol. 101v. See Appendix, 2.

- 1) 1v–2v: *Incipit*: ‘Gaudia celestia beate Virginis Marie’.¹¹³
- 2) 2v–3r: *Incipit*: ‘Alia oratio ad Virginem’. In Latin.
- 3) 3r: *Incipit*: ‘Alia oratio ad Virginem’. In vernacular.
- 4) 3v–4v: *Incipit*: ‘Qualiter talis debet esse anima ad Christum qualis fuit et est amor Christi ad animam. O amore che m’ami, prendime a li toi hami / ch’io ami como sono amata’.¹¹⁴
- 5) 4v–7v: *Incipit*: ‘Qualiter anima devota humiliter alloquitur Christum natum in carne, et qualiter Christus dulciter ad animam respondet. L’amore che è venuto in carne a noi se dare / andiamo laudiamo laude fare, e canto con honore’.¹¹⁵
- 6) 7v–9r: *Incipit*: ‘Dulcis reponsio Christi ad animam. Sposa che mi domandi e admirì lo gran facto / pensando lo baratto che l’amore m’a facto fare’.
- 7) 9r–10v: *Incipit*: ‘Responsio anime ad Christum. Iesu dolce mio sposo dime che ti potesse fare / ch’io te potesse amare quanto te son obligata’.
- 8) 10v–12r: *Incipit*: ‘Qualiter anima ascendit ad statum perfectionis contemplando amorem Iesu Christi, et propriam vilitatem. O brigata guarda el pretio, se te voi inebriare / che lo pretio è inebriatio per lo tuo innamorare’.¹¹⁶
- 9) 12r–v: *Incipit*: ‘Expergiscere igitur anima christiana que ista legis et audis, devotius cogita sedulaque mente pertracta’.¹¹⁷
- 10) 12v: *Incipit*: ‘Mensa scripture meditatio devota vel proprius Christi vita in cuius meditatione refici debet anima christiana’.
- 11) 13r: *Incipit*: ‘La libertà del libero arbitrio male usata non po’ nocere né noce se non a chi la ha quanto è grande essa libertà, secundo la sua voluntà operante’.
- 12) 13v–20r: *Incipit*: ‘Dubii dechiarati per messer Gabriele Biondo a sor Alixandra del monasterio del Corpo de Christ’. A series of questions and answers.¹¹⁸
- 13) 20v–22r: *Incipit*: ‘O Iesu dolce o infinito amore / inestimabil dono, misera mi che sono / che da ti fugo, tu me segui anchora’. Attributed to Leonardo Giustiniani.¹¹⁹
- 14) 22v–25r: *Incipit*: ‘Per la oratione el frate è sancto / l’è compuncto e pien de pianto’.
Unknown author.

¹¹³ Attributed to Thomas Becket (‘Thomas martyr et episcopus Cantu[a]riensis’).

¹¹⁴ *Laude*, pp. 192–193.

¹¹⁵ Items 5 to 7 are parts of the same poem. *Laude*, pp. 144–150. The Latin rubrics for the items 5 to 7 coincide with those found in JACOPONE DA TODI 1495, fols 31v–33v.

¹¹⁶ *Laude*, pp. 168–169. See JACOPONE DA TODI 1495, fol. 76. It has *considerando* for *contemplando*.

¹¹⁷ JACOPONE DA TODI 1495, fol. 34v. See LODONE 2020a, p. 153 n. 23.

¹¹⁸ Edited in LODONE 2016b, pp. 333–337.

¹¹⁹ LEONARDO GIUSTINIANI 1474, fols 1r–2v.

- 15) 25v–27r: *Incipit*: ‘O Maria dolce con quanto desio / miravi el tuo figlio Christo homo et Dio’. Attributed to Giovanni Dominici.¹²⁰
- 16) 27r: *Incipit*: ‘De messer Gabr. Bl. Glorioso mio padre Paulo mio / questo dì nel tuo nome gratioso’. A sonnet by Biondo, ABBA–CDDC–EFG–GFE.¹²¹
- 17) 27v–46r: *Incipit*: ‘Al foco, al foco, al foco / del crucifixo amore / che cresce a tutte l’hore / in ogni tempo et loco’. Poem by Biondo, with ample glossae by the author, 936 verses.¹²²
- 18) 46v: Rubric: ‘Le Laude infrascripte per ordinem sonno del beato Jacopone, fra minore, da Todi’.
- 19) 46v–47r: *Incipit*: ‘De la beata vergine Maria et del peccatore. O regina cortese / io so’ a voi venuto’.¹²³
- 20) 47r–48v: *Incipit*: ‘De la beata vergine Maria. O vergen più che femina / sancta Maria beata’.¹²⁴
- 21) 49r–50r: *Incipit*: ‘Como la verità piange de la bontà morta. La veritate piange / che è morta la bontade’.¹²⁵
- 22) 50v–51r: *Incipit*: ‘Como Christo si lamenta de la chiesa romana. Iesu Christo se lamenta / de la chiesa romana’.¹²⁶
- 23) 51v–53r: *Incipit*: ‘De la grande battaglia d’antichristo. Or se parra chi haverà fidanza / la tribulanza che prophetizata’.¹²⁷
- 24) 53v–55r: *Incipit*: ‘Del pianto de la chiesa reducta a mal stato. Piange la chiesa, piange et dolura / sente fortuna di pessimo stato’.¹²⁸
- 25) 55v–56v: *Incipit*: ‘De san Francesco et de sette apparitione de croce a lui et de lui fatte. O Francesco povero / patriarcha novello’.¹²⁹
- 26) 57r–59r: *Incipit*: ‘De san Francesco et de le battaglie del nimico contra lui. O Francesco da Dio amato / Christo in te n’è mostrato’.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ See LODONE 2020a, pp. 154 n. 25.

¹²¹ See also Add., fol. 96r–v. Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 54–55.

¹²² Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 55–71.

¹²³ *Laude*, pp. 1–2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–120.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–136.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 137–139.

- 27) 59v–60r: *Incipit*: ‘Epistola consolatoria a frate Ioanni da Fermo dicto de l’Averna per la stantia dove anco se riposa transferita in vulgare la parte literale quale et presa. Fra Ioanni da l’Averna che quartana / che quartana se scioverna’.¹³¹
- 28) 60v–62r: *Incipit*: ‘De la sancta povertà et suo triplice cielo. O amor de povertade / regno de tranquillitade’.¹³²
- 29) 62r–v: *Incipit*: ‘De la sancta povertà signora de tutto. Povertate innamorata / grande è tua la signoria’.¹³³
- 30) 63r–64r: *Incipit*: ‘Como Christo se riposa nel anima ornata de virtù como sposo con la sposa. Homo che vol parlare / in prima dei pensare’.¹³⁴
- 31) 64r–65r: *Incipit*: ‘De la bontà divina et voluntà creata. La bontà infinita / vol infinito amore’.¹³⁵
- 32) 65v–68r: *Incipit*: ‘La battaglia del nimico. Or udite la battaglia / che me fa el falso nimico’.¹³⁶
- 33) 68v–74v: *Incipit*: ‘Como l’anima per sancta nihilità et charità pervene a stato incognito et indicibile. Sopra ogni lengua amore / bontà senza figura’.¹³⁷
- 34) 75r–78r: *Incipit*: ‘Como per la ferma fede et speranza se pervene a triplice stato de nihilità. La fede et la speranza / mon facta sbandigione’.¹³⁸
- 35) 78v–79r: *Incipit*: ‘Como l’honor et la vergogna contendono insieme. Udite una entenzone / ch’è fra honore et vergogna’.¹³⁹
- 36) 79v–81r: *Incipit*: ‘Como la vita di Iesu è specchio de l’anima. O vita de Iesu Christo / specchio de veritate’.¹⁴⁰
- 37) 81v: *Incipit*: ‘D. Gabrielis Blondi: Epithaphium sanctissimis Magadlene, Lucretie, Barberine et Margerite virginibus’. An epitaph by Biondo for the death of four secular women.¹⁴¹
- 38) 82r: *Incipit*: ‘De la impatientia che fa tutti li beni perdere. Cantico del beato Jacopone. Assai me sforzo a guadagnare / se el sapesse conservare’.¹⁴²

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 140.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 132–133.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 131.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 165–166.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 179–180.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 107–109.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 217–223.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 224–227.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 80–82.

¹⁴¹ See Appendix, 2.

¹⁴² *Laude*, p. 58.

- 39) 82v–88r: *Incipit*: ‘Como in l’omo perfecto sono figurate le tre hierarchie con li nove chori de l’angeli. L’uomo che po’ la sua lingua domare / grande me pare che hagia signoria’.¹⁴³
- 40) 88v–90r: *Incipit*: ‘Arbore de l’amore divino. Un arbore è da Dio piantato / lo qual amor è nominato’.¹⁴⁴
- 41) 90v–91r: *Incipit*: ‘Cantico de la natività de Iesu Christo. O novo canto / c’hai morto el pianto’.¹⁴⁵
- 42) 91v–92r: *Incipit*: ‘De la divina iustitia et falsità. Solo a Dio ne possa piacere / non me ne curo’.¹⁴⁶
- 43) 92r: *Incipit*: ‘Saper vorrei signor se ’l te piacesse / se la mia vita te piace o despiace.’ A sonnet most probably by Biondo.¹⁴⁷
- 44) 92v: *Incipit*: ‘D. Gab. Bl. Saper vorresti de la mia venuta / la cagione, et el fin de la dimora.’ A sonnet by Biondo.¹⁴⁸
- 45) 93r–98r: *Incipit*: ‘Questa laude è de persona exercitata ne la vera vi de la croce et che per lo suo nihilo havea guastato el seraphico ardore de la vera transformatione cresciuta et stabilita in lui per molte acerbe et improvise spogliature, sostenute in pace in acquisto de lume et de virtù per li soi contrarii, et in acquisto tandem del stabile amor passivo aliquialiter. Spogliati anima mia / et vestite d’amore’. A poem by Giannozzo Sacchetti, with ample glosses by Biondo.¹⁴⁹
- 46) 98v–100v: *Incipit*: ‘Transitus beate Barberine per D. Gabr. Bl’. A letter written from Modigliana about the passing of the secular woman Barbarina, 19 August 1494.¹⁵⁰
- 47) 101r–v: *Incipit*: ‘D. G. B. Epitaphium beatissimis M. L. B. et M. virginibus’. See item 37, above.¹⁵¹
- 48) 102r–109r: Papal bull *Solet annuere* by Onofrius III, followed by the *Regula bullata* and Testament of Saint Francis. Written by a different hand.
- 49) 109r–111r: Letter to Francesco Fabrino, 24 June 1492, from Modigliana.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 198–204.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 205–207.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 141–143.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 61–62.

¹⁴⁷ See LODONE 2017a, p. 41, n. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Also in Add., fol. 212r. Edited in LODONE 2017a, p. 54.

¹⁴⁹ On Giannozzo Sacchetti, see PALERMO 1857, pp. ciii–cxxx and 27–59, SACCHETTI 2005, pp. 37–44; LODONE 2017b.

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix, 1.

¹⁵¹ See Appendix, 2.

- 50) 111v–117v: Translation in vernacular of *Remediis contra tentationes spirituales huius temporis* by Peter John Olivi.¹⁵²
- 51) 118r–125r: *Incipit*: ‘Signor Iesu Signore / vero et universale’. The *Third Mystical Hymn* by Biondo.¹⁵³
- 52) 125v–127r: *Incipit*: ‘Fuggiam, fuggiam, fuggiamo cari fratelli’. A poem by Biondo.¹⁵⁴
- 53) 127v–134v: Blank pages.
- 54) 135r–136v: A letter by the copyist of the codex.¹⁵⁵
- 55) 137r: Table of contents of the codex.

2.2.1.5 Frascati, Monastero di Monte Corona, MS Liber in Folio II (hereafter, Fra.).

I limit my description of the codex to the items concerning Biondo.¹⁵⁶

- 1) 236r: ‘Ad quasdam seductas mulieres flo[rentinas] in perversissimam heresim et idolatriam G. B’.¹⁵⁷
- 2) 236v: Blank page.
- 3) 237r–238v: Letter by Biondo to three Florentine women, Madalena, Caterina, and Dianora, 12 November 1505, from Florence.¹⁵⁸
- 4) 239r–v: Letter by Biondo to three Florentine women, Madalena, Caterina, and Dianora, 11 December 1505.¹⁵⁹
- 5) 240r–241v: Letter by Paolo Giustiniani to the same three women.¹⁶⁰

2.2.2 The Genres

From the early encomiastic poetry dedicated to Leonardo della Rovere’s death (11 November 1475) to the letter to Francesco Fabrini (24 November 1506) and the writing of *De amore proprio* in the house of Strinato degli Strinati (13 October 1506), Biondo’s literary activity spanned nearly forty years. What makes it challenging to confront Biondo’s literary production

¹⁵² Edited in LODONE 2016b, pp. 338–343.

¹⁵³ Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp. 74–97.

¹⁵⁴ Edited in LODONE 2017a, pp.72–73.

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix, 4.

¹⁵⁶ On the items concerning Biondo in this codex, see GIUSTINIANI 1967–2012, I, pp. 81 and 115–116.

¹⁵⁷ See GIUSTINIANI 1967–2012, I, p. 115.

¹⁵⁸ Edited in LODONE 2016a.

¹⁵⁹ Edited in LODONE 2016a.

¹⁶⁰ Edited in LODONE 2016a.

is not simply the length of his activity but also its variety. Let us now examine more in depth the genres Biondo considered.

2.2.2.1 Correspondence

One of the fascinating parts of Biondo's oeuvre is his correspondence, comprising thirty-seven extensive items, to which we must add the seven fragments of letters to Alessandra degli Ariosti kept in the Forlì codex.¹⁶¹ Biondo's letters vary immensely in length and scope.¹⁶² For instance, the letters to Paolo Biondo and Alessandra Strinati easily qualify as short treatises.¹⁶³ By contrast, the letter regarding Barbarina's passing can be categorised as a hagiographical work. Other missives, such as the letter to Cecilia Gozzadini, focused exclusively on resolving theological questions. Biondo's letters also touched on several additional themes: social unrest, heresy, eschatological predictions, economic troubles, book acquisition, journeys, trials, illnesses, and death. From this point of view, his correspondence is valuable not only for a study of Biondo but also for different types of history (for instance, the history of books, astrology, or the local history of Modigliana). Finally, they also have some significance as linguistic documents of their own.

They are especially significant for my investigation as they shed light on one of Biondo's main preoccupation, that is, the reformation of his readers, encouraging them to turn away from a faith based entirely on exterior rituality, merit over grace, and spiritual exercises devoid of any substance, while aiming towards a personal experience of communion with God. The Forlì codex, consisting exclusively of letters, can in a sense be regarded as an instrument of religious proselytism and education, regardless of whether it reached a larger audience or remained confined to Biondo's circle.¹⁶⁴ By learning what others had to do, we also learn, indirectly, the role Biondo assigned to himself and exhibited to others.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, Biondo's letters give us a taste of what he understood by spiritual direction. I will return to this theme in Chapter 6.2, when I look at the principles of his direction.

Despite the various lacunae (for example, the lack of date, location, or recipient's name) and the formulaic tropes and standardised rhetoric, Biondo's letters still offer us a wealth of data and a series of internal references that help map his movements and social links within reasonable limits, as we have been able to do in recounting his life. Nonetheless, many aspects

¹⁶¹ Lodone has promised a much desired critical edition of Biondo's collection of letters.

¹⁶² On the epistolary practices, see GRIGGIO 1998.

¹⁶³ On this aspect, see DOGLIO 2000, pp. 29–48.

¹⁶⁴ On the letters as instruments of religious dissent, see BRAIDA 2009, pp. 21–99.

¹⁶⁵ On this point, see HENDERSON 2002.

remain unknown. While we know reasonably well what Biondo thought about the Florentine upheavals caused by the political and religious conflicts between Savonarola's followers and the other factions, his opinion on Bologna remains opaque, despite his long-standing relationship with Corpus Domini. Each connection must, therefore, be weighed carefully. Moreover, the number of letters to a person does not indicate the influence he or she had on Biondo's life. For instance, we do not have any letters to Diambra; yet we know that Biondo and the copyist of the Seville manuscript had a very high opinion of her.

2.2.2.2 *Exegesis*

In addition to the letters, Biondo left several exegetical exercises. These also vary considerably in length and scope. At one end of the spectrum, we have the cursory examination of Jeremiah 20 and, at the other, the extensive commentary on 2 Maccabees 1, which evidently required a lot of effort and time. A remarkable piece is a comment on Isaiah 6 in the Magliabechiano codex, for it shows how Biondo reworked his analysis several times to highlight the issues that interested him the most. Moreover, I would like to stress that the exegetical pieces can stand on their own and form the bulk of Biondo's production in this field. However, we cannot dismiss the various passages that we find in both letters (see, for instance, the letter to Cecilia with its section on Revelation 3:14–16) and treatises, where Biondo introduces biblical pericopes in order to give his argument a scriptural foundation.

How did Biondo approach the biblical texts? What were the principles that guided his reading and hermeneutics? In this field, Biondo was no innovator. As he explained in the *Sermo de igne sacro* concerning 2 Maccabees 1, like many of his predecessors, he took 1 Corinthians 10:11 as his guiding principle. Biondo reminded his readers that what happened to our ancestors served as an example (*in figura*) for us, who come at the end of the world.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, he subscribed to the traditional view that the literal level of the Scriptures could and must be read in an allegorical, moral, and, finally, anagogical way. Consequently, the OT was read typologically, that is, as a prefiguration (*figura*) not only of the events in the NT (that is, the coming of Jesus Christ) but also of Biondo's times.¹⁶⁷

It was precisely in this actualising perspective that the events recounted in 2 Maccabees 1 were adapted for Biondo's readers. For Biondo, the history of the Jewish people could be

¹⁶⁶ Mag., fol. 2r: 'ante omnia autem memor sit meus lector, quomodo contingebant patribus nostris omnia in figura propter nos, in quos fines saeculorum devenerunt'. On the importance of this Pauline pericope, see LUBAC 1959–1964, II, pp. 503–504.

¹⁶⁷ On the notion of figura, see the seminal but still important study *Figura*, now in AUERBACH 2014, pp. 65–113.

read both as the edification and upbringing of a single individual, which was realised exclusively in the afterlife (this is what interested Biondo), and in an ecclesiastical way regarding the contemporary Church. The Scriptures could either describe the anagogical-eschatological fulfilment of the individual or the latter's ethical involvement, expressed in the ecclesiastical dimension through sacraments and works of charity. In his commentary on 2 Maccabees 1, Biondo privileged the individual dimension. The consequences of this choice will be examined in Chapter 6.

2.2.2.3 *Treatises*

Biondo wrote three major works: *De meditatione et deceptionibus*; the *Commentarius*, that is, the Latin translation made by Biondo of his vernacular treatise, the *Ricordo*, which caused him so many problems with the Venetian religious authorities; and *De amore proprio*.¹⁶⁸ Since I will return to them at several points in this dissertation, here I will briefly summarise their content, gain a general overview of their purpose, and survey the main problems that informed them.

2.2.2.3.1 *De meditatione et deceptionibus*

De meditatione et deceptionibus (On Meditation and its Deceptions) was Biondo's first major work. A letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli tells us that Biondo was close to completing it in August 1492.¹⁶⁹ This treatise aimed to show how to follow 'the way of the mind' and 'become intimate with God'.¹⁷⁰ It can, therefore, be placed in the tradition of mystical treatises, which instructed readers on how the soul could rise and experience a mental vision of the divine.

These treatises were developed initially in a monastic environment.¹⁷¹ They were highly influenced by the Rule of Saint Benedict, which referred to the Ladder of Jacob (Genesis 28:12) and advocated a gradual advancement toward God under the virtue of humility.¹⁷² In his *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* (The Steps of Humility and Pride), the Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux counted twelve steps.¹⁷³ The steps numbered seven in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.¹⁷⁴ They could be divide in three groups corresponding to humility,

¹⁶⁸ They are now edited in LODONE 2020a, pp. 163–341.

¹⁶⁹ Add., fol. 184r: 'Da alcuni dì in qua, facta violentia a la mia negligentia, et reducto el tractatello de la Meditatione a bon porto, si che se scrive et spero finirà presto'.

¹⁷⁰ Add., fol. 64r: 'intrinsecarsi con el suo Dio [...] la via de la mente'.

¹⁷¹ On the monastic developments, see MCGINN 1994, pp. 119–146.

¹⁷² See PRICOCO 2000, *Regula sancti Benedicti*, p. 154 (cap. VII, *De humilitate*).

¹⁷³ BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX 1957–1998, III, p. 13. On Bernard's views, see MCGINN 1994, pp. 157–224.

¹⁷⁴ BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX 1957–1998, I, p. 108 (*Sermo* 18, cap. 6).

charity, and contemplation, respectively. The Franciscan friar Bonaventure spoke of six rungs in his *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum* (Journey of the Mind to God).¹⁷⁵

Unlike these treatises, Biondo did not elaborate on the various stages. Instead, he planned three main sections: the preparation, the exercises, and the fruits of meditation.¹⁷⁶ In this last section, he also examined ‘the dangerous errors and deceptions’ that primarily concerned beginners.¹⁷⁷ Unlike Bernard, who had explained that, while the first two steps were available to all (lay people included), the other ten were accessible only to monks, Biondo clarified that his work was mainly intended for the uneducated. The readers who wished to know more, however, would be satisfied by the section on deceptions, for there Biondo would illustrate both the way in which reality and fantasy could become confused, jeopardising meditation, and the complex and possibly problematic relationship among human industriousness, grace, and demonic influence.

Biondo began by distinguishing several forms of preparation. His exposition, however, was soon diverted by the issue of the self-lovers and false devotees to whom he acknowledged he would return several times in this treatise.¹⁷⁸ After this digression, Biondo stated that the first act concerning preparation was ‘to trim the will’.¹⁷⁹ One must, then, undergo a thorough self-examination and recognise God’s immense mercy, as displayed in Jesus’s death for humankind. The purpose of this continuous self-questioning, in which the meditation on the crucified Christ played a crucial role, was to adhere firmly to God’s will. The importance of this action and its various expressions will be examined in Chapter 5.3.

At this point, Biondo devoted himself to the problems connected to meditation. The greatest danger was to confuse human industriousness with divine grace, and one’s will with God’s will. The origin of this misunderstanding lay in the faculty of the imagination, which could replace the good planned by God with the good wished by the human will. This substitution had a two-pronged impact on the possibility of salvation. Biondo argued that, since people could not obtain what they desired, they would hate God for not providing the yearned and imagined good. And yet, human beings would not entirely abandon God, even though they would begin to despair about their salvation. People hated God but, at the same time, worried

¹⁷⁵ BONAVENTURE 1882–1902, V, p. 297 (*Itin.*, I, 1).

¹⁷⁶ Add., fol. 64r: ‘Prima come se habiano a preparare. Secondo como se habiano ad exercitare. Terzo como et quale fructo habiano del suo exercitio a ricogliere.’

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.: ‘Et in queste parte ponerò alcuni consigli et cautele da schivare, alquanti de molti più comuni et più pericolosi errori et inganni occorrenti a li incomenzanti de intrare nella via overo acto de la mente.’

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., fol. 67r: ‘li falsi spirituali, de quali spesso me occorre parlare in questo tractatello’.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., fol. 69r: ‘spuntare le sue volontà’.

about their fate. With an introduction that echoes Dante's famous threefold inscription on the door of Hell, Biondo began an extended essay on the number of the Beast (Revelation 13:11–18).¹⁸⁰ His purpose was to show how this twisted relationship with God, which Biondo called *falsa spiritualità* and *falsa sanctità* (false spirituality and false holiness), originated from human attempts to domesticate the divine mystery through imagination and reason.¹⁸¹

The section on the fruits of meditation is relatively brief. The primary fruit was the renovation of faith, hope, and charity (the three theological virtues) to allow confidence in Jesus Christ's love. The second fruit, connected to the first, was the destruction of vices and sins. Finally, the joy of meditation was directly related to humans becoming smaller and smaller in the eyes of God.¹⁸² For Biondo, one only approached the divine mysteries (Christ's Incarnation, salvation, and perdition) through diminution. I will return to this central point in Chapter 5.3. However, one point can already be made. Although Biondo recognised that meditating could lead to a temporary vision of the divine (this places Biondo in line with the main mystical tradition), its fruits primarily had a practical efficacy. This belief was reflected in the structure of the treatise itself: as Biondo endeavoured to include lay people and the uneducated, he omitted complex and abstract theories. Biondo maintained this approach and developed it further in his next treatise.

2.2.2.3.2 *Commentarius* or *Ricordo*

The second treatise Biondo wrote was the *Ricordo*, which he translated into Latin a few years later as the *Commentarius* (Memorandum). The *Commentarius* began by affirming that self-love and self-idolatry rule the world and have replaced the love for God.¹⁸³ Biondo wanted to offer a series of remedies so that one could relinquish human pride.¹⁸⁴ This text places Biondo not only in a well-established literary tradition (the *remedia* genre) but also in close connection with a particular line of Franciscan spirituality, one which advocated interior devotion and *meditatio*. According to the historian Antonio Montefusco, this spiritual approach was promoted most ardently by Peter John Olivi, Angelo Clareno, Ubertino of Casale, and John of

¹⁸⁰ Add., 79r: 'Qui se comenza pigliare la sinistra parte [...] Qui anco è fondato et stabilito [...] Overo li è data qui con permissione del male temporale la rasono aiutante'. DANTE 1988, I, p. 35 (*Inferno*, III, 1–3).

¹⁸¹ Add., 79r.

¹⁸² Add., fol. 93r: 'tanti sono li beni che de qui nascono che sono omnino indicibili peroche questo è *el vero fonte de la vita* purché in esso la creatura piccola facta humilmente se bagni.' See Revelation 21:6 and John 4:14.

¹⁸³ Add., fols 29r–32v.

¹⁸⁴ Add., fol. 32r–v: 'In quo commentario experiar electis Ieshu Christi ac maxime laicis et secularibus formam aliquam universalem vivendi tradere. Per quam formam possint, mediante libertate arbitrii et divina gratia eis cooperante, fugere quantum illis concessum fuerit ipsam presumptionem.'

Parma (I will return to these authors in the following chapter).¹⁸⁵ Notably, although the remedies differed between lay people and clerics, Biondo argued that there was an essential commonality between the two states, for the purpose of both remained God.

The first remedy was intrinsic: Biondo suggested annihilating one's self-confidence. However, how could one accomplish that? Pride would not only lead to self-sufficiency (and to the disposal of God) but also would affect others (meaning that, as an example to others, one could lead them away from God). Relying on Psalm 13:1, Biondo concluded that nobody was free from self-love.¹⁸⁶ He implied that the remedy could not be actualised through human effort but exclusively through faith in God's salvific election, which coincided with divine goodness and love.¹⁸⁷ What to do, however, with those whom God, in his mysterious will, did not decide to call? The problem of election was introduced, but Biondo advised not to try to investigate whether one was chosen. Instead, one should pray God for the grace that could facilitate an understanding of God's eternal decision, for any other gift was an obstacle impeding God's salvation. The suggestion, however, did not solve the problem but simply put it off. We will expand on this point in Chapter 5.3.

The second remedy was extrinsic but should not be interpreted to mean that Biondo wanted to found a new religious order. On the contrary, his *forma vivendi* concerned what one must renounce. He did not want to introduce anything new; instead, he worked by subtraction. The significance of Biondo's kenotic approach will be examined in Chapter 5.3. We can briefly say that a central point in Biondo's proposition was to accept what God had given. For religious people, this meant accepting the rule as it was handed down. Biondo categorically condemned any attempt to reform the orders.

The same principle applied to lay people: one did not reach salvation by joining a religious order but by fulfilling what God had given to each person as his potential. In other words, the attempts of lay people to leave their state, ascend the mountain of the interior spiritual act, and follow the way of contemplation were seen by Biondo as a betrayal of God's plan.¹⁸⁸ Here Biondo refined the approach developed in *De meditatione*. His intention was not to reaffirm the medieval theory of *ordines*, which precluded lay people from accessing the higher spheres of meditation, but to stress that the encounter with God could not be

¹⁸⁵ MONTEFUSCO 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Add., fol. 36v.

¹⁸⁷ Add., fol. 38r.

¹⁸⁸ Add., fol. 47v: 'Non presumant proprium statum transcendere et in montem interioris actus spiritus et viam contemplationis ascendere.'

programmed and calculated by following certain practices (i.e. meditation, vocal prayers, fasting, and night vigils). One might be granted a divine vision, but this never resulted from spiritual and bodily exercises or by following a rule.

The question arising from considering the general framework of the treatise concerned the way in which lay people could adhere to God. According to Biondo, the will was the central faculty leading to salvation. I will look at Biondo's understanding of human faculties in Chapter 3.5. For our purpose here, it suffices to say that, for Biondo, the will performed two specific acts: firstly, a voluntary decision to reach God's salvation as God intended; secondly, a confession of sinfulness, which God alone could vanquish. Biondo was aware that lay people were confronted with a series of difficulties (i.e. mundane preoccupations, family duties, and social responsibilities). However, they clung to God precisely by satisfying their responsibilities.

Biondo concluded with a collection of practical suggestions: how one should approach the sacrament of confession, how to choose a confessor, the definition of natural sins, the dangers connected to false preachers, how to behave during the mass and take the sacrament of communion, and how to attend to the various offices and holidays. He reaffirmed that lay people must fulfil their responsibilities and not fear hard work. Finally, for good measure, the work ended with a strong invective against Savonarola. As suggested by Dionisotti and stressed by Lodone, it is not unthinkable that Biondo added or updated this section to defend himself against the accusations laid against the *Ricordo*.¹⁸⁹

2.2.2.3.3 De amore proprio

The final treatise written by Biondo was *De amore proprio* (On Self-Love), completed in the house of Strinato degli Strinati a few years before Biondo's death. Unlike the other two treatises, which had a more defined structure and were seemingly oriented towards a wider audience, this treatise was addressed explicitly to Alessandra degli Ariosti. In what appears to be a hodgepodge of disparate themes, Biondo followed one central thread: the conflict between love and self-love. He explicitly stated his interest in discussing 'various things but before all else self-love'.¹⁹⁰ To show the nature of the struggle, Biondo employed various biblical pericopes, which, in turn, forced him into digressions that opened new dimensions related to the focal idea of self-love. The result was both intimate – he spoke personally to Alessandra –

¹⁸⁹ DIONISOTTI 1968, p. 264; LODONE 2020a, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹⁰ Add., fol. 105r: 'Ad sororem Alexandram de Ariostis, de pluribus et primum de amore proprio.'

and cosmic, as he strove to explain how self-love ruled over the world and eliminated the love of God and the warm wind of His Spirit (*Austro*).

The work started with a highly elaborated prologue in which apocalyptic passages were joined together to convey the idea that corruption had peaked, announcing the Antichrist's arrival. The son of this corruption was self-love, a subject that will be examined extensively in Chapter 4.4. Leaving out the treatments and remedies, Biondo acted like a physician tasked with diagnosing the human condition, identifying its main disease – self-love, and elucidating its symptoms and effects.¹⁹¹

Self-love compelled human beings towards time and the world, away from eternity and God. Since life was only possible in God, self-love led to self-annihilation. Recalling the dangers of imagination developed in *De meditatione*, self-love was also the attempt to establish a personal truth that opposed God's truth. In line with what he already proposed in the *Commentarius*, only those who became 'truly insignificant' (*veri minimi*) had access to God's love (*ultima charitade*).¹⁹² Those who rejected God's love followed Lucifer instead. Biondo then detailed the characteristics of Lucifer. This explanation was followed by an analysis of Matthew 25:24–27 (the parable of the talents) and a discussion on penance. Through various penitential steps, Christians were brought to reject their own actions, will, and intellect: they embraced passivity (*passione*) and rejected activity (*acto*).

This part is followed by a discussion on divine gifts and graces, supported by a commentary on Psalm 103 (104):20–21. The distinction between those who accepted God's gifts and those who contested them led Biondo to differentiate between natural darkness (created by God) and the night, which originated from human action. The separation between darkness and night encompassed the whole of humanity, which was, therefore, divided into those who followed God and those who disputed His authority. At this point, Biondo introduced the idea of deception. God did not force human beings to believe. Instead, He deceived and allowed the self-lovers to revel in their own self-glorification, ultimately destroying them. The notions of election and divine call introduced in the *Commentarius* were now connected to the essential theme of divine deception. I will examine their correlation in Chapter 6.5.

¹⁹¹ Add., fol. 106v: 'voglio piacendo a Dio che io possa dire qualche cosa de questo amor proprio et manifestar quello che lui in effecto et in substantia sia.'

¹⁹² Add., fol. 109v.

The opposite of separation was the union with God, which happened exclusively in one's mind. Like all mystics, Biondo acknowledged the incomprehensibility of this vision, although it shaped one's experience. Just as Christ wanted to be united with the members of his mystical body, so did Lucifer with the members of his corrupted mystical body. As Biondo admitted, here he was overwhelmed 'by a vast sea of ideas which came to mind'.¹⁹³ The first of these ideas concerned the intellect and how its divisions were connected to the definition of grace. Biondo divided grace into various types so that his readers would not confuse natural gifts (*gratiae gratis datae*) with the transcendental divine salvific grace (*gratis gratum faciens*). We will return to this subject in Chapter 5.2. More importantly, for Biondo, love (*carità*) was the moment when a person was united with God:

When love is united to the mind or when it renews itself, it becomes stronger and grows in the receptive faculty, while it unites to itself the higher part of the rational will, it unites all the inferior rational parts, even the senses and the flesh. And at that point, because it becomes just a point, that is, it becomes a time without time, God, who is that love, in this act takes possession of all the parts of the mind subordinated to the peak of the will mentioned above, and from that moment onwards in which this soul is given the most absolute, most perfect, most total, and most sublime freedom, God as the Lord no longer demands counsel or consent from this soul in time, a means to another similar point and moment, but He elevates and purifies it, and unites it to Him in the most powerful way, and so He makes this soul agree with Him for ever and ever (*denovo sempre*) for all eternity, in fact, in eternity itself.¹⁹⁴

Next, Biondo examined how the states of perfection coexisted with sin. He took religious orders as his example, where one could find both those who obeyed the rules and those who disregarded them. To answer this issue, Biondo referred Alessandra to Saint Paul and various doctors (whom he did not name). A third question that interested Biondo was understanding the reason for the growing blindness towards God's actions and will, especially among those who attempted to study God. The issue brought Biondo back to the distinction between divine

¹⁹³ Add., fol. 133v: 'uno immenso quasi mare de cose quale mi occorrono a la mente'.

¹⁹⁴ Add., fol. 135v–136r: 'La carità quando se unisce a la mente o quando se renova et reforza et cresce nella virtù passiva sempre nel unire a sé la volonta rationale elevata, unisce a quella tutte le sue parte rationale inferiore et anco el senso et la carne. Et in quel puncto, perché in puncto se fa cioè in un tempo senza tempo, Dio, che è essa carità, in questo acto piglia la possessione de tutte le parte subordinate a la prefata cima de la volontà, et da quel puncto in là nel quale a tale anima è data absolutissima perfectissima totalissima et sublimissima libertà, Dio como signore non domanda più consiglio né consenso de tale anima nel tempo meglio perfino ad un altro simile puncto et momento, nel quale elevando et purificando et più potentemente a sé uniendo quella la fa a sé denovo sempre per la eternità, immo etiam nella eternità consentire.'

truth and human truth, which he had previously discussed. This was followed by a section on the definition of prayer and its relationship with the will and intellect.

Summing up the main idea that underscored his discussion on the distinction of graces, the coexistence of evil and good, the problem of the human will that tries to define God's will, and the true meaning of prayer, Biondo ended the letter to Alessandra with an analysis of God as the first principle and ultimate end. This explanation allowed Biondo to clarify what he understood by religious orders (Biondo focused mainly on Franciscans and Dominicans), the issue of vocation and inspiration, the significance and nature of the rules, the adoption of philosophy by the friars, and the debate between philosophy and faith.

Finally, what mattered to Biondo was the reformation, a problem that he had already examined in the *Commentarius*. In contrast with the development that took place in the religious orders (especially in the Franciscan and Dominican Orders, which had histories that were, to different degrees, marked by continuous quarrelling over the importance given to poverty, obedience, mendicancy, apostleship, and preaching), Biondo affirmed the ineradicable centrality of the rules, which God had directly inspired.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, he concluded his argument not with a logical explanation based on biblical *exempla* or magisterial statements but with a confession of faith. He used his own life as a reference. In other words, just as he submitted to God, Biondo invited Alessandra to accept what he said and follow Saint Claire's rule. The charisma associated with his person had to be sufficient for her.

Significantly, Biondo did not propose for her to submit to him but exclusively to Christ. As explained by Brian Fitzgerald, a close connection had developed between inspiration, prophecy, and authority.¹⁹⁶ However, unlike the mystics Hildegard of Bingen or Catherine of Siena, who used their revelations and visions to initiate a radical renovation of the Church, Biondo, who also asserted knowledge of God's plans, never made any attempt to connect it to historical events.¹⁹⁷ What did this knowledge consist of then? An initial answer to this question could be that it was exclusively obedience (*obedientia* was a key word for Alessandra, a Clare nun) that could liberate her from the worldly shackles of self-love. I will return to this central

¹⁹⁵ On the changes within the mendicant orders, see LAPPIN 2011 and HOLLOWAY 2016 (for the Dominicans); BURR 2011 and MERLO 2003 (for the Franciscans).

¹⁹⁶ FITZGERALD 2017.

¹⁹⁷ On Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena's political activities, see KIENZLE 2010 and MCGINN 2012a, pp. 197–249, respectively.

problem in Chapter 5, where I analyse how obedience and self-annihilation, based on a kenotic understanding of Christ were integrated.

2.2.2.4 Poetry

In addition to the treatises in prose, we have several works in verse. Biondo's religious poetry was essential in transmitting his theological views and doctrinal positions. Even though his production was not extensive, we can confidently speak of *theologia poetica*, at least according to Petrarch's interpretation.¹⁹⁸ For Petrarch, poetry was connected to theology, for the poet was directly inspired by God and acted as a conduit of the divine word, disclosing the hidden truth that nobody else could see. Hence, his justification of poetry was directly influenced by the ancient association of *mania* and poetry.¹⁹⁹ For Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Cristoforo Landino (1428–1498), and Giovanni Caldiera (c. 1395–1474), the defence of poetry was based on the idea of a *prisca theologia*.²⁰⁰ The ancient poets, *prisci theologi*, spoke of Christ unknowingly. It was the task of modern thinkers and scholars to draw the connections (*concordantiae* for Caldiera). As Salutati argued against Giovanni Dominici, there was a universal truth (which, for Salutati, was tied to the Christian God) that underscored both the Christian writings and all works of literature, regardless of time and space. It was the task of the scholar to use the appropriate interpretation. Biondo seemed to agree with the humanists. In the letter to Paolo, he acknowledged that Greek and Latin works had a moralising value, just as Landino had argued in his commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, Biondo pushed Paolo not to waste time with works where the truth was hidden under allegories but where it was evident, namely the Bible.

The same point emerged in the extensive glosses accompanying the poem entitled *Al foco* (To Fire). Biondo's self-commentary was neither meant to allegorise the poem nor to introduce a further level of interpretation that was not already present in the text but to illuminate the obscurity of the letter.²⁰¹ He was aware that poetry is a highly compressed form, and he certainly did not make it easier with his abundance of oxymorons and antinomies, which were helpful, however, to express the intricate relationship between faith and reason, spirit and letter, *sapientia* and *scientia*, divine *Logos* and human language. For example, in lines 73–74, Biondo wrote: 'death with life / in a subject stay', and he clarified: 'this subject is the soul, its faculties and passions'; in lines 113–16, the poem reads: 'By virtue of the divine subject, / the

¹⁹⁸ TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 683–697.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 690.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 697–721.

²⁰¹ On the practice of the self-commentary, see MINNIS 2010, pp. xxxi–xxxiii.

faulty nature is overcome / through the pulling of the object'. In the note, Biondo explained: 'The subject here is the divine person of Jesus Christ, communicated to the annihilated soul'.²⁰²

Poetry was also where the exposition of dogmas met the intimate dimension of Biondo's passionate faith. As an expression of the inner turmoil that animated Biondo's piety, the poems expressed his desire to pursue personal annihilation and *spogliamento* (self-disrobing) at all costs. This desire found its natural habitat in poetry rather than in his academic treatises (although I do not discount their value).²⁰³ This topic requires greater reflection as it conflicted drastically with the actualisation of the ecclesiastical dimension, understood as the space where neighbourly love was supposed to fulfil itself.

Regarding the question of the chronological order of Biondo's poems, we cannot rely on incontrovertible evidence. For instance, even if it would seem obvious to place the *Third Mystical Hymn* after the *Second*, the reality is that examples of elaboration, renaming, and repositioning of poems were as common in Biondo as in other poets. Famous examples include Dante and Petrarch, both masters in the art of identity construction. An example closer to Biondo is his friend Paolo Porcari. The Neapolitan codex V. E. 57, a collection of his poems, shows many examples of rearrangement, cancellation, and repositioning. The same occurred with Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230–1306), one of the direct models for Biondo's poetry, as witnessed by the abundance of material that survives in the Seville codex and was testified to in Biondo's own words. Each of the various editions of Jacopone's *laudario* followed a different order and promoted a different narrative; this problem has not been solved by modern critical editions.²⁰⁴

Let us now look at Biondo's corpus, starting with the shorter texts. Two sonnets survive. In the first one, Biondo turned a friend's question concerning his visit into an existential portrait of himself. Biondo confessed his ongoing attempts to contain his free will so as to serve God better. This battle was a cause of suffering, but it was, at the same time, the only joy he knew. The second sonnet was occasioned by the conversion of Saint Paul (Acts 9:1–9). Here, Biondo's language verged on illegibility as he tried to develop, in highly dense verses, the entanglement of human and divine wills. On the one hand, we have Paul's obstinacy, whose

²⁰² Sev., fol.29r: 'La morte con la vita / in un subiecto stanno'; in the note: 'In un subiecto: Questo subiecto è l'anima et le sue potentie et passione'. Ibid., fol. 30r: 'In virtù del subiecto / divino, è trapassata / la natura mancata / per tirare de lo obiecto'; in note: 'El subiecto qui è a persona divina de Iesu Christo communicata a l'anima annihilata.'

²⁰³ I should add that I do not consider Biondo to be a remarkable poet. As an epigone of Jacopone, he sits in his shadow. However, the personal note is what makes him interesting.

²⁰⁴ See LEONARDI 2007.

will, however, should have been mobile and ready to accept God's will. On the other hand, we have God's eternal plan, which, rather than being presented as a rigid and immutable pattern, was alive, and turned, in love, towards his persecutor. The encounter between God and Paul gave Biondo – one of God's 'lost sheep' – hope for a similar conversion: to turn from 'wolf into lamb'.

The *Second Mystical Hymn* comprises sixty verses. In this hymn, Biondo encouraged his persecuted spiritual brothers, the *poverelli*, to escape and hide beneath the earth. On the theme of flight and persecution, I will return in Chapter 5.1.3. As for the idea of poverty, this will be discussed in the following section as we take a close look at the historical context and Biondo's sources. Biondo depicted an apocalyptic scenario of conflict and divine retribution. The gentle dove (a symbol for the Spirit of divine love) now held a sword, and the crucified Lamb, who drank the blood of his enemies, was angered and described as seeking vengeance (see Revelation 6).²⁰⁵ The final judgement was approaching fast, with nowhere to hide from God's wrath. One aspect we will have to examine attentively: in lines 29–30, Biondo referred to the elect as 'eternal children'. Who were these children? When were they defined as such? The poem ends with a series of oxymorons ('dead life', 'dead and alive', 'this bad living which is infernal death', and 'poison that gives life'), through which Biondo invited his readers not to mistake this earthly life for the eternal life, which could only be reached through death.²⁰⁶

Despite the richness of these three examples, it is undeniable that the *Third Mystical Hymn* and the poem *Al foco*, of respectively 1508 and 936 verses, represent the apex of Biondo's poetic production. For this reason, they require a more detailed examination. However, since I refer to them during the dissertation, I will only highlight their structures and major themes.

2.2.2.4.1 Third Mystical Hymn

This long and convoluted poem was built on intricate images and paradoxical language, designed to display the mysterious ambivalences of death and life, love and justice, election and damnation, faith and industriousness. In a brief prose introduction, Biondo clarified that the poem would deal with hypocrites and false believers who dared to measure the heavenly

²⁰⁵ See also *Laude*, p. 28: 'L'agnolo sta a trombare voce de gran paura.'

²⁰⁶ Sev., fol. 126v: 'morto et vivo [...] questo mio viver mal / che è morte infernal [...] o mio vital veneno.'

skies with their hands (an apparent reference to Dante but originating from Isaiah 40:12).²⁰⁷ The poem, however, touches on numerous additional topics.

After a doctrinal introduction on the nature of the Christian Trinity, meant to prove Biondo's orthodoxy, he voiced a legitimate doubt: Did God truly love him?²⁰⁸ The question originated from the fact that God seemed to side with His enemies by giving them every form of worldly power and wisdom.²⁰⁹ Did this mean that God had also given them salvation?²¹⁰ This question is central to this dissertation as its answer helps define the love of God and clarify whether God's love is limited by His justice. The seriousness of the question is indicated by the fact that God Himself answered it. Further, it highlighted a direct relationship between God and man, which did not need any clerical mediation (such as Biondo himself). God affirmed, first of all, His complete and unfettered freedom.²¹¹ Created in the image and likeness of God, human beings were also free. However, there would also be a judgement. God explained that, in that final decision, the mundane order would be reversed: the oppressed would be freed, the false cult would be unmasked, death would become life and vice versa.²¹²

God's freedom meant that God revealed Himself in two distinct ways: He either offered Himself wholly or only in part.²¹³ This fundamental distinction contradicted what God had said earlier, namely that 'He is the life' (John 11:25 and 14:6). How could God be the life and the sustaining principle of the universe and, at the same time, deny Himself? We will examine this in Chapter 6.4. When God revealed Himself entirely, He also granted eternal life and a mystical experience. In the other case, God gave only temporal gifts. Those who received them remained stuck in time. God gave of Himself partially in two ways: covertly and openly.²¹⁴ The first way affected the philosophers and the theologians; the false believers experienced the second way. I will explore these two groups in Chapter 4.3. For Biondo, the biblical passage that more clearly explained God's dual revelation was the Matthean parable of the virgins (25:1–13). Biondo inserted it several times in his writings. He saw a direct connection between the oil brought by the foolish virgins with their hands (and therefore externally) and the absence of

²⁰⁷ Add., fol. 160v. DANTE 1988, III, p. 324 (*Paradiso*, IX, 79–81).

²⁰⁸ Add., fol. 161v: 'perché dubita molto / se a te piace o despiace'. This is very much the same question asked in the anonymous poem in Sev., fol. 92r: 'Saper vorrei Signore se 'l te piacesse / se la mia vita te piace o te despiace.'

²⁰⁹ Add., fol. 161v: 'Hora mi maraviglio / che a' nemici te dai, / et sol con loro fai / tuo segreto consiglio.'

²¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 162r: 'Dimmi se so' ingannato, / o pur si vedo el vero: / che a lor tuo regno e impero / non hai però donato.'

²¹¹ Ibid., fol. 162v: 'Posso e so quel ch'io voglio'.

²¹² Ibid.: 'vedrai da te fugire / la morte annihilata / et vita doventare / tuo morir et penare'.

²¹³ Ibid., fol. 164r–v: 'In dui modi mi dono / a le mie creature [...] A mi dono tutto / tracto in me lo ritengo [...] Ma chi sol tengo in parte / perché in parte lo lascio'.

²¹⁴ Ibid., fol. 165r: 'Questi son de due sorte: / un più chiaro et aperto, / l'altro tutto coperto'.

Christ inside of them (they lacked the *forma*, the substance of Christ).²¹⁵ The relationship between *forma*, Christ, and inwardness will be examined in Chapter 5.1. In the poem, this is the point in which God says He has answered Biondo's initial question.

However, God further explored the differences between those who approached Him on their own terms, to whom God revealed Himself partially, and those who trusted God completely and to whom God offered Himself entirely. What happened to the latter? God would settle in the apex of their minds.²¹⁶ While the intellect was annihilated, the human will became one with God's will. Since God worked from the inside, He seized the entire soul in hidden ways. There was a war within the created being between the will of God and human desire. This war was a cause of suffering. God became temporal, and, at the same time, man became eternal in God.²¹⁷ In this union and reciprocal embrace, man assented to God.

For those to whom God gave of Himself only partially, self-love was what drove them towards Him. Here we can see the same unresolvable tension highlighted in *De meditatione*. Self-lovers seemed to move towards Him, but in truth, they walked away from Him; yet, they could not renounce Him entirely. Their natural desire worked against their obedience to God. What they attempted to achieve through efforts and exercises ('to measure the sky with their hands') could only be gained when God drew them towards Himself.²¹⁸

In the final part, Biondo explained how the emptiness that Christ brought demanded that human beings embrace the crucifix, which was 'unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:23). The poem ends, therefore, with a quatrain inviting Biondo's readers to let God cause total devastation (*fracassa*) inside of them.²¹⁹ Only then – by becoming 'the filth of the world' (1 Corinthians 4:13) – they would adhere to God's will.

2.2.2.4.2 Al foco

Like the *Third Mystical Hymn*, this poem uses paradoxical language, oxymorons, and contradictory imagery, to advance into the divine mystery. Unlike the *Third Hymn*, however, the crucifixion was the starting point: God invited human beings to follow 'the love that leads

²¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 166r: 'Portan l'olio de fuore / non dentro a sé nascosto [...] fuori sta l'olio mio [...] perché io non son lor forma.'

²¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 169r: 'In questa parte altissima / de l'human intellecto / ho facto el mio ver letto / et sedia bellissima.'

²¹⁷ Ibid., fol. 170r: 'Eterno temporale / in lor facti con meco / vivo mutabil seco / nel mio tempo eternale.'

²¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 170v: 'misuran ciel con spanna [...] [Dio] vole ch'el nostro limo / non venga ma sie tracto.'

²¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 173v: 'Passi a te quel che passa, / tu lascia che lo eterno / faccia nel tuo interno / qual' vol di te fracassa.'

to the garden of the cross'.²²⁰ The cross of Christ was written in their hearts (see Jeremiah 31:33); therefore, they reached the new eternal life in Christ only through what was inside the human heart and not external to it.²²¹

How could men and women accept the cross? The only way was through paradoxical positions: 'believing without any pledge [...] without money or sign, [having] faith against faith, against every hope, the most faithful trust that sees the invisible'.²²² Notably, the word Biondo used was *pegno*, a synonym of *arra*, a term that typically referred to the Holy Spirit. Biondo's point was to draw a sharp distinction between the Spirit, which was invisible, and His gifts. We will return to this point in Chapter 5.2, where I look at Biondo's pneumatology. In the poem, darkness was said to become light, gaining to turn into losing, and suffering to be a delight.²²³ The believer lived only in God's light.²²⁴ It followed that faith was closely related to self-doubt.²²⁵ I should like to point out that the anonymous short poem in Sev., fol. 93r expressed the same point.

For Biondo, doubting did not necessarily mean embracing scepticism and renouncing God but recognising that everything was a gift from God.²²⁶ *Spogliamento* – the act of self-disrobing – led to understanding God as the Giver. Significantly, suffering did not cease.²²⁷ On the contrary, it became the *forma vivendi* (the way of life) believers must adopt. They become 'a wise fool'.²²⁸ To clarify the distinction between appearance and substance, Biondo introduced the physiological distinction between higher and lower regions of the soul. The former dealt with God, the latter with reason and the senses. God acted upon the former, and for this reason, it suffered (*passio*); the latter experienced only the world, while it performed its voluntary acts (*actus*). These complex issues will be carefully examined in various parts of this dissertation.

Biondo's final point demonstrated how God's election worked against human logic: 'first You make them celestial, and then infernal, inhuman more than that, and [yet it is

²²⁰ Sev., fol. 27v: 'l'amor che guida / al giardin de la croce.'

²²¹ Ibid., fol. 28r: 'l'ha stampato in core'; 'quanto più se incentra'.

²²² Ibid., fol. 31r: 'O creder senza pegno [...] senza / denari, o alcun segno, / o fede contra fede, / contra ogni speranza, / finissima leanza / che l'invisibil vede.' On the translation of *finissimo* with most faithful, see BATTAGLIA 1961–2009, 'Fine', sig. 8, V, p. 1031.

²²³ Sev., fol. 31v: 'le tenebre son luce [...] el perder solo è acquisto [...] dà pena ogni dilecto / se non de pena è mixto'.

²²⁴ Ibid., fol. 32v: 'vive in luce divina'.

²²⁵ Ibid., fol. 33v: 'né li par bon né bello / né suo pensar né fare'.

²²⁶ Ibid., fol. 33r: 'Altro che don non vede / chi ha ben li occhii aperti'.

²²⁷ Ibid., fol. 34v: 'vive nel suo tormento'.

²²⁸ Ibid., fol. 35v: 'savio stulto'.

precisely then that] You clothe them the most with Yourself'.²²⁹ Against all doubts and suffering, for Biondo, God's creation was directed entirely at the elect.²³⁰ Like 'Job, who was approved while he was in a dunghill but will be divine, rich, and saintly', so 'God will take the elect out of their wretchedness, prison, mud, scum'.²³¹ The example of Job reveals the importance this book had for Biondo. He mentioned it several times in his works. Particularly dear to Biondo were chapters 40 and 41, where the monsters Leviathan and Behemoth were introduced. We will also have to deal with their significance. The elect were like the sacrament of the eucharist: externally, they were wine and grain, but internally, they were the blood and flesh of Christ.

By contrast, the eucharist poisoned the damned. This extremely interesting sacramental interpretation will be examined more in depth in Chapter 6.5.3. Finally, Biondo's vision rose to an eschatological level. He showed the battle between evil and Heaven, noting that the divine judgement would forever divide humanity. The damned would be cast into Hell, and the elect would be eternally glorious in God.

2.2.2.5 *Fragments and Works-in-Progress*

Not all the works written by Biondo reached completion. Some have survived only in a fragmentary state, unfinished, or as works-in-progress. The majority of these are found in the Magliabechiano codex. I have transcribed most of them, for, in my opinion, they complement and, at times, add to what Biondo said in his letters, treatises, and poems. They can now be read in the Appendix, documents 5–14. Each of them has been given a title. Some of these titles correspond to the rubrics found in the manuscript (for instance, documents 9–10). In the absence of a clear title, I used the *incipit*. I have summarised the content of each text in a short introduction and divided them into paragraphs for easier understanding.

One aspect I should like to point out is that, despite their fragmentary state, some of these texts appear to be connected and possibly were to be integrated by Biondo into a future, more extensive project. Specifically, documents 5, 11, 12, and 13 deal with the interaction of the human will and divine grace. Text 9, on the other hand, begins with a set of points that Biondo would like to develop; he only managed to deal with the first one. Another element worthy of attention is that, in these texts, Biondo never mentioned his audience. One exception

²²⁹ Ibid., fol. 43v: 'Prima li fai celesti / et poi li fai infernali, / oltra questo brutali / et di te lor più vesti.'

²³⁰ Ibid., fol. 43v: 'Et tutto el tuo lavoro / che nel principio festi / par che dica et attesti / l'acto tuo in costoro.'

²³¹ Ibid., fol. 44r: 'Quando Job approbato / in puza et sterquilino / serà tutto divino, / ricco, et san diventato, / trarali de miseria / prison et luto et feza'.

is Text 11 § 22, where Biondo alluded to a possible readership. Finally, all of them were written in Latin; however, there are moments when Biondo lapsed into vernacular.²³² The implication might be that these texts were either exercises that Biondo later abandoned (Text 9, for instance), or they were incorporated into other works. For instance, the examination of the will in Text 8 shows many similarities with a section of the *Commentarius*.

2.2.2.6 Translations

Another area covered by Biondo's literary activity was that of translation. Biondo was equally fluent in Latin and the Italian vernacular. The most prominent example of Biondo's diglossia is the *Commentarius*, Biondo's translation of his own work, the *Ricordo*. As pointed out by Lodone, cross-examination of the *Commentarius* with the passages of the *Ricordo* preserved in the *Quaestio* by Antonio Trombetta reveals that Biondo did not change the text drastically.²³³ Importantly, however, Biondo seemingly opted for a more nuanced approach and was less confrontational and clear-cut in asserting his positions. Despite the small changes, the gist and the message remained intact.

Two points should be noted. Firstly, from a doctrinal point of view, Biondo was firm in his positions. The trial of Capucci had nothing but corroborated his eschatological views. The constant conflict and the rejection confirmed that the tide of corruption had indeed peaked, as he explained at the beginning of *De amore proprio*. As seen above in the letter to the three Florentine women, Capucci's liberation had become the substance of dreams.²³⁴ Secondly, from a linguistic point of view, the shift from the vernacular to Latin did not mean that the text had become more elaborate or richer in ideas. There was no significant difference in whether Biondo used Latin or vernacular. Biondo was able to work fluently in both languages, and both languages were reasonable means to convey both philosophical and theological ideas. From this point of view, Biondo's ability to convey his views in both languages confirms the conclusions reached by the research project led by David Lines on vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy, that is, that both languages coexisted and demand scholarly attention equally.²³⁵ Indeed, one could argue that, for evangelisation and salvation, the passage from vernacular to Latin involved a loss, for the text was no longer readily available to all those who

²³² Mag., fol. 44r.

²³³ LODONE 2020a, p. 213.

²³⁴ Fra., fol. 239v: 'Ho sogniato stamatina che el medico è uscito di carcere tutto alegro, non pareva però che fusse in tutto libero ma se avesse a representare a non so chi con certe condicione. Fu sogno; se serà verità saperemolo.' See LODONE 2016, p. 540.

²³⁵ On this project, see LINES AND REFINI 2014.

desired to read it if they lacked the relevant language skills. Preachers recognised the importance of the vernacular for pastoral purposes. For example, the *Zardino de oration fructuoso*, attributed to the Franciscan Nicholas of Osimo († c. 1453), clearly acknowledged that many could not profit from the *libri litterali e scientifici*, and yet they also tried to come close to God. For this reason, he chose to write in the vernacular.²³⁶

Biondo translated not only his writings but also those of others. The Seville codex preserves a translation into the vernacular of the Latin *De remediis contra tentationes spirituales huius temporis* by Peter John Olivi. According to its table of contents, the manuscript was supposed to contain two other translations. Furthermore, from two letters to Alessandra degli Ariosti, we learn that Biondo intended to buy a copy of a work by Ubertino of Casale, most probably the *Arbor vitae crucifixae*, recently published to enormous success.²³⁷ Biondo noted that the text was highly complex, perhaps unsuitable for Alessandra and her fellow nuns.²³⁸ Eventually, he bought the book in Rome and sent it to Bologna. To help Alessandra, he considered translating it into the Italian vernacular.²³⁹ Unfortunately, we do not know whether he ever attempted to complete his planned translation.

Another aspect related to Biondo's ability to work with multiple languages has to do with the various versions of the Bible that were at his disposal. He was aware that there was a Septuagint ('*da li 70 interpreti*'); the Jerome translation ('*la verità hebraica secondo Hieronimo and Nicolò de Lyra*'), and a Gallican Bible ('*secondo la translatione gallicana*').²⁴⁰ Unlike the humanist Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459), almost a contemporary of Biondo, who was working on a new translation of the OT starting not from the Greek but the original Hebrew, Biondo did not find any reason to doubt the validity of each translation.²⁴¹ From his point of view, all versions were correct and reliable, to the extent that each translation highlighted one aspect. For instance, regarding Psalm 102 (103):20, while he acknowledged the disagreements between the *versio antiqua* and the *littera hebraica*, he also noted that both had a profound meaning 'hidden to the human intellect'.²⁴² Biondo did not explain the reasoning behind his approach. We can speculate that he justified it by the same hermeneutical

²³⁶ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, *prologue*. On Nicholas of Osimo, see PELLEGRINI 2013.

²³⁷ For., fol. 22r–v. On Ubertino's reception, see PIRON 2014.

²³⁸ For., fol. 22r: 'Vorreste Ubertino, tale electione a curiosi è veneno.'

²³⁹ Ibid., fol. 22v: 'Mandovi uno Ubertino portato da Roma qua [...] Voria et emendare lo latino, et farlo volgare.'

²⁴⁰ Add., fols 87r, 88r. On the different versions of the Bible, see CHIESA 1996.

²⁴¹ Manetti would eventually translate only the Psalter. On Manetti, see TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 581–601.

²⁴² Add., fol. 118v: 'secondo l'una et l'altra lettera, è dicto dal profeta a Dio: *Tu hai posto le tenebre et facta è la nocte. In essa passeranno*, secondo la lettera comune, overo *Seranno mosse*, secondo la hebraica, *tutte le bestie de la selva*. Secondo l'una et l'altra lettera che significa gran cosa et molto ascosta dal humano intellecto'.

principles that guided his exegesis. As the inherent richness of the Spirit of the Scriptures allowed for multiple interpretations that none could fully capture, so it was for translations. Accordingly, the underlying idea was that no translation could ever be equivalent to the original – perhaps not even the Hebrew version – but each added something unique to the Word of the Spirit. At the same time, each translation – not only Jerome’s *Vulgate* – became valuable. Unlike Erasmus, who would struggle to find the perfect Latin rendition of the Greek *logos*, we could say that Biondo would instead appreciate how each word (be that meant as *sermo*, *verbum* or *oratio*) added something unique to the divine *Logos*.

2.2.2.7 *Dubii dechiarati per messer Gabriele Biondo a sor Alixandra*

One text that stands out in Biondo’s oeuvre is the collection of *dubia* Biondo wrote for Alessandra degli Ariosti. This type of text was often written by spiritual directors and should be placed next to the many letters (both existing and those that were mentioned but have been lost) in which Biondo specifically addressed doctrinal problems.

The text is significant because it offers a succinct summary of various issues we will return to throughout this dissertation. Within it, Biondo answered seven doubts. The first piece of advice concerned Alessandra’s difficulties in engaging with God. Biondo suggested constant self-examination and that she seek for God’s guidance. The second doubt dealt with bodily and spiritual penance. The text is corrupted, but the main idea is that, for Biondo, there was no established ‘*forma de vivere*’. This concept was especially important for, in Alessandra’s case, a Saint Clare nun, her duty was to uphold the rule (*‘la sua professione’*) according to ‘her particular gifts and graces’.²⁴³ He then explained how each person occupied a specific place within the Church, corresponding to specific responsibilities. Lay people responded to the Ten Commandments; friars and nuns (like Alessandra) to the solemn vows of their orders; clerics, like Biondo, to a tacit vow. Everyone, however, was evaluated by God. From this point of view, Biondo was relatively close to the position Valla expressed in his *De professione religiosorum* (On Monastic Vows).²⁴⁴ In this text, which Biondo in all likelihood did not know, Valla explained that the term *religiosus* had been misappropriated by the members of religious orders. For Valla, every believer was a *religiosus*, for every baptised person entered the communion with God regardless of his or her subsequent choice to pledge obedience to a monastic order.

²⁴³ Sev., fol. 15r.

²⁴⁴ I return to this text in Chapter 3.5, where I examine Biondo’s relationship with the humanists.

On a completely unrelated matter, Alessandra asked if the happy face of a dead person meant salvation. Biondo did not connect the two but invited Alessandra to pray. The fifth doubt concerned the souls in Purgatory and the visions of demons. Concerning the sixth doubt, Biondo advised her not to believe that external acts of devotion were necessary for salvation, without which one could have hope. For Biondo, there was no correlation and, therefore, no necessary merit between human actions and divine redemption. Finally, Biondo suggested that Alessandra should leave aside any pleasant activity and only seek to please God: ‘I will say it to you more clearly: place all your interest, passion, and desire in being able to be liked by God, and not to try to find out how much or when you like Him’.²⁴⁵

2.2.2.8 *Lost works*

Before moving to the next Chapter, we should not forget Biondo’s lost works. I have already mentioned the commentary on the Holy Father for Chiara Gozzadini and the *Ricordo*, though, fortunately, Biondo’s Latin translation remains. Other missing works further testify to Biondo’s tireless activity. In *De meditatione*, Biondo mentioned in passing a treatise, which he had already begun, entitled *De timore* (On Fear) and a second prologue to his moral exposition of the Psalms.²⁴⁶ Although we know nothing about both works, one detail stands out: according to his words, Biondo worked simultaneously on multiple projects. We may also assume that they complemented each other. This approach is evident in a text where Biondo discussed the necessity of definitions.²⁴⁷ After explaining the etymology of the word grace, Biondo stressed the connection between grace and light. However, he did not expand on it, for, as he explained, he already dealt with this topic in another work, entitled *De luminibus* (On the Lights).²⁴⁸

Finally, the table of contents of the Seville manuscript reveals not only the unfortunate loss of many works but also, if it were not already evident, the variety of Biondo’s literary activity and interests. The manuscript lists: a collection of fragments of letters (it could be the Forlì codex, as already pointed out by Lodone); a letter of seven folios to Alessandra degli Ariosti and a short one accompanied by three sonnets (it seems that the sonnets have survived); an assortment of valuable admonitions by Catherine of Siena; three works by Peter John Olivi, two of them translated in the Italian vernacular; and Olivi’s *Postilla super Job*. The loss of this

²⁴⁵ Sev., fol. 19v: ‘Dirovelo più chiaro, che debiati ponere tutto el vostro studio, affecto et desiderio vostro in possere a Dio piacere voi, et non cercare come ello quanto o quando possa piacere a voi.’

²⁴⁶ Add., fol. 74r: ‘Spero nel Signore me darà gratia de chiarire in altro tractato già cominzato De timore et più amplamente nel secondo prologo de la morale expositione de psalmi.’

²⁴⁷ See Appendix, 14.

²⁴⁸ Mag., fol. 62r: ‘in alio tractatu De luminibus de natura lucis huius plura edidimus que faciunt ad propositum opus’.

last title is particularly significant, not only because we would have had another text witnessing the contemporary interest in Olivi's work but also for the possibility of finding Biondo's marginal notes accompanying the text. As we will see in Chapters 3.3.1 and 6.4.4., Biondo admired Olivi; however, he also interpreted his sources with a measure of independence.

CHAPTER 3: Philology, *Auctoritates*, and Sources

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the internal and external tensions that make defining God as love problematic. While the centripetal tendency towards an intimate experience of faith conflicted with its centrifugal actualisation in works of charity and sacramental liturgy, the notion of predestination seemed to contradict the idea of an *ecclesia universalis* and curtail God's love.¹ To correctly understand these dichotomies, I suggested not to separate the ideas concerning God (which develop internally) from the social and ecclesiastical dimensions (the actualisation of these ideas in the *civitas Dei*). The one can only be understood in connection with the other, and vice versa.

In Chapter 2, on the account that Biondo is a relatively unknown figure, I summarised his life and briefly described his works. I traced his movements, identified the nature of his audience, and examined the conflicts that occurred between him and itinerant preachers, the followers of Savonarola, and the ecclesiastical authorities, who contested the orthodoxy of Biondo's *Ricordo*. By providing a summary analysis of his works, I highlighted the range of his religious propositions. One specific aspect emerged in all his writings: Biondo's pastoral commitment. In other words, all of his writings directed readers to acknowledge their sinful state, move towards reformation, and attempt to gain salvation. Thus, the ideas Biondo developed about God (either in an original way or from a tradition to which he belonged) would to be fulfilled in the realisation of the Church.

However, before examining how Biondo understood God as love and how this principle was realised in the Church, one preliminary question must be answered: How do we deal with this wide range of material that differs in length, subject, language, audience, genre, state of preservation, completion, and conditions of production (date, place, and occasion)? To answer this question, I think it is appropriate to clarify how I have approached the material at my disposal. This is examined in Section 1 of this Chapter. Then, I think it is incumbent to look at Biondo's sources, direct and indirect, which I have divided into four groups (Sections 2 to 5). I start with the sources that are chronologically more removed from Biondo and for which there is no apparent direct reference in his writings. These two sources were Augustine and Dionysius or, to be more precise, the kind of Augustinianism and Platonism that shaped the

¹ I have not clarified what predestination means for Biondo and to what tradition he subscribed (if any). This will be done in Chapter 6.4.

general thinking of the time. As I move closer to Biondo's time, attention is given to the direct influence that some specific members of the Franciscan Order had on Biondo. The next step is to look at the criticism that Biondo levelled at the scholastic and humanistic traditions, and the ambiguity of the concepts he adopted that belonged either to scholastic traditions of learning or to the *studia humanitatis*. Even though Biondo did not name names, he clearly distanced himself from both the schoolmen and humanists. Before I move on, I should clarify that these labels (Augustinianism, scholasticism, Platonism, humanism, Franciscanism) simply indicate general attitudes and currents. I am fully aware of their limits and that each of them include several conflicting positions.

3.1 Manuscripts: Limitations and Methodology

First, from a paleographical point of view, I should say that I have approached the study of the codices in a diplomatic and conservative way. Therefore, I have preserved Biondo's spelling without normalising the different variations. For easier reading, I have resolved the abbreviations and modernised the punctuation.

In general, while addressing this material, three limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, we cannot ascertain his hand irrefutably. Although we may have examples of it (for instance, the glosses of the poem *Al focolo*), we still cannot rely on an autograph. Secondly, it is evident from the manuscripts that Biondo's writings have been arranged and edited. The Forlì manuscript is a leading example. Here, we have letters that have been cut and grouped. A similar arrangement is found in the London codex, where two groups of letters were organised by their respective recipients, Giovan Battista Bartoli and Strinato degli Strinati. One might think that the recipient's identity was the main factor behind the way in which the material was assembled; however, there are too many extraneous items to make this the only factor. We are therefore led to conclude that we neither know how Biondo intended to arrange his writings nor if he ever asked himself this question. Thirdly, since the texts are not ordered chronologically, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assert what was written at which time. Even though internal references can help us remedy this weakness to some extent, the problem remains. This challenge is especially evident in the documents included in the Magliabechiano codex. The conclusion is that these codices are deficient in several respects. They neither fully represent Biondo's life and literary output nor correspond entirely to his intentions. Moreover, the insufficiency of what we have depends not only on the manuscripts but also the relationship

between Biondo and his disciples, which, as noted in Chapter 2.1, valued orality and personal contact.

This consideration allows me to point to a further complication: Biondo's writings travelled as attachments to his letters.² In one of his missives, Biondo admitted being worried about the safety of this procedure.³ This fear became even more acute during the years of the trial, which revealed profound dissensions between Biondo and the friars involved in the proceedings.⁴ Therefore, one can reasonably assume that the fear of possible repercussions led Biondo to embrace a form of self-censure and dissimulation, a Nicodemite approach as a precautionary measure.⁵ The term Nicodemite was first used derogatorily by the Reformer Jean Calvin to denote those who had embraced Protestant ideals but maintained a Catholic façade because they feared for their lives.⁶ Cantimori cleansed the word of its disparaging meaning and used it in a specific, historical sense to refer to those Italians of the late sixteenth century who had embraced the Reformation but maintained an appearance of deference to the Roman Church.⁷ When in this dissertation I say that Biondo followed a Nicodemite approach, I do not mean that Biondo had developed a covert rejection of the Roman ecclesiastical institutions, but that in certain circumstances Biondo needed to dissimulate his faith. From this point of view, it would be a mistake to judge Biondo as a proto-Reformer who became a Nicodemite. Nonetheless, some of the features and attitudes Cantimori studied in those Italian heretics of the late Cinquecento, who were caught in the fire between Reformers and Catholics, can also be noticed in Biondo, in particular, the appeal to flight. This subject will be examined in Chapter 6.1.3; there, we will also see that, by flight, Biondo meant not a call to political renovation but both a return to inward piety and a plea to seek refuge in an eschatological solution, in which death and life were subverted. At that point, Human beings will no longer

² Add., fol. 184r: 'l'altre cosette quale pertanto recarete con voi et poi che seranno emendate'. Ibid., fol. 179r: 'Per Zorzo del Bello ho havuta una vostra lettera.' See For., fol. 17r: 'hareti da mi qualche lettera per via del cancelero del locotenente, il cui figliolo, secretario del Camerlengo, è mio intimo'. On the transmission of manuscripts, see RICHARDSON 2009.

³ For., fol. 17r: 'non vi ho scripto più tempo, né da voi ho ricevuta lettera, per carestia de fideli meggi, che messi pur ce sono'.

⁴ Add., fols 190v–191v, 196v: 'Al frate non havete mostrate mie lettere, harò caro non le mostrate, per non li dare materia de colorire busie et argento de fare archimia de quale sono grandi artifici.' On the conflict with the local authorities, see LODONE 2013.

⁵ On Nicodemism, see CANTIMORI 1939, pp. 64–70; CANTIMORI 1959, pp. 518–536; ROTONDÒ 1967; GINZBURG 1970; SIMONCELLI 1979. See also the introduction by Massimo Firpo in JUAN DE VALDÉS 1994, pp. vi–cl. Most of the studies have focused on the second half of the sixteenth century, when the dialogue between Rome and Protestants almost ceased and therefore the conditions of those who remained in Italy but had embraced the reform became unsustainable. See the recent work by ANNE OVERELL (2019), who interestingly explores Nicodemism both in Italy and England.

⁶ GINZBURG 1970, pp. xi–xiii.

⁷ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 70.

abide by the logic of human reason but exclusively the logic of God. In this respect the hymn *Fugiam fugiam* is emblematic.

A further aspect of Nicodemism should be considered. Carlo Ginzburg argued strongly for a doctrinal foundation of this movement.⁸ As a precautionary measure against a political system perceived as being oppressive, he saw that simulation had always existed; therefore, what made the sixteenth-century Nicodemism a religious phenomenon was its specific doctrinal foundation, which Ginzburg called the lawfulness of simulation (*la liceità della simulazione*).⁹ In other words, simulation in the Cinquecento was not simply a response to political oppression but was justified by dogmatic and logical propositions. As such, it became a tenable religious stance. For Ginzburg, Nicodemism crystallised in the works of Otto Brunfels, a Carthusian monk who later left the order. One work is significant for us, the *Pandettae*, which Ginzburg considered the manifesto of Nicodemism. Here Brunfels theorised and gave a scriptural basis to religious simulation. In doing so, Brunfels legitimated a series of latent tendencies. I argue that Ginzburg's conclusions with respect to Brunfels and Nicodemism in general can be applied to Biondo. This process will help us understand that Biondo's conception of God as love did not coincide with the orthodox doctrinal view of the time. Consequently, a conflict ensued between forms of interior and exterior piety (i.e. the two churches Prospero spoke of in his 2007 essay).

Here it is important to add that Biondo's need for secrecy and privacy did not necessarily imply a fear of institutions. Perhaps this attitude preceded the events of the trial and became more prominent after it. There was a contemporary current of religious lay piety, based on Matthew 6:1–4, that promoted discretion and distance from public fame. In Florence, for example, we have the *compagnie della notte* (Congregations of the Night) which met at night to meditate on Christ's Passion, away from the daily buzz.¹⁰ Research by Solfaroli Camillocci has shown how, in Genoa, the group that formed around the *notaio* Ettore Vernazza (c. 1470–1524) privileged *correctio fraterna* over the spiritual direction of clerics. Further, they denied any relevance to the social status and difference of gender, subverting the ordinary hierarchy of roles, and sought to renovate the practice of faith, separating it from its institutional ties.¹¹ We might remember that the Humiliati, a lay group that developed in Lombardy during the

⁸ GINZBURG 1970, p. xi–xviii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

¹⁰ See HENDERSON 1990.

¹¹ SOLFAROLI CAMILLOCCI 2002, pp. 37–74.

twelfth century, aspired simply to private devotion and a reserved life of humble work, certainly not to challenge Roman authority or the privileges of the clergy.¹²

In the case of Biondo, we have already mentioned this shift towards less provocative or confrontational expressions when discussing the *Commentarius*, the Latin translation of the *Ricordo*. This self-conscious concealment may also have led to the use of abbreviations and initials, which in itself is an ambiguous and imprecise form of communication but suited the aims of Biondo and his readers. For instance, in a text in which Biondo investigated the nature of the habit and its connections with grace, he abruptly switched from Latin to the vernacular and explained how ‘certain kind of graces through raptures and the grace resulting from the pain of sinning and crying for Jesus’s Passion [...] are not graces infused by God but natural operations based on Satan’s deception’.¹³ He then spoke of various religious figures, identified only by initials. He criticised some of them in disparaging terms. It is evident from the text that their identities were known to the intended recipient.¹⁴ One may raise different questions on this matter: Did Biondo hide the identity of these figures behind initials because there was no need to be explicit? Or did he not want to be understood by other people? Was he trying to be secretive, or did he think that charity and neighbourly love would simply demand patience and tolerance instead? The answer is probably somewhere in-between these two poles.

Various considerations can help us address the difficulties I have mentioned so far (the material limits of the manuscript sources; Biondo’s preference for the spoken word, which conveniently leaves no trace; his predilection for cautious and discrete forms of communication). Firstly, in my investigation, I have not assumed any hierarchical distinction between Latin and vernacular texts in Biondo. As noted earlier in the section concerning Biondo’s translations, he was fluent in both languages and used them both to express his philosophical and theological position. Nonetheless, we should also acknowledge that Biondo switched to Latin in certain circumstances. The letters to his nephew Paolo Biondo (in which Gabriele, notably, stressed the limitations of humanistic studies) and to an anonymous friar (in which he defended his orthodoxy) are exemplary in this respect. One could be tempted to generalise and see the use of Latin as an indication that a work was seen by Biondo as more important than a vernacular one. For example, one might assume that the various works-in-progress collected in the Appendix (all of an academic tenor) suggest that Biondo privileged

¹² GRUNDMANN 1995, pp. 32–40 and 69–74; MERLO 1989, pp. 57–61.

¹³ Mag., fol. 44r: ‘certe gratie de rapti et gratia de dolore de li peccati er pianto de la passione de Christo [...] non fuerunt gratie infuse, sed operationes naturales per deceptionem Sathane’.

¹⁴ Mag., fol. 44r: ‘certe persone a te note’.

Latin for doctrinal exposition. The reality, however, is that all his surviving treatises are in the vernacular or are later Latin translations of works originally written in Italian (for instance, the *Commentarius* with respect to the *Ricordo*). In the case of lost treatises of which we have only their Latin titles, such as *De luminibus* or the *expositio* over the Psalms, we should not assume that they were written in Latin. *De amore proprio* and *De meditatione* have Latin titles, and yet they are in Italian. Finally, Biondo's vernacular religious poetry, which I confidently place next to his completed treatises, displays a remarkable grasp of the religious problems and a high level of awareness concerning the dynamics and paradoxes of faith.

The second point I want to make is that I have not privileged a specific genre, but I have considered them equally important. Just as Biondo was able to pass from one language to another, so his intentions shifted within the same texts. The registers he adopted were fluid and interconnected: biblical imagery was linked to ordinary life, daily and local events took on an eschatological dimension, and Latin was mixed with the vernacular. This sort of pastiche was nothing new. Famous preachers like Bernardino of Siena and Giovanni Dominici employed every weapon at their disposal to excite their audiences.¹⁵ The same approach was used in letters. The correspondence of contemporary preachers, such as Giovanni Dominici and Agostino di Portico, a Camaldolese monk, shows a similar technique.¹⁶ A short letter that Biondo wrote to Alessandra degli Ariosti is emblematic in this respect. The letter begins by praising the arrival of don B., a trustworthy messenger who lived with Biondo temporarily.¹⁷ The praise follows an immediate criticism of the religious hypocrites who 'strain at a gnat and swallow a camel' (Matthew 23:24). An example is an unnamed abbot who tried to avoid the *ranno caldo*, a mix of hot water and ashes used to wash clothing (perhaps a metaphor for penitence).¹⁸ Biondo noted, sarcastically, that despite his excellent intellect, the abbot had a weak head and was devoid of spirit and counsel.¹⁹ Then, Biondo asked Alessandra, the abbess, and all the nuns of Corpus Domini to pray for him, for the waters of the deluge had risen

¹⁵ On the differences in preaching between Bernardino and Dominici, see NIRIT BEN-ARYEH 2001.

¹⁶ DOMINICI 1969; AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019.

¹⁷ Fol., fol. 23v: 'La venuta de don B. me fa scriver queste per esser lui messo fidato [...] ogni dì è in casa.' The following is another example to reiterate the point of using initials, here is another example. B. is known to both Alessandra and Biondo; therefore, there is no need to be more explicit. However, using initials can be seen as a way of preserving his status as a trustworthy messenger.

¹⁸ BATTAGLIA 1961–2009, 'Rannata', sig. 4, XV, p. 437.

¹⁹ For., fols 23v–24r: 'messer lo Abbate fuggie il ranno caldo, forsi che ha tenero el capo. È homo ad ogni modo, debile de animo et consiglio. Pure è sano de intellecto.'

everywhere.²⁰ Biondo had both seen and heard of this apocalyptic event.²¹ He then had a message for Chiara Gozzadini concerning his commentary on the Holy Father. Finally, he ended the letter with two further biblical pericopes (Isaiah 61:3 and Revelation 1:5), reaffirming Biondo's desire to comfort the nuns.²²

What is significant about this letter is that the ability to join exegesis, homily, hortatory injunctions, and social commentary does not mean that Biondo did not recognise the importance of genres and registers, but it highlights the need for a multiplicity of approaches. The adoption of multiple levels does not depend exclusively on the fact that Biondo had to be able to speak to a variegated audience, but also on the need for Biondo to adapt his writings to the ongoing dialogue. Following the encouragement of Biondo himself, his texts were passed around, discussed, and commented on. When new questions arose, they required new explanations. If Biondo had used technical jargon in his first attempt, it was probably time to try with a different register in the second shot. An example of this continuous dialogue was included at the end of *De amore proprio*. Biondo confessed to Alessandra degli Ariosti that he had completed the treatise and that it was ready for delivery; *messer Zuanne*, who was revising it, had found some ambiguities Biondo deemed it necessary to resolve.²³ Don Filippo, the copyist, could not amend the letter (i.e. the treatise). In the end, Biondo assured Alessandra that divine providence would help her.

In this section, I have highlighted the specific difficulties related to Biondo's manuscripts, including his desire for secrecy, the use of initials, and a certain degree of oblique communication. I have also clarified how I propose to overcome these limitations. Next, we will examine Biondo's sources.

3.2 Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite

In this section my aim is to circumscribe the type of influence that certain key auctoritates such as Augustine and Dionysius may have exercised on Biondo's thought. I use the term *auctoritas*

²⁰ For., fol. 24r: 'prego me rechomandati a la Matre e a tucte quelle altre a mi note et a tucto el Collegio [...] sono cresciute le acque del diluvio in ogni loco'.

²¹ For., fol. 24r: 'parte sentite et provate, parte odite et intese'.

²² For., fol. 24r: 'Voria intrare nel foco per consolare *lugentes Israel* [...] Valete in domino Jhesu omnes et orate pro me propter eum *qui dilexit nos et lavit in sanguine suo*.'

²³ Add., fol. 158v: 'Credetti a di' passati mandar questa per Bernardino da Pavia, ma per certa ambiguità da messer Zuanne che la revedeva retrovate volendo chiarire la cosa fui necessitato a mutare alcune parte. Le quale non possendo poi rescrivere don Filippo, remase la lettera quale ve se mandarà per el primo fidele occorrente.'

instead of sources to stress the claim of trustworthiness and orthodoxy.²⁴ This also means that the notions they developed were so embedded within Western culture that their use not always needed to be registered or emphasised: it was *patrimoine commun*, as indicated by the historian Henri Marrou.²⁵ This approach allows me to examine the reception of these ideas directly (that is, at the ‘history of their effects’, in the sense of Gadamer’s *Wirkungsgeschichte*) rather than arguing for or against Biondo’s reading of Augustine and Dionysius.²⁶

Biondo might have read some of the works of Augustine. For example, in *De amore proprio*, he quoted a passage from the *Praeceptum* (the Rule of Augustine, which in the Middle Ages was adopted by the Augustinian canons and the Dominican Order).²⁷ In the letter to his nephew Paolo, Biondo mentioned the *pondus amoris*, the weight of love, an expression Augustine used in *The Confessions* to explain the internal force that guided him toward God.²⁸ Moreover, Biondo usually employed the Augustinian notions of *aversio* and *conversio* when he tried to explain how humans turned away from God and returned to Him. Even without any direct reference and leaving aside any copying from Augustine, undoubtedly, a set of Augustinian ideas profoundly shaped Biondo’s thoughts. As for Dionysius, Biondo most certainly did not read him. Nevertheless, it is evident that Biondo assimilated a range of Neo-Platonic ideas that shaped his mind, as these had seeped into the body of Christian doctrines through the Middle Ages.²⁹

3.2.1 Augustine: Economy of Salvation

One idea that in Biondo resonated with Augustinian tones was the view of history as a succession of conflicts and radical antinomies.³⁰ For Augustine, history and time began with creation, but the history of suffering and evil started with the Fall of Adam and Eve. In postlapsarian time, human beings could be divided into those who lived according to the flesh (*fili carnis*) and those who lived according to the spirit (*fili Spiritus*).³¹ I will look more into this duality in the next section on the influence of the Franciscan Angelo Clareno. The children

²⁴ On authority and *auctoritas*, see MINNIS 2010.

²⁵ MARROU 1950, p. 14.

²⁶ GADAMER 2013, pp. 311–18.

²⁷ Add., fol. 145v. See VERHEIJEN 1967, p. 418, n. 3.

²⁸ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXII, col. 849 (*Conf.*, XIII, 9, 10): ‘Pondus meum amor meum; eo feror, quocumque feror. Dono tuo accendimur, et sursum ferimur.’

²⁹ On the influence and role of Platonism in Christianity, see GERSON 2021.

³⁰ On this theme, see MARROU 1950.

³¹ AUGUSTINE 1955, p. 414 (XIV, 1).

of the flesh followed their own judgement; the children of the Spirit abided by God's commandments. Both inhabited the city of the world (*civitas mundi*), founded on self-love; however, the latter will eventually dwell in the city of God (*civitas Dei*), based on divine love.³² The Augustinian distinction between divine love and self-love became a basic trope in Western Christianity. For instance, Agostino di Portico (1408–1468), a Camaldolese monk and the spiritual adviser of several nuns, spoke of orderly and disorderly love, one aiming at God, the other dwelling in the world.³³ The Franciscan Jacopone da Todi juxtaposed 'delightful love' (i.e. Christ) to 'counterfeit' and 'self-belonging love', which 'has no wings' and, therefore, 'persists in its own suffering'.³⁴ This duality found its way into Biondo's writings in various ways. The most thorough examination he devoted to self-love is the treatise *De amore proprio*, where he told Alessandra degli Ariosti that God was 'the only thing contrary to, inimical to and incompatible with the self-love mentioned above'.³⁵ At its core, self-love was 'the hatred of God'.³⁶

Against the apocalyptic tendencies championed by the Donatists, who attempted to establish a pure Church, Augustine saw the Church as a mixed entity with a long history.³⁷ Although humankind was split between 'children of the promise' and 'children of the flesh' (Galatians 4:22–31), their separation would only occur after the final judgement. As we will see, Biondo embraced this eschatological view, but he chose the interpretation developed by some members of the Franciscan Order. Nevertheless, one aspect should be stressed here. As pointed out by Marrou, Augustine's constant dualism (two loves, two cities, two sets of children, two destinies) did not imply a latent Manichaeism on his part but expressed the fundamental connection between the natural realm (*natura*) and the divine sphere (*gratia*).³⁸ According to Delumeau and against Augustine's intentions, however, this strong dualism fostered a rejection of the mundane dimension (expressed in the motifs of the *contemptus*

³² Ibid., pp. 451–452 (XIV, 28).

³³ AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, p. 253: 'la virtù non è altro che amore ordinato. Il peccato non è altro che amore disordinato [...] In cielo non è altro che amore ordinato. In terra l'amore si scompiglia spesso e perde l'ordine'. On Agostino di Portico, see in *ibid.* the extensive introduction by Daniela Delcorno Branca.

³⁴ *Laude*, pp. 56: 'Amor diletto, Cristo beato'. See also *ibid.*, pp. 67–68: 'amor contrafatto [...] appropriato [...] non ha penne né ale [...] remanse en afratura'. On divine love in Jacopone's poetry, see VETTORI 2004.

³⁵ Add., fol. 128r: 'Dio è puro amore et carità vera, et contrario solo et inimico et incompatibile de dicto amore proprio'. See also *ibid.*, fol. 143v–r: 'a lo amor de Dio non è contraria altra cosa che lo amor proprio de la creatura'.

³⁶ Add., fol. 128r: 'dentro a lo amore proprio sia lo odio de Dio'.

³⁷ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXVI, col. 735 (*Enarrationes in psalmos*, LXI, 8): 'Et sunt istae duae civitates permixtae interim; in fine separandae'. On the Donatists, see MILES 2016; HOOVER 2018.

³⁸ MARROU 1950, pp. 39–40.

mundi and flight) that heavily shaped Western Christianity, both inside and outside the cloister.³⁹

I will investigate the role that the notion of flight played in Biondo's thought when dealing with his ecclesiology in Chapter 6.1.3. For the moment, it is worth mentioning that antinomies define the very nature of human beings. Every being has both an outer and an inner self. Inside (*ad intra*), one finds substance (*substantia*), essence (*essentia*), form (*forma*), and being (*esse*), which is the principle that guides one's nature. On the exterior (*ad extra*), we observe non-essential qualities (*accidentales*). A further polarisation – between spirit (*pneuma* or *spiritus*) and flesh – defines rational beings. For Biondo, human beings were, fundamentally and ontologically, spiritual beings. Since the true nature of created beings (*forma*) lay in their inner core and could not be apprehended through the senses, the epistemological journey towards the truth coincided with a progressive movement towards inwardness. On the contrary, the term flesh indicated that what was perceived by the senses could also be a source of deception.⁴⁰

For Biondo, the effects of sin had repercussions beyond the human realm; consequently, divisions could be found in geography and cosmology. The world was divided into a Northern hemisphere, where human beings lived, and the Southern pole, ruled by God's Spirit. The winds were also separated into the Northern and the Southern winds (*Aquilone* and *Austro*). The first was related to sin; the second was connected to the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ Notably, there was a third wind, the *Affrico*, which resembled the South wind and stood for hypocrisy and fake faith.⁴² One might think that Biondo adopted the imagery of a deeply divided universe as a metaphor for the human condition. However, for him, sin – understood as a deficiency of being (another view Biondo shared with Augustine) – affected the structure of the universe (*machina mundiale*) in the form of a subtraction.⁴³ I will return to this subject in Chapter 4.1, where I look at how Lucifer's fall echoed throughout the universe.

Augustine's take on the passions reflected his idea that spiritual men could not be divided from their carnal equivalent. For Augustine, those who aimed at erasing emotions

³⁹ DELUMEAU 1990, pp. 12–17.

⁴⁰ The 'deceptions of meditation', the subject of one of Biondo's major treatises, refer primarily to a two-tiered knowledge: one related to the senses, the other to the *lumen gloriae*. I return to this point in Chapter 5.4.

⁴¹ Add., fol. 83r: 'Aquilone vento frigidissimo contrario a lo Austro vento calido signante lo Spirito Sancto.' See *ibid.*, fol. 120v: 'Austro, spiratore de la sua chiesa vera nelli suoi veri australi et veri christiformi membri.'

⁴² Add., fol. 120v: 'Affrico, pur meridionale et calido vento, non puro né principale como è lo Austro, perché è più remoto dal suo polo.'

⁴³ Add., fol. 120r.

(namely, the Manichaeans and the Platonists) insulted the goodness of God's work by vilifying the body.⁴⁴ According to the Stoics, emotions such as love, fear, or sadness defined those who were foolish. For Augustine, however, people could not help but experience these emotions.⁴⁵ In taking 'the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:7), Christ himself felt these emotions.⁴⁶ Biondo took an ambiguous approach toward the passions. He sometimes showed a profound indifference towards the body, praising the absence of feelings – what the Greeks call *apatheia* and the Latins *impassibilitas*.⁴⁷ Biondo also declared that Jesus and Mary did not feel all kinds of emotions but only the higher ones.⁴⁸ At other times, he did not entirely reject the role of the passions. To understand Biondo's position on the passions more clearly, we need to look at how he understood the relationship between body and soul. I will deal with this subject in Chapter 5 when I investigate the faculties of the will and intellect. Before passing to Dionysius the Areopagite, I want to point out that two other elements in Augustine's thought were highly significant for Biondo: the idea of divine illumination and his interpretation of election. I will examine these in Chapter 5, when I discuss the topic of grace, and Chapter 6, when I deal with Biondo's ecclesiology.

3.2.2 Dionysius the Areopagite: Self-Communication, Apophasis, and Hierarchy

As with Augustine in the previous section, the point here is to elucidate the essential ideas connected to the Dionysian sphere of influence without assuming that Biondo had any direct knowledge of Dionysius's body of works.⁴⁹ Since Dionysius was one of the principal carriers of Platonic ideas (above all Proclus), we could also speak of Platonic elements in Biondo's thought.⁵⁰

In a short and unfinished text, Biondo spoke of how God communicated Himself both inside and outside the Trinity:

⁴⁴ AUGUSTINE 1955, p. 419 (XIV, 5): 'Non igitur opus est in peccatis vitiisque nostris ad Creatoris iniuriam carnis accusare naturam.'

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 426 (XIV, 9): 'cives sanctae civitatis Dei metuunt cupiuntque, dolent gaudentque, et quia rectus est amor eorum, istas omnes affectiones rectas habent.'

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 427.

⁴⁷ I will return to this specific stance in Chapter 5.3.4.

⁴⁸ See Appendix, 7.

⁴⁹ According to ROREM (1993, pp. 237–240), very few ventured to read the works of Dionysius, despite the almost unparalleled prestige attached to his name. Many simply invoked his name for his unquestioned authority. See also the several articles in TOUSSAINT AND TROTTMANN 2014, pp. 83–175, where Dionysius's influence is studied with respect to authors who were temporally close to Biondo, such as Marsilio Ficino and Nicholas of Cusa.

⁵⁰ On the influence of various Platonic ideas and notions, see VANNINI 2015, pp. 113–140.

The goodness of the divine nature, in addition to the intrinsic act with which that nature communicates itself in the production of the Second and Third Person, communicates itself also extrinsically in the production of the rational, bodily, and mixed creation.⁵¹

Biondo followed here the Dionysian notion of *bonum diffusivum sui*, that is, the thesis of God's self-diffusiveness.⁵² In his *Divine Names*, Dionysius explored the many titles and names for God that can be found in the Bible. These names, the so-called *transcendentalia* of the Scholastic tradition, were predicates that, like One, True, and Good, belonged first to God.⁵³ One of these names was Love. As Dionysius explained, God effused Himself to allow all of creation to participate in Him. Love was understood as a uniting force: God wanted to unite the beloved with Himself.⁵⁴ Augustine expressed the same idea.⁵⁵ For Dionysius, love was a continuously active principle. Regardless of the Fall, the creation was still joined with God in a way that could never be broken. For Biondo, this principle did not hold for Lucifer: his fall had both broken God's connection and caused an irreparable loss of being. I will examine this issue in Chapter 4.1.

Despite divine love, Catherine of Siena insisted that the distance between Creator and creation lay at the core of Christian doctrine.⁵⁶ The 'region of dissimilitude', where human beings live, was inescapable.⁵⁷ The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) affirmed it in plain terms: 'Between the Creator and the creation no similitude can be noticed, unless we notice a greater dissimilitude between them'.⁵⁸ In *De amore proprio*, Biondo confessed to Alessandra degli

⁵¹ Mag., fol. 23v: 'Bonitas divine nature, preter actum intrinsecum quo se ipsam communicat in productione secunde et tertie persone, communicat se etiam extrinsece in productione rationalis, corporee et mixte creature.' See Appendix, 6.

⁵² On the Dionysian principle of *bonum diffusivum sui*, see DI MAIO 1989, pp. 283–313 (its role in Thomistic theology); and WALSH 1958 (its role in Bonaventure's thought). Diffusion should not be confused with emanation. There are two aspects which help to differentiate them. Firstly, diffusion is an act of God's will. On this point, see DI MAIO 1989, pp. 306–313. The second aspect, which should not be underestimated, is that God allows the creation to respond.

⁵³ DIONYSIUS 2009, p. 412–414 (*Divine Names*, IV, 7, 701A–C). See also THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sent.*, I, d. 22, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3: 'quaedam nomina dicuntur proprie de Deo, quae quantum ad significata per prius sunt in Deo quam in creaturis, ut bonitas, sapientia et hujusmodi'. On the notion of attribute and transcendentals, see GORIS AND AERTSEN 2019.

⁵⁴ DIONYSIUS 2009, p. 422 (*Divine names*, IV, 10): 'δυνάμειως ἐνοποίου καὶ συνδετικῆς'.

⁵⁵ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XLII, col. 960 (*Trin.*, VIII, 10).

⁵⁶ RAYMOND OF CAPUA 2013, pp. 180–181: 'Scisne filia que tu es et quis ego sum? Si hoc duo noveras beata eris. Tu enim es illa que non es, ego autem sum ille qui sum [...] O verbum abbreviatum et grande! O doctrina brevis et quodammodo infinita.'

⁵⁷ On the idea of dissimilitude, see GILSON 1947; *Dic. Spir.*, 'Dissemblance (Regio dissimilitudinis)', III, cols 1330–1346.

⁵⁸ DS 806: 'inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda'.

Ariosti that he was walking ‘in a contrary land’.⁵⁹ Note here also the connection Biondo made between an abstract notion and personal experience. This was a staple feature of Biondo’s method for expressing his religious thoughts.

The interplay of union and separation, proximity and otherness, can also be noticed epistemologically. In *The Mystical Theology* and *The Divine Names*, Dionysius elaborated on the entanglement of apophasis and cataphasis: one could approach God through positive definitions of God while admitting that the ideas of Love, Unity, Truth, and Goodness could only be investigated by following the path of negative divine attributes.⁶⁰ God remained an unknown quantity, an utterly unresolvable *x*, and, at the same time, He had spoken about Himself entirely and unmistakably through the Scriptures and revealed Himself ‘once for all’ (*ephapax*, Romans 6:10 and Hebrews 7:27) in Jesus Christ. The historian Paul Rorem explained how the Greek term *mysterion* – in Latin *sacramentum* – defined the ambivalence of positivity and negativity: God was a mystery (He perennially resided in the ‘cloud of unknowing’, as Dionysius explained), but He was also made manifest in Jesus.⁶¹ These are crucial aspects to which I will return on two specific occasions: once in Chapter 5.4, when I examine Biondo’s idea of union with God, and again in Chapter 6.5, when I look at Biondo’s understanding of divine deception.

Finally, we need to say some words on the notion of hierarchy, a word invented by Dionysius that has influenced the development of human thought in ways that cannot be underestimated.⁶² Starting from the principle that God was self-diffusive and being influenced by contemporary Neo-Platonic thinkers such as Proclus, Dionysius envisioned the cosmos as emanating directly from God. The result was a plurality of beings whose perfection depended on their proximity to God: the closer one was to God, the better. God had therefore assigned a place to each being. For Dionysius, angels also sat at a distance from God: they enjoyed the divine vision ‘according to their measure’.⁶³ Unlike the Latin term *universitas*, which indicated the totality of creation, the Greek word *kosmos* hinted at order and harmony. The same idea also appeared in Augustine’s *Confessions*: ‘The body tends towards its place with its weight. [...] The things that are not in order are restless: once they are in place, they are at peace. My

⁵⁹ Add., fol. 156v: ‘quantunche [...] spesse volte et almeno per la maggior parte quasi sempre io camini in contraria regione, et omnino a questa dissimile’.

⁶⁰ On the role of negative theology in Christianity, see MORTLEY 1986, II, pp. 33–44, 63–84, 160–241; LOUTH 2012.

⁶¹ ROREM 1993, p. 4. On mystery and sacrament, see ROREM 1984, pp. 39–46.

⁶² ROREM 1993, p. 3.

⁶³ DIONYSIUS 2009, p. 100 (*Celestial Hierarchy*, III, 3, 168A): ‘κατὰ τὴν οἰκειάν ἀναλογίαν’.

weight is my love: I am brought by it, wherever I am brought'.⁶⁴ In *The City of God*, Augustine spoke of 'natural order'.⁶⁵

A well-ordered cosmos was meant to shape every aspect of human thought. For instance, natural laws reflected God's orderly vision. From a sociological point of view, a hierarchical society divided into separate states (*ordines*) – monks, clergy, and lay people – reflected the cosmic order devised by God. Law-abiding citizens maintained order before both God and the king. As Taylor pointed out, hunting down heretics was a social duty as they did not only did they deny God, but they were also a threat to civic order.⁶⁶ As shown by Thomas Tentler, the sacrament of penance reflected this juridical aspect, for the sinner was treated as someone who needed to be restored to his rightful place to participate correctly in the life of the Church.⁶⁷ As stressed by Adriano Prosperi, the main task (*la funzione*) of the *misericordie* that accompanied the condemned to the gallows was to obtain their conversion.⁶⁸ The same principle of order sorted the sciences according to their importance. The humanist Bartolomeo della Fonte (1446–1513), a contemporary of Biondo and a teacher at the University of Florence, spoke of a cosmic order emanating directly from God's wisdom. The various branches of human knowledge reflected the divine order.⁶⁹

Biondo accepted the idea of an orderly cosmos. He urged his followers to be 'content with one's state and measure, that is, with the gifts and graces God wanted to give'.⁷⁰ He also emphasised God's eternal predestination: every being had a 'natural place' that had been 'eternally assigned'.⁷¹ For Biondo, this 'sacred order', which sustained the 'enchanted world' (in the words of Taylor), was coexistent with creation, and each created being was assigned a 'distinct' place.⁷² This pyramid also occurred internally. Biondo ordered the human faculties and the various emotions according to an ascending scheme.⁷³

⁶⁴ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXII, col. 848 (*Conf.*, XIII, 9, 10): 'Corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum. Pondus non ad ima tantum est, sed ad locum suum. Ignis sursum tendit, deorsum lapsus'.

⁶⁵ AUGUSTINE 1955, pp. 358–359 (XII, chapters 4 and 5). Further sources on this point in ZAMBON 2008, I, p. 264, n. 4.

⁶⁶ TAYLOR 2007, pp. 41–43.

⁶⁷ TENTLER 1977, especially pp. 3–27. As noted by PROSPERI 2007 (p. 619), however, heresy became a political crime only where there was a strong centralised power. In Italy, heresy remained a religious crime.

⁶⁸ PROSPERI 2013, pp. 154–165.

⁶⁹ TRINKAUS 1983, p. 52–87.

⁷⁰ Add., fol. 64r: 'contenta del suo stato e de la sua misura, cioè de li doni et gratie quale Dio li vole dare'.

⁷¹ For., fol. 22r: 'loco naturale'; Add., fol. 65r: 'secondo la misura eternalmente a sé donata in Esso'.

⁷² Mag., fol. 75r: 'per gradus distinctos ac varios'. See TAYLOR 2007, p. 25.

⁷³ See Appendix, 7.

Creation, therefore, resulted from God's love and was ordered hierarchically. Two features characterised this structure. The first was mediation. A golden chain (*catena aurea*) started from God and reached the lowest ontological level of existence.⁷⁴ Therefore, each created being acted as a mediator between the upper and the lower level. Instead of a chain, Biondo used the image of the tree. I will return to this image in Chapter 6.2.2, when I discuss the principles of the Church. Here, I will mention the fact that, according to Thomas Aquinas, 'God is being in Its essence; the creation is being through participation'.⁷⁵ Although lacking the level of metaphysical inquiry pursued by Thomas Aquinas, who continuously elaborated on the notion of participation, Biondo, too, was well aware of the limits of human finitude as well as of the extent to which humans could enjoy God's self-revelation through participation.⁷⁶ In the realm of worldly experience, Biondo juxtaposed what was made possible 'by the gift of participation' in the living God and His Son, and the insurmountable difference between creation and Creator, 'temporality and eternity', which defined human beings as an 'empty land' (Genesis 1:2).⁷⁷ This disparity, *per se*, did not contradict participation, but Biondo preferred to focus on the meaning of participation as distance rather than participation as vicinity.

The second element that featured in Biondo's consideration of the divine creation was the process whereby, regardless of their distance from God, lower beings aspired to return to Him: they had an innate desire to perfect their status. For Dionysius, *eros*, understood as a yearning for God, was the human response to God's diffusive love, *agape*.⁷⁸ This process was timeless and ahistorical.⁷⁹ In *The City of God*, Augustine developed an interpretation of history in which the Dionysian *reditus* could be used in connection with the Augustinian *conversio*. According to linguist Lino Pertile, Dante's *Paradiso* is a work about the desire for vision rather

⁷⁴ ROREM 1993, p. 168. On the notion of the chain of being, see the various papers in M. KUNTZ AND P. KUNTZ 1987, which investigate both the origin of this idea and its development in Western thought (especially those on Augustine, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure).

⁷⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 4, a. 3, ad 3: 'Deus est ens per essentiam et alia per participationem'; id., *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 5: 'Similiter etiam quantumcumque crescat gratia alicuius hominis, qui gratiam secundum aliquam particularem participationem possidet, nunquam potest adaequare gratiam Christi, quae universaliter plena existit.' See also FABRO 1950, pp. 189, 307–312.

⁷⁶ Mag., fols 32v–33r: 'Ens autem divinum dicit naturam et substantiam, hoc est essentiam; sicut verum dicit identitatem et durationem, hoc est eternitatem; et bonum dicit proprietates naturales et substantiales, quae in nobis participata dicuntur qualitates potentia sapientia bonitas rerum eiusmodi.'

⁷⁷ Ibid., fol. 78r: 'Secum quidem suo dono participii eius, quod ipse est, existentes, unus et verus Deus ac Dei et verginis filius eque ut unus et verus et perfectus ac novus homo idemque Deus eternus. Seorsum tamen consideratione quadam nostri temporalis in eum desinentis et suam temporalitatem amittentis, eternitatemque in eo adipiscentis adeptique principii, *populus eius, ovesque pascue ipsius*, et opus manuum illius, *quia ipse fecit nos et non ipsi nos*. Ex nobis ipsis vero et nostro proprio opere procul omni dubio sumus *terra inanis*.'

⁷⁸ ROREM 1993, p. 151. See also VASILAKIS 2021, pp. 141–183.

⁷⁹ ROREM 1993, p. 171.

than the vision of God in itself, and in this sense, Dante could explain God and show what was needed to reach God.⁸⁰ In doing so, Dante joined the eternal aspiration with its mundane realisation. As I will argue in this dissertation, desire and mediation were applied by Biondo both in the individual and ecclesiastical dimension; however, the results were contrasting due to God's election.

In this chapter, I have illustrated a few Augustinian motifs that indirectly might have shaped Biondo's thought: a radical conflict between good and evil forces that could only be resolved at the end of time, and the recognition that sin had a cosmic influence, which affected the entire course of human history. I have also looked at those elements that belonged loosely to the Dionysian and Platonic traditions: the principle of self-diffusing good, the duality of apophasis and cataphasis, and the idea of hierarchy. In the next section, I will examine a series of sources that we know were closer to Biondo.

3.3 The Spiritual Franciscans

This section looks at those authors whom Biondo openly acknowledged and praised. These were all members of the Franciscan Order who later became known as the spiritual Franciscans: Peter John Olivi, Angelo Clareno, Ubertino of Casale, John of Parma, Ugo Panziera, and Jacopone da Todi.⁸¹ Here I should stress two points. First, the spiritual Franciscans represented a minority within the Franciscan Order. Therefore, as testified by the various conflicts that animated the Franciscan Order's troubled history, their point of view did not reflect the general views of the Franciscan Order. It also shows that we should not equate *auctoritas* with *potestas* (the exercise of power). This important distinction highlights a connection between Biondo and a minority group and reflects a specific aspect of his religious thinking: Christ, as the model for Christians, compelled believers to reject any position of power and adopt a kenotic-obedient disposition. This injunction was valid both on the individual and ecclesiastical levels. Secondly,

⁸⁰ In MCGINN 2012a, p. 192.

⁸¹ The critical literature on spiritual Franciscans is vast. Here I only refer to a few works which can help us establish the context. On the history and development of the Franciscan Order, see MOORMAN 1968, and the more recent MERLO 2003 and ROBSON 2006. The history of the Order is marked by enormous difficulties concerning the interpretation of the Rule and a fierce debate concerning the role of the Order itself, whose emergency opposed well-established social institutions. Criticism took many forms and arose both internally and externally. We may consider the rise of the 'spiritual Franciscans' as an expression of internal dissent. On the difficulty concerning the label 'spiritual Franciscans', see PÁSZTOR 1976. On the development of the spiritual Franciscans as a movement, see BURR 2001. Difficulties also marked the development of the Order of Saint Clare. See MUELLER 2006. For an overview of the external critics of the Mendicant Orders and the conflicts between the Orders and other social institutions (for instance, universities, other religious orders, and the Papacy itself), see CUSATO AND GELTNER 2009, pp. 105–192. On the influence of Franciscans on Biondo, see LODONE 2012.

even though Biondo obtained most of his ideas from the writings of spiritual Franciscans (including those views I discussed in the previous section and labelled as Augustinian and Dionysian), he was highly selective in his readings. In other words, Biondo retained what he agreed with but rather nonchalantly rejected or ignored what he considered irrelevant.

3.3.1 A Specific Olivi

It is unclear what Biondo knew of Peter John Olivi (1248–1298).⁸² I have already mentioned Biondo's translation of Olivi's *Remedia* and the lost copy of the *Commentary on Job*. We are unsure if Biondo ever read Olivi's masterpiece, his *Commentary on Revelation*.⁸³ Considering the condemnation his works received, this would be quite improbable. Nonetheless, the historian Caterina Menichetti recently found the only surviving copy in Italian vernacular of the *Lectura*, and, as Lodone pointed out, Olivi's works travelled in many forms: translations, misattributions (where, e.g. Olivi is taken for Bonaventure), and interpolations in other works.⁸⁴ The *Remedia*, for instance, can be found in copies of Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, a work that had an enormous audience, or Vincent Ferrer's *Tractatus de vita spirituali*. Access to Olivi and the other spiritual Franciscans was also possible through the libraries of the Observants in Rome.⁸⁵ Excerpts from Olivi's works can be found in Bernadino of Siena's autograph manuscripts.⁸⁶ Another aspect concerning transmission should be noted. As pointed out by Ginzburg and Prosperi, in the realm of the history of ideas it does not matter when the work was originally written or what the identity of the author was but the year when the work was published.⁸⁷ Applying this principle to Biondo, we see that the works of Olivi and the other Franciscans mentioned in this section were not written around 1300 but grew significant because they were available during Biondo's lifetime. In any case, with respect to Biondo's reading of Olivi, it is safe to say that he knew he was reading Olivi's works.

Olivi's output is vast and covers many subjects. Although Olivi wrote extensively on the notion of property and the diatribe between *usus pauper* and absolute poverty, Biondo was not interested in these issues.⁸⁸ Biondo's religious vision focused on defining and urging

⁸² For a comprehensive introduction to Olivi's thought, see PIRON 2010. See also BETTONI 1959; MANSELLI 1959.

⁸³ OLIVI 2009.

⁸⁴ MENICHETTI 2016; LODONE 2018.

⁸⁵ LODONE 2020a, pp. 28–29. See also RUSCONI 1975.

⁸⁶ See MONTEFUSCO 2012.

⁸⁷ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 126.

⁸⁸ See especially his *Tractatus de contractibus* (OLIVI 2012). On the role of Olivi in this controversy, see BURR 1989.

adherence to God's will. In many respects. These momentous quarrels, which had exacerbated frictions within the Franciscan Order and had implications that surpassed the economic sphere, expressed the profound and ineradicable dissensions that constituted the very fabric of human history.⁸⁹ In this respect, Biondo remained utterly removed from the intricate juridical, theological, economic, and political debates concerning the definition of poverty.⁹⁰

Biondo's indifference toward economic issues may also explain why he chose to translate the *Remedia*: it was not a treatise dealing with economic and social issues but a text for lay people on discernment. Biondo prioritised interior piety, forcing him to understand poverty in exclusively abstract terms. His point of view was entirely theological in an a-historical sense as he remained close to the Pauline definition of the self-emptying Son (Philippian 2:7–8). This scriptural approach gave him freedom from the theological and canonical subtleties that, in principle, would allow the friars to justify the use of goods and property. Furthermore, as I will explain more extensively in Chapter 6.1, Biondo contested the very idea of a religious order as it conflicted both with the principle of universal harmony that I have highlighted in the previous section on Dionysian themes, and with the idea of divine predestination and election, which I will examine in Chapter 6.3.

3.3.2 Angelo Clareno and Ubertino of Casale: The Importance of Suffering

For Biondo, the *auctorità* of Angelo Clareno (c. 1255–1337) was trustworthy; he was 'educated and supernaturally illuminated'.⁹¹ Notably, these quotations come from the final section of *De amore proprio*, where Biondo discussed the state of the religious orders. Biondo was aware of Clareno's *Commentary on the Franciscan Rule* and his letters (especially those addressed to the mystic Philip of Majorca, a *persona devotissima*).⁹² Even though Biondo did not mention it, he most likely read the *Liber chronicarum sive tribolationum ordinis minorum*, to which I will soon turn. Unlike Clareno, Biondo considered Ubertino of Casale (1259–c. 1330) a difficult author to be approach cautiously. This judgement probably depended on the vicissitudes and controversies surrounding Ubertino's life.⁹³ It might also have arisen from the inherent complexity of Ubertino's writings. We can safely say that Biondo learned of

⁸⁹ Studies on the Franciscan notion of poverty are numerous. See at least GROSSI 1972; CAPITANI 1985; TABARRONI 1992; LAMBERTINI 2000.

⁹⁰ On the notion of poverty as a mystical rather than economic category, see BRUFANI 1992.

⁹¹ Add., fols 146r: 'la sua auctorità [...] è degna de fede', *ibid.*, fol. 155v: 'homo docto et illuminato supernaturalmente'.

⁹² On Philip of Majorca, see VIDAL 1910.

⁹³ On Ubertino's life, see LODONE 2020b. On his posterity, see PIRON 2014.

Augustine's interpretation of history as conflict from these two authors, though Biondo preferred to stress the aspects concerning human suffering.

Suffering was also emphasised by Olivi in various works (for instance, the *Letter to the Sons of Charles II of Naples*) but became central in his *Commentary of Revelation*.⁹⁴ Since we do not know whether Biondo read Olivi's *Lectura*, let us focus on Ubertino's *Arbor* and Clarenò's *Liber chronicarum*. The *Arbor* is a complex and multilayered text consisting of five books.⁹⁵ The first four books contain an extended meditation on Christ's life. The final book comments on Revelation. Ubertino divided Revelation into seven parts. Each part was connected to one of the seven ages of human history. In the last book, Ubertino did not set aside Jesus. On the contrary, each age was connected to a moment in Jesus's life. As historian Gian Luigi Potestà argued, Ubertino brought his interpretation of Jesus's life to completion by using it as 'the hermeneutical paradigm' for all historical events viewed no longer in their historical development (therefore, separate from the future) but from the eschatological perspective of God's fulfilment in Jesus as risen and glorified.⁹⁶

Book 5 of the *Arbor* also closely connected Jesus and Saint Francis. As a *Christus redivivus* (a reincarnated Christ), Saint Francis was deemed to have exemplified history through his life and the events of the Franciscan Order. Ubertino thought he lived between the fifth and the sixth ages, during the final conflict between the Antichrist and God. This battle coincided both with the Passion of Christ and with the difficulties encountered by the spiritual Franciscans. While for Bonaventure, Saint Francis had lived according to the teachings of Christ and set a moral example, in Ubertino's eyes, God had sent Francis to redeem humanity.⁹⁷ According to Ubertino, even though the wrong followers and ecclesiastical institutions had hampered (i.e. crucified) the Order of Friars Minor, it would return (resurrect) to its former glory.⁹⁸

Like Ubertino, Angelo Clarenò, too, adopted a seven-fold division in his *Liber chronicarum*. The chronicle, written around 1326, focused on the period from the inception of the Franciscan Order to the year 1322.⁹⁹ Each period was built on the opposition between those

⁹⁴ See Olivi's letter to the sons of Charles II of Anjou in EHRLE 1887, pp. 534–540. See also OLIVI 1989, pp. 195–199 and 210–217. On Olivi's ecclesiology, BARTOLI 2016b.

⁹⁵ See UBERTINO OF CASALE 1485.

⁹⁶ POTESTÀ 1980, pp. 15–16: 'La vicenda della morte e resurrezione di Cristo è in ultima analisi il paradigma ermeneutico di tale visione della storia.'

⁹⁷ On Bonaventure's position, see MICCOLI 1970.

⁹⁸ Ubertino thought that Saint Francis would resurrect, like Christ.

⁹⁹ For an analysis of the texts, see EHRLE 1886; CLARENÒ 1999, pp. 5–53; ACCROCCA 2007.

who upheld Saint Francis's ideal of poverty and those who ignored it. The history of the Order of Friars Minor was characterised by further deterioration and an increase in persecution (see Matthew 24). According to Clarenò, these conflicts began with Elias of Cortona. Biondo adopted Clarenò's disparaging depiction of Elias.¹⁰⁰ The image Clarenò used to express the decadence was the statue of Nebuchadnezzar, taken from Daniel 2.¹⁰¹ The martyrial perspective dominated every facet of Clarenò's account. The tribulations, which marked divine election, signalled the actualisation of God's will. Even outside the Franciscan Order, the ideal of living an authentic life by suffering was a recurring theme. The Anabaptist Sebastian Franck (1499–1542), for instance, subsumed the whole history of the world under the idea of suffering.¹⁰² The very attempt to flee from persecutors and tribulations was, on the other hand, an indication that Satan was hard at work (see Matthew 16:21–23). Clarenò understood history as an ongoing fight between God's allies, who had no other weapon than 'poverty and the nudity of the cross', and the Antichrist's adherents.¹⁰³ Like the *Arbor*, however, the *Liber chronicarum* ended with words of hope and vindication.

The division of history that Olivi, Clarenò, and Ubertino promoted was insignificant to Biondo. He preferred the clear division that James of Massa, an early follower of Saint Francis, outlined in his prophecy. I will return to this aspect in Chapter 6.1.2 to help clarify the eschatological framework of Biondo's ecclesiology. On the other hand, Biondo fully embraced the martyrial perspective. I will examine this in depth in Chapter 5.3. Here I want to stress only Biondo's dependency on the spiritual Franciscans' interpretation. In many ways, suffering did not have to be connected to the spiritual Franciscans. As I have already emphasised, the lay movements that sought to express their piety through personal devotion, charitable works, and vocal and mental orations were also connected to penitential movements and confraternities (for instance, *Battuti*, Flagellants, and *Disciplinati*) and emphasised forms of personal submission and penance (such as fasting, night vigils, and bodily flogging). Biondo, however, never adopted or promoted this form of piety. On the contrary, he openly rejected any penitential exercises and urged his readers to consider them as a kind of diabolical deceptions.

¹⁰⁰ Add., fol. 137r: 'frate Helia reprobò et padre de li reprobi, contradictori al spirito del padre, et destructori per humana presumptrice prudentia de le vie da Christo a Francesco et da Francesco a loro chiaramente et inexcusabilmente mostrate'. On a more balanced portrait of Elias of Cortona in Franciscan literature, see CAPITANUCCI 2014, NOBILI 2014, SEDDA 2014.

¹⁰¹ CLARENÒ 1999, pp. 148–153.

¹⁰² FRANCK 1531.

¹⁰³ CLARENÒ 1999, p. 106: 'in paupertate et in nuditate crucis funda teipsum et regula tuam et vitam tuam'.

For Biondo, suffering was not a means to reach personal perfection but the natural dimension in which he lived: suffering was the element that characterised the age of the ultimate conflict between God and Lucifer and their respective spiritual and carnal bodies. This reading was given to Alessandra degli Ariosti in *De amore proprio*: she was not to embrace penitential fasting or corporal flogging but understand that sin and suffering announced the arrival of the Antichrist and the world's final redemption.

Biondo never experienced anything close to the tragic problems that the spiritual Franciscans had to confront (persecution, exile, death, inquisition, and opposition by the Papacy). It might seem that suffering was just a rhetorical device. The move from Rome to Modigliana cannot be compared to Clareno's flight to Armenia. However, it is also true that the *metanoia* Biondo experienced in his Roman years pushed him to reject the pomp of the Roman Curia and embrace private piety and intimate communion with God. Importantly, Biondo's identification with his predilect authors did not have to be literal, especially when Biondo had come to disregard every exterior act of piety. Biondo had learned from Clareno the enormous distance between *res* and *nomen*, the ontological principle of a being and its outer appearance.¹⁰⁴ He applied this distinction relentlessly and on every occasion. In a letter written on Saint Francis's day and most probably directed to Alessandra, a Clare nun, Biondo wrote that 'neither Clare nor Giles were ever confined or could be confined by this form of life [i.e. the boundaries of the Franciscan rule], although this form was perfect – indeed, the most perfect – insofar as it was exterior and visible or understandable by the senses or natural intellect'.¹⁰⁵ As has been rightly pointed out by Lodone, the 'legitimate sons and daughters of Saint Francis and Saint Clare' were 'the invisible Friars Minor'.¹⁰⁶ One could, therefore, rightfully experience exile and suffering while being secluded in the heart of Italy, surrounded by the vibrant cultural centres of Florence, Bologna, and Florence.

3.3.3 John of Parma, Ugo Panziera, and Jacopone da Todi

Another Franciscan whom Biondo highly revered was John of Parma (c. 1208–1289).¹⁰⁷ For Biondo, John of Parma was the 'holiest and most learned friar who perhaps ever belonged to

¹⁰⁴ On this issue, see BURR 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Mag., fol. 93r: 'Perché né Chiara né Egidio furono mai circumscripti né circumscriptibili da questa forma de vita, benché perfecta et perfectissima in quanto extrinseca et visibile o intelligibile al senso o intellecto naturale.'

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 'li invisibili frati minori et li veri et legiptimi figlioli et figliole de San Francesco et de S. Chiara'. See LODONE 2016b.

¹⁰⁷ On John of Parma, see CACCIOTTI AND MELLI 2008.

the Order of he who then became Saint Francis'.¹⁰⁸ Once again, it is worth noting that this quotation is found in Biondo's discussion on the religious orders in *De amore proprio*. Biondo stated that he read some of John's writings, but he did not mention their titles. Was he referring to the *Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci cum domina Paupertate* (The Holy Agreement between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty), commonly attributed to John?¹⁰⁹ We know that Clarenò had depicted John as a paladin of *Domina Paupertas*, a martyr who had been sacrificed on the altar of the intellectual reformation of the Franciscan Order pursued by Bonaventure.¹¹⁰ Biondo never mentioned Bonaventure. Was his silence motivated by the reading of Clarenò? He certainly disagreed with the transformation of the Franciscan Order from one of poverty and humility to one that centred on learning and education. For Biondo, this trend contradicted the very intention of Saint Francis's Order, a problem he also identified with the Dominican Order. I will look at Biondo's opinion about the doctors of the Church in the following section.

Another aspect concerning John of Parma is that Biondo completely glossed over his alleged Joachimism.¹¹¹ Even though Clarenò, in his *Liber chronicarum*, spent a few pages on the defence of John against these accusations, Biondo did not even hint at them.¹¹² Indeed, Biondo never mentioned the works of Joachim, nor did he refer to his prophecies. As we will see in Chapter 6, Biondo's reading of James of Massa's prophecy indicated that the renewed Church, the new Jerusalem, had nothing to do with a renewed religious order (Joachim) or with a political entity (Savonarola). According to Biondo, every time the Church clung to the material world, its reformation was bound to fail: for Biondo, spiritual meant supernatural and eschatological in its absolute sense.

More important than John of Parma was Ugo Panziera (c. 1260–1330), the Franciscan friar whom Biondo called 'a true son of Saint Francis'.¹¹³ Panziera had written several treatises, which had a considerable circulation in Florence.¹¹⁴ Biondo knew these texts first-hand and used them abundantly. One copy was available at Il Paradiso in Florence, where Biondo seemed to have a few contacts. One of his Latin texts, *De gaudiis beatorum* (The Joys of the

¹⁰⁸ Add., fol. 155r: 'più sancto et docto frate che forsi havessi mai l'ordine de poi San Francesco'.

¹⁰⁹ On this work, see BRUFANI 1990.

¹¹⁰ See CLARENÒ 1999, pp. 360–363, 374–379. On this intellectualisation of the Franciscan Order, see also LAMBERTINI 2000, pp. 7–12, who discussed the positive interpretation given to it by Bonaventure.

¹¹¹ On the alleged Joachimism of John of Parma, see the four papers in CACCIOTTI AND MELLI 2008. On the difficulties in assessing the influence of Joachim in the thirteenth century, see ANDREWS 2018.

¹¹² CLARENÒ 1999, pp. 416–417.

¹¹³ Add., fol. 137r: 'uno vero frate minore chiamato Ugo Pancera, de San Francesco figliol vero'. On Panziera, see GAGLIARDI 2014.

¹¹⁴ LODONE 2012, p. 10 and 2016b, p. 73.

Blessed Souls), is filled with direct quotations from a vernacular treatise by Panziera, which he promptly translated into Latin.¹¹⁵ Ugo's importance for Biondo cannot be underestimated. The range of themes dealt with by Panziera in his treatises made him a constant point of reference. For this reason, I will return to him at several points during this investigation.

Another Franciscan central in Biondo's life was Jacopone da Todi. Biondo called him 'the most acute investigator and best hunter of the true virtues'.¹¹⁶ His *laude* were so important to Biondo that several can be found copied in the Seville manuscript. As with Panziera, I will not dwell here on Jacopone's relevance for Biondo, for his role will be signalled at various points of this investigation. One aspect should, however, be highlighted. Jacopone was not the only poet Biondo praised. Another was Giannozzo Sacchetti (c. 1340–1379), of whom Biondo said that he 'was trained in the true way of the cross and that, as a result of being annihilated, he had tasted the seraphic ardour of the true transformation, grown in him into a stable condition because of his harsh and sudden acts of disrobing (*spogliature*), borne in peace'.¹¹⁷ Although only one poem was copied, its importance is confirmed by Biondo's extensive glosses that accompany it. Another important author was Leonardo Giustiniani (c. 1388–1446), whose poem *O Iesu dolce, o infinito amore* (Sweet Jesus, Infinite Love) confirmed the love of God beyond any logical doubt. I have highlighted the significance that poetry played for Biondo in a previous section. Nevertheless, one question remains: Can we consider Biondo's predilection for poetry an indication that he rejected the scholastic approach to knowledge? In other words, was he aiming at separating theology from philosophy? This belief seems to be corroborated by the praise for John of Parma, who suffered at the hands of Bonaventure. To answer this question more appropriately, I must look at Biondo's thoughts on philosophers and theologians.

3.4 Church Doctors and Averroists

Let me begin by saying that Biondo respected the authority of the Church Fathers and doctors. In a text in which he investigated why Jesus willingly hid his identity, after having given a brief answer, he urged his readers to refer to the doctors.¹¹⁸ The only passage which contains a few

¹¹⁵ See Appendix, 10, where I have highlighted the relevant passages.

¹¹⁶ Mag., fol. 37r: 'ille sagacissimus virtutum verarum odorator et venator optimus'.

¹¹⁷ Sev., fol. 93r: 'persona exercitata ne la vera via de la croce, et che per lo suo nihilo havea gustato el seraphico ardore de la vera transformatione cresciuta et stabilita in lui per le molte acerbe et improvise spogliature sostenute in pace'.

¹¹⁸ Mag., fol. 66r.

names of doctrinal authorities is in *De amore proprio*. Once again, it is the section where he disputed the significance of the religious orders. There, Biondo cogently argued for a radical distinction between the actions of Saint Francis, Saint Clare, and Saint Dominic and the orders that spawned from their activities. Biondo also invoked the doctors in his letter to the anonymous friar, where he defended his orthodoxy. He declared that he always followed their authority.¹¹⁹ What can we make of these statements? One might argue that they would have been more convincing if he had supplemented them with actual quotations. Nevertheless, even though we never find a reference to, say, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, and others, the complexity of his writings, the range of themes, and the variety of genres confirm Biondo as a knowledgeable writer. Furthermore, the various scholarly texts preserved in the Florentine codex indicate without a doubt Biondo's familiarity with both the terminology and the methodology of scholasticism.

Why then this reticence on Biondo's part? In my view, it might very well be the case that he preferred or relied more extensively on the piety literature published at the time and that was more readily available. As Ginzburg and Prosperi have argued in relation to the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova (the first author of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, which was later revised and augmented by the humanist Marcantonio Flaminio), the primary sources were neither the scholastic treatises nor the *quaestiones* but numerous works of popular religious literature.¹²⁰ Biondo was more interested in religious poets (for example, Jacopone, Sacchetti, or Giustiniani) than in philosophical or theological treatises. In the case of Biondo as a reader of Olivi, what we have is a latter's work on lay piety rather than an economic treatise.

What did Biondo think of philosophers? He referred to them only twice in his surviving writings. The first reference is in *De amore proprio*, where, as I mentioned earlier, he condemned the introduction of philosophical studies within the religious orders. Biondo saw philosophy as an attempt to adapt the message of the Gospel to human logic. While philosophers and theologians tried to define the Christian faith systematically, they lost sight of the pastoral duties and the practical issue of the salvation of ordinary believers. The second passage can be found in a short text that analysed reason and its acts.¹²¹ Biondo did not deny the validity of natural philosophy, but he set limits: God could not be investigated from below. He connected those who tried to trespass the natural limits to Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126–1198)

¹¹⁹ Add., fol. 26v.

¹²⁰ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, pp. 124–164.

¹²¹ See Appendix, 5.

and contemporary Averroists.¹²² How should we understand this fascinating reference to Averroes? To answer this question, we first need to understand what Biondo thought of Lucifer and what he meant for him in the grand scheme of sin and salvation. In Chapter 4.3 I will return to this topic, while exploring more extensively the connection that philosophers, theologians, and mystics, who relied on the power of intellect for their spiritual ascents, had with Lucifer, their archetype and model. We can only then appreciate why Biondo classified those who preferred human reason over the revealed truth of the Gospel as belonging to Lucifer's team (*squadra*).

3.5 Biondo's Ambivalent Position Towards Humanism

Biondo's relationship with the humanists was as ambivalent as the one with philosophers and theologians. First, he shared with the humanists the refusal to deal with religious matters strictly or exclusively in scholastic terms.¹²³ Both Biondo and the humanists felt the urgency to base their faith on foundations firmer than the ones that could be provided by any *quaestiones*, logical arguments, or sentences. See, for example, the beginning of Text 13 in the Appendix below, which investigated how divine grace acted in the world:

Since the definition of things must precede how we handle them, as, when things spread from their source, one can understand from the kind of source the nature of those things that flow from it; now that we want to say something about grace, we thought it would be appropriate to appraise the weight of the word according to the characteristics of the Latin language, so as to be able to set out the parts of our discourse according to the properties and the nature of the word 'grace'.¹²⁴

Even though the passage echoed the notion of the mystical body and the idea of the Spirit's procession (see John 15:26), Biondo did not go where one would expect him to go (for example, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, or mystics like Catherine of Siena). He preferred to rely on linguistic rather than exegetic or scholastic approaches. Biondo was confident that by assessing the correct etymology of the word 'grace', with the support of some unnamed *grammatici* (a

¹²² Mag., fol. 20r: 'Averrois et similes ei in hoc multi'.

¹²³ On the anti-scholastic tendencies of the humanists, see TRINKAUS 1995, especially pp. 3–50, concerning Petrarch, and 103–170 about Valla. See also CANTIMORI 1975, pp. 88–111; GARIN 2009, pp. 33–54 and 83–102.

¹²⁴ Mag., fol. 58v: 'Quoniam necesse est rerum diffinitiones precedere tractatum ipsarum, ut dum rerum diffusio emanat a capite, intellegi possit ex genere capitis natura eorum quae procedunt ab illo, volentibus nobis aliquid de gratia dicere, oportunum rati sumus verbi pondus secundum latinam proprietatem disquirere, ut valeamus ab ipsius vi et natura partitiones nostri sermonis ordiri.'

term that at the time denoted both grammarians and philologists), it was possible to obtain the ‘origin’ of the word. In other words, there was a mysterious (sacramental) core which the word could reveal. We are not too far from a theological consideration of language and from establishing a direct connection between human words and the Word that spoke of the hidden Father (see Matthew 11:27 and 2 John 1:9). The results of Biondo’s etymological analysis will be examined in Chapter 5.2.2, where a crucial element of grace comes to the fore: the personal relationship between humans and God and the gratuitousness of God’s actions. For the time being, it is important to recognise that Biondo did not think that the doctors or the *magistri* were always the appropriate authority. However, Biondo did not share the opinion of the Florentine humanist Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), who called himself a philologist (*grammaticus*) and not a philosopher, marking a complete rejection or mistrust of dogmatic philosophers and theologians.¹²⁵

Another point of contact with the humanists was Biondo’s criticism of the religious orders. Leonardo Bruni’s *Oratio in hypocritas* (1417) and Poggio Bracciolini’s *Dialogus contra hypocritas* (1447) had focused on the hypocrisy of friars and monks.¹²⁶ However, as Trinkaus noted, ‘they are of far more social than doctrinal importance’.¹²⁷ The criticism Valla levelled against the clergy was of a different level. In his *De professione religiosorum* mentioned above, Valla attacked the appropriation of the term *religiosus* by clerics, monks, friars, and nuns.¹²⁸ In his view, the term *religiosus* was a synonym of the term Christian, and therefore, every person who had been baptised was a *religiosus*, regardless of vows or ordination. Like Valla, Biondo confronted the religious orders in more radical terms than a simple criticism of the abuses of the clergy. I will investigate this aspect more extensively in Chapter 6.1, for it concerns the principles of Biondo’s ecclesiology. Here it suffices to say that, for Biondo, membership in a religious order depended on divine inspiration and not on vocation. While the former came from God, the latter implied an act of the will, which for Biondo was not necessary for salvation.

Was Biondo rejecting the usefulness of the will? Yes and no. For the humanists, the will was central to human fulfilment; through their will, human beings could restore their divine image and recover likeness to God. Salutati saw the faculty of the will as central to salvation:

¹²⁵ See POLIZIANO 2010, pp. 246–247.

¹²⁶ BRUNI 1996, pp. 305–331. POGGIO BRACCIOLINI 2008.

¹²⁷ TRINKAUS 1995, p. 673. See also VASOLI 1983, pp. 77–120.

¹²⁸ VALLA 1953, pp. 357–427; VALLA 1986. For an analysis of this text, see FOIS 1969, pp. 261–295; DI NAPOLI 1971, pp. 247–278; CAMPOREALE 1991; TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 674–682.

the ability to decide between good and evil belonged to the very dignity of man, and it was a responsibility that could not be taken away.¹²⁹ According to Giannozzo Manetti, every man and woman was *homo faber* as they applied their will and industriousness to realise their destiny.¹³⁰ In the next concluding sections of this chapter I will introduce Biondo's views about the faculties of the will and the intellect. It will become clear how Biondo navigated a middle course between the (often osmotic) traditions of scholastic philosophy and humanist studies. Human will and human dignity are, of course, of paramount importance in this discussion.

3.5.1 *Potentia volitiva*

For Biondo, the will and the intellect (*potentia volitiva* and *potentia intellectiva*) belonged to the higher sphere of human nature, with the difference that the will aimed for the good and the intellect for the truth. Biondo divided the *volitiva* into two parts: 'elective' (*electrix*), with the ability to choose, and 'loving' (*amans*), for it was drawn towards an object that had been assessed as good and therefore worth loving.¹³¹ The *electrix* preceded the *amans*, and between them, Biondo placed the intellect.¹³²

A clarification is in order here. Firstly, when Biondo claimed that the *electrix* chose an object, this object always was a reference to God because both truth and the good pre-existed creation.¹³³ If something was mistaken for God, the error did not lie with God but with the human will. Nevertheless, if it was true that sin was a sin as long as it was voluntary, how could the *electrix* be held responsible for a choice that was made before any rational judgement? According to Biondo, the choice was based on what one could gather from the senses and a natural inclination.¹³⁴ This 'inclination', to which Biondo referred with the standard term *synderesis*, offered the ground upon which, in conjunction with all that was grasped by the senses from the surrounding world, an informed choice could be made.¹³⁵ The matter, however,

¹²⁹ See TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 51–102.

¹³⁰ See TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 230–258.

¹³¹ Mag., fol. 26r: 'Que sunt volitive partes? Electrix et amans'.

¹³² See also THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I-II, q. 3, a. 4, *contra*: 'a principio volumus consequi finem intelligibilem; consequimur autem ipsum per hoc quod fit praesens nobis per actum intellectus; et tunc voluntas delectata conquiescit in fine iam adepto'.

¹³³ Mag., fol. 28r: 'quae sit proprietates intellective partis angeli: et respondetur quod est ferri in preexistens verum quatenus ab ea apprehensibile est'. Ibid., fol. 29r: 'queritur que esset illius proprietates [...] Et respondetur quod erat ferri in preexistens et precogitatum bonum quatenus cogitatu apprehensibile erat'.

¹³⁴ Mag., fol. 3r: 'videt pacem non per carnem et sensum et intellectum naturalem, aut eorum actum naturalem et rationalem etiam'.

¹³⁵ Mag., fol. 40r: 'pondus synderesis quorsum inclinet nemo perfecte novit: an scilicet conservet se deo an sibi ipsi'. See EISLER 1904, II, 472–473; LANGSTON 2018; LEONE 2020.

was not so quickly resolved. The ‘root of the will’ could neither be located nor fully explained.¹³⁶ Only God could access and map the proper foundations of the human will.¹³⁷ Thus, for Biondo, there was an element over which human beings had no influence but on which their salvation depended. I will expand on this crucial point in Chapter 5.2.

For the time being, it is sufficient to point out that ‘there are, undoubtedly, only two agents in the world: the will of God and that of His creature’.¹³⁸ One might think that this sentence had Manichean overtones, but its purpose was to rule out the possibility that human will might coincide with God’s will. In contrast, Biondo equated the human will with self-love.¹³⁹ He added, ‘there is nothing opposite to God’s love but the self-love of the created being’.¹⁴⁰ He continued by saying that ‘God cannot favour human choice (*electione*) because human choice always destroys and denies divine choice’.¹⁴¹ One could not love and hate God simultaneously (see Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13).¹⁴² Humans could be attracted either to God or to themselves. Although the human will might be naturally directed towards God, in truth, according to Biondo, it always went against God. The reason for this conclusion lay in Biondo’s contention that the will should always be subservient, which was the same as to letting God attract believers (John 12:32).

Since obedience was grace and ‘every action worthy of merit depends on grace’, grace, as we will see in Chapter 5, was the key to understanding Biondo’s complex view on love and obedience.¹⁴³ Here we only need to keep in mind that, for Biondo, whenever one decided *ex se* or *a suo modo* (‘by oneself’) what was right or wrong, a ‘dissimilitude’ between God and man

¹³⁶ Mag., fol. 40v: ‘Et illud nemo scit quod sit in homine, nisi spiritus dei supplet qui est in homine [...] voluntatis nostrae radix semper occulta est nobis.’

¹³⁷ Ibid., fol. 47v: ‘Origo autem istius voluntatis et amoris profundum idest obscurum et celatum cordis vocatur, quod scrutari dicitur solus deus, quia solus novit an motus ab nobis ipsis et propter nos sit in nobis vel a se in ipsum, quia si a nobis etiam si in ipsum post nos tendere videatur, in nos recidit et desinit semper’. See *ibid.*, fol. 52v: ‘quia profunda cordis scrutatur solus Dei spiritus’ (see 1 Corinthians 2 :10); *ibid.*, fol. 4r: ‘perfectio talis mentis soli Deo est scrutabilis’.

¹³⁸ Add., fol. 148r: ‘indubitabil cosa è nel mondo non essere altri agenti che questi dui cioè la volontà de Dio o la volontà de la creatura’.

¹³⁹ Ibid.: ‘è da me chiamata amor proprio la volontà de la creatura’.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., fol. 143r: ‘a lo Amor de Dio non è contraria altra cosa che lo amor proprio de la creatura’.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., fol. 148v: ‘Dio non po’ favorire a la humana electione perché è sempre destructrice et negatrice de la divina.’

¹⁴² Ibid., fol. 76v: ‘consequente cosa è che chi de lui se diffida non lo ami, como che chi lo ama non se diffida, et non dica la vertiginosa et cavernosa malitia de la doppia volontà versipelle, bianca et negra a suo parere, cioè volente et non volente, amante et odiante in uno instante una medesima cosa’.

¹⁴³ Mag., fol. 7r: ‘quia prior motus, ut sit meritorius, semper a gratia sit necesse est’. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 105, a. 4, *contra*: ‘virtus volendi a solo Deo causatur. Velle enim nihil aliud est quam inclinatio quaedam in obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum universale.’

arose: man ‘leaves and moves away (*elongari*) from God’, and, therefore, he ‘acts unjustly’ disrupting the ‘state and measure’ planned by God.¹⁴⁴

3.5.2 *Potentia intellectiva*

Let us now look at the intellect. Biondo divided the intellect into a superior and an inferior part.¹⁴⁵ He distinguished three modes of intellection: the natural intellect; *ratio*, which he also simply called ‘intellect’ with no need for further specification; and the abstract intellect, also called elevated or, occasionally, supernatural.¹⁴⁶

In one of his shortest texts, Biondo provided a classification of the principal operations (*motus* and *actus*) of the natural intellect.¹⁴⁷ Some belonged ‘only to the body’; others were regulated by either ‘desire’ or ‘dread’, *appetitus* or *horror*.¹⁴⁸ As we move up, the will increasingly became a defining factor, thus confirming Biondo’s understanding of the two faculties as closely intertwined. Finally, Biondo identified a region adjacent to *ratio*. The thoughts produced here ‘try to become, be, and seem rational’.¹⁴⁹ In truth, they were delusional fantasies.

One aspect needs consideration. Everything that was initiated by the natural intellect depended on the senses. Since these operations were closely related to the animal nature of human beings, they also were prone to corruption.¹⁵⁰ These kinds of actions were not present in Christ nor the Virgin Mary.¹⁵¹ How justified this sentence was from a theological point of view is questionable. If the Son’s total willingness to assume the ‘form of the servant’ (Philippians 2:7) must be taken seriously – and this is necessary if we do not want to fall into some form of Docetism, in which the Second Person only ‘seemed’ (*dokein*) to suffer and become a man – Biondo’s rejection of human emotions becomes problematic. Despite

¹⁴⁴ Mag., fol. 43v: ‘abire et elongari a Deo per dissimilitudinem voluntatis, id est velle ex se, tunc male agit’. Compare Add., fol. 64r: ‘la creatura accorta starà nelli suoi termini [...] contenta del suo stato et de la sua misura’. On the idea of ‘departing’ (*elongari*), see Chapter 4.1.

¹⁴⁵ Mag., fol. 55r: ‘rationalis potentie intellective et superioris, quae contra inferiorem sua distinguitur [...] Harum nomina sunt: prime et separatoris a sensibus, intellectus abstractus; secunde vero intellectus seu ratio simpliciter’.

¹⁴⁶ Add., fol. 108v: ‘modo de intendere naturale, rationale, abstracto o elevato, o supernaturale’.

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Mag., fol. 25r: ‘Nam sunt quidam eius motus qui tantum carnis sunt [...] alii sunt circa obiecta sensuum per appetitum; alii circa contraria per horrorem.’

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 25v: ‘Sunt quarti motus animalitatis, id est supreme partis ipsius sensus, quae adiacet fine rationis parti, et plus de illa participat quam tertia, quae etiam aliquid decerpit rationis. Et hi motus supreme partis querunt rationales fieri, esse, et videri.’

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., fol. 25r: ‘Veritate nature’; ibid., fol. 25v: ‘motus animalitatis’; ibid., fol. 25r: ‘prouit nunc est natura corrupta ut fames, sitis, somnus, lassitudo, et alie similes passione’.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., fol. 25r: ‘hi non fuerunt in Christo nec matre veneranda’.

advocating the view that passions *per se* must not be denied, equating spiritualisation with the condemnation of everything corporeal was never abandoned.¹⁵² This tension will become evident in Chapter 5.3, while the broader ramifications of Biondo's ecclesiology are discussed in Chapter 6.

In the loftiest part of the soul (the *apex mentis*), Biondo placed the abstract intellect.¹⁵³ In line with major mystics and writers on divine love, it was here that the union between God and human beings occurred. This ecstatic union (also called *excessus mentis*) will be examined in Chapter 5.4. However, a feature of Biondo's views can be anticipated here: a certain degree of irrationality that seems to be shared by both the natural and the abstract intellect. As for the former, irrationality was closely related to the obscurity of the human will and the bodily limitations of the senses. The irrationality of the abstract intellect, on the other hand, depended entirely on the supernatural nature of its object (i.e. God's act of love). Biondo's supernatural intellect displayed a twofold nature: the object it apprehended was received from above, yet it remained somewhere within the human mind.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the supernatural intellect lay at the confluence of two hierarchically ordered agencies: the divine and the human. In Christian terms, what was born out of the abstract intellect was the deliberate choice to listen to God, an act of faith. I will return to this question in Chapter 5, where I discuss the idea of obediential potency (*potentia oboedientialis*).

Between the natural intellect and the abstract intellect, we find *ratio*. *Ratio* was capable of three acts.¹⁵⁵ With the first act, *ratio* 'runs back and forth and calculates': it collected what it received from the senses.¹⁵⁶ The second act was to 'unite and reflect': what was collected was divided and reassembled through the mental function of abstraction (*abstrahendo*).¹⁵⁷ This abstraction implied a movement upward. We have already encountered this ascending movement in the 'spiritual' aspiration of the natural intellect. The final act was to meditate and

¹⁵² Mag., fol. 15r-v: 'Quare autem hos lapides dixerim in quibus tanta virtus effulgeat, advertat lector pius et fidelis, me ideo facere quod passiones grandes supra bonas esse et vero non ullatenus tollendas sed mutandas per rectum illarum usum asseruerim.' See also Add., fol. 70r: 'vole Dio che [...] habiamo in odio le nostre molte overo viciose naturale overo habituale inclinatione, che non habiamo in odio la natura nella quale sono fondate [...] Cioè per exemplo de la prima distinctione, volendo extirpare da noi la inclinatione de la gola, overo de acto de la generatione, non in tal modo togliamo el cibo al corpo [...] et exercitio corporale overo mentale al quale siamo obligati in alcun modo, o veramente manchi totalmente causandoci la morte'.

¹⁵³ On the development of the notion of *apex mentis*, see VANNINI 2015, p. 141–146.

¹⁵⁴ Mag., fol. 22r: 'Habet autem principium intelligentia a causa extrinseca, id est a gratia.'

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 19r: 'Ratio triplicem actum facit.'

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.: 'discurrit seu ratiocinatur [...] Discurrit per phantasmata seu rerum imagines in accidentibus notis'. See PIEPER 1988, p. 11: 'dis-currere, "to run to and fro"'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Mag., fol. 19r: 'componit seu cogitat [...] Componit seu cogitat abstrahendo phantasmatum similitudines et invicem illas commiscendo, ac novas imagines ex illis formando'.

look for the truth.¹⁵⁸ According to Biondo's view of human nature, based on the polarity between essence and appearance, *ratio* no longer dealt with mere natural objects (*accidentales*) but looked at the actual being (*rerum esse*) hidden beneath the deceptive surface of reality. To what extent *ratio* could fulfil this task – and not get trapped in its own fantasies – is examined in next Chapter, especially in Section 2.

After examining what Biondo thought of the human will and intellect, we can see that he disagreed with the humanist trust in human industriousness. However, he did not deny the importance of the will or of the intellect. According to Saint Paul, God's call demanded an answer.¹⁵⁹ Biondo called this answer *respondimento*.¹⁶⁰ For Biondo, 'one cannot reach God unless one assents to God's free and gratuitous will to give Himself to whomever He wants, without and against the merits of that particular person'.¹⁶¹ Even more important is the following passage, which highlighted one of the main categories of humanist thought, the idea of human dignity: 'The faculty of the human rational free will' was for Biondo the seat of 'human dignity, sublimity, and real greatness'.¹⁶² For Biondo, a sin was a sin 'as long as it is voluntary', provided that here by voluntary one means 'rational will'.¹⁶³

Even though Biondo thought of the intellect as a 'servant of the will', it played an equally significant role.¹⁶⁴ As Biondo realised, the two faculties could not be divorced.¹⁶⁵ The Florentine priest and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), a contemporary of Biondo and a much more systematic thinker, confronted this problem all his life, changing his approach as he developed his thought, eventually settling for a harmonic connection between the two faculties.¹⁶⁶ For Biondo, the will and the intellect 'serve, help, and respond to each other' in a

¹⁵⁸ Mag., fol. 19r: 'meditatur seu inquirat veritatem et substantiam rerum seu formam [...] Meditatur seu inquirat in accidentibus rerum causas et rerum esse ac ipsas formas.'

¹⁵⁹ Romans 8:30.

¹⁶⁰ Add., fol. 93v.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 72r: 'non se po' acquirat Dio se non nel consentire a la sua libera et gratuita volontà de donarsi a chi el vole senza et contra li meriti de quello'. See also Mag., fol. 7v: 'et intimo lumini mens consensit'.

¹⁶² Add., fol. 110r: 'la facultà de lo humano rationale libero arbitrio nel quale consiste la humana dignità, sublimità, et grandezza substantiale.'

¹⁶³ Add., fol. 67v: 'peccato in tanto è peccato in quanto è volontario; qui se intende che sia volontario de volontà rationale'. Similarly in PANZIERA 1492, fol. 28r: 'el più nobile et il più meritorio acto che sia nella creature in salute si è la volontà'.

¹⁶⁴ Mag., fol. 26v: 'electrix domina et regina est, utens intellectu ut ministro, amante ut regno. Et sic ipsa est unum cum suo ministro et regno'. See also Add., fol. 108r: 'perché lo intellecto è como ministro de la volontà et serve a quella et la volontà non serve a lo intellecto'.

¹⁶⁵ On the long medieval debate concerning the primacy of either will or intellect, see the seminal works by KRISTELLER 1965; KRISTELLER 1967; and the most recent EDELHEIT 2014, pp. 138–196.

¹⁶⁶ On Ficino, see KRISTELLER 1964, pp. 256–288; ALBERTINI 2002; ALLEN 2017.

dialogical relationship that either of them could initiate.¹⁶⁷ The *respondimento* given by the human will and intellect, however, was a mix of *actus* and *passio*: it was embedded in the more significant notion of obedience to God's grace. For this reason, a fully informed answer to these complex questions can only be gained at the end of Chapter 5, where I deal with Biondo's understanding of grace.

In this chapter, I have looked at the sources that, at various levels and following different ways of dissemination and appropriation, underpinned Biondo's philosophical endeavour. I started with Augustine and Dionysius in search of those basic theological topoi that resonated in the history of the Christian attempts to assimilate a variety of late antique philosophical traditions. I then moved on to the spiritual Franciscans and highlighted how they enriched Biondo's religious proposition. Finally, I examined how Biondo distanced himself from both scholastic and humanist currents of thought despite various points of convergence. Biondo appeared to deny both a strictly voluntaristic and a strictly intellectualist approach. Both the faculties of the will and intellect seemed to show the presence of an irrational element, something unpredictable yet deeply embedded within human nature.

¹⁶⁷ Add., fol. 108r: 'queste potentie del humano intendere et volere variamente servono l'una al altra et aiutansi insieme et respondensi per necessità variamente'. This collaboration between the intellect and the will was also suggested by others, such as, for instance, Henry of Ghent (c. 1217–1293). See RICHARDSON 2014, p. 123.

CHAPTER 4: Falling out of Love

Biondo understood the relationship with God in terms of ranks and hierarchy. Men could upset their bond with God and thus begin a history of conflicts and antinomies by either retreating from God or moving too close to God. Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter examine the first and second options, respectively. In both cases, the model used was Lucifer. In Section 3, I connect the doctrinal points raised in the first two sections to two specific historical and social classes of human beings. This investigation will allow me to reiterate Biondo's critical stance toward both current philosophical positions and the ideas advocated by the spiritual literature. Finally, in Section 4, I examine how Biondo understood self-love as the root of rebellion against God. My examination does not follow a systematic set of doctrinal ideas; rather, I choose to emphasise how Biondo delivered his preoccupations and worries concerning egocentric love through a range of potent images capable of emotionally impacting his readers.

4.1 Ontological Consumption

Biondo formulated the idea of departing from God in several ways, including using the linguistic record. A recurring term is *elongare* ('to withdraw, depart').¹ Cognates of *elongare* are the Latin noun *elongatio* and the vernacular Italian verb *dilongarsi*.² In other cases, the prepositions *a* or *ab* suffice.³ Special mention was made to Matthew 1:23 (also Isaiah 7:14). Since God is called 'Emmanuel' ('He who is with us'), the idea of departure was implicitly denoted by the expression 'not with'.⁴ Biondo also recalled the Augustinian notion of *aversio* ('turning away'). It might seem that the voluntary abandoning of the *loco naturale* resulted exclusively in a corruption of the divine order, but this was not the case. The disruption also caused a *defectus*; that is, in Thomas Aquinas's words, 'the absence of something that ought to be there but is not'.⁵ The more one retreated from God, the more one grew wanting or defective (*deficiens*).

¹ Add., fols 44v, 129r, 133r; Mag., fols 38r, 43v.

² Add., fol. 83r: 'inghiozzati tanto et dilongati dal vero amore divino'. See *ibid.*, fol. 127r: 'departa et delonghi et separi'.

³ Mag., fols 43v: 'elongari a Deo', 74v: 'recedit a vero'.

⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 77v.

⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 1, a. 3, *contra*: 'malum non sit aliquid per se existens, sed sit aliquid inhaerens, ut privatio (quae quidem est defectus eius quod est natum inesse et non inest)'.

Biondo, quoting the Creed, called God ‘eternal light from eternal light and light from light’.⁶ In this theology of light, to apostatise (*aphistanai*, that is, to revolt against God) meant specifically fading into obscurity. In ontological terms, moving into darkness meant entering into the absence of being. In this perspective, every step away from God both led to obscurity and eroded one’s being in itself: sin touched both on the *accidentēs* and the *substantia* or *essentia* of a person. For this reason, these losses caused by sin could neither be registered and tabulated as if they were data on an accountant’s chart, despite the vast literature that attempted these calculations, nor could they be recovered through the mechanical accumulation of prayers and acts of penance. From this point of view, Biondo was at odds with what most spiritual writings proposed (for example, Giovanni Certosino’s *Decor puellarum*, where we read how prayers were equivalent to indulgences worth thousands of years of purgatorial penance).⁷ In addition to the different interpretations concerning spiritual direction and redemption (to which I will return in later chapters), Biondo’s position raises an important question: Can a created being lose all its being? To answer this question, in the next section, I will concentrate on the case of Lucifer. I want to emphasise that Biondo’s theorisations of Lucifer were not just doctrinal but related to his followers and had, therefore, a pastoral and parenetic purpose.

4.1.1 Lucifer: A Case Study

Biondo intended to write a treatise on free will, where he wanted to examine the cases of Lucifer, the angels, humans, and, finally, the relationship between grace and the human will.⁸ Unfortunately, he only completed the first part. Other incompleting texts seem to touch on the same subjects, but we cannot say they belonged to the same project. Here, Biondo said that Lucifer ‘was created first’ and therefore was ‘nobler’ than other created beings.⁹ Lucifer’s pre-eminence in the order of creation (*ordo creationis*) was paralleled by his primacy in the order of rebellion (*ordo iniquitatis*). Therefore, the two pivotal events concerning Lucifer were his rise and fall. While his hubristic ascent was settled, the consequences of his fall continued to

⁶ Mag., fol. 77r: ‘eterna lux de luce eterna et lumen de lumine’. James 1:17; DS 125.

⁷ See GIOVANNI CERTOSINO 1461, fols 7r–13r. See also TENTLER 1974 and 1977, who investigates how the manuals for confessors tried to classify sins and retribution.

⁸ See Appendix, 9.

⁹ Mag., fol. 28r: ‘qui prior creatus et nobilior ex se est’. Isaiah 14:11–15; Ezekiel 28:12–16; Revelation 12:7–9; Luke 10:18; Jude 1:6. See also RUSSELL 1984, pp. 159–217.

reverberate. For Biondo, although Lucifer's rebellion 'is finished', 'the waters of the deluge' (a symbol for universal malice) continued to grow.¹⁰

Clareno did not specifically dwell on this issue, but he emphasised the universal suffering originating from Lucifer's revolt.¹¹ Biondo agreed substantially with Clareno's history of conflict and suffering. For the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova, a vocal promoter of God's infinite mercy and love, forgiveness had to be universal, but he spoke only of men and women.¹² In his *De Dei immensa misericordia*, Erasmus stressed that even Cain and Judas Iscariot could have been forgiven if they had turned to God.¹³ In Benedetto and Erasmus's eyes, God's love turned Purgatory and Hell into conjectures. Biondo's position was entirely incompatible with those of Benedetto and Erasmus, for, as it has already been noted, Biondo believed that some people had been given to Lucifer for eternal damnation. According to Augustine, Lucifer's wickedness could not reach the level of self-destruction.¹⁴ Therefore, Lucifer existed in a lesser form. In a way, Biondo strongly disagreed with Augustine, for he claimed that Lucifer 'evaporated in his attempted rebellion'; for Biondo, Lucifer 'ended in nothingness'.¹⁵ In another way, Biondo retained Lucifer's individuality for the specific purpose of erasing it instantly and turning it into universal sinfulness. So what happened to Lucifer or the damned? I will answer this question at the end of this chapter.

Two passages clarify how Lucifer's imperfection migrated from his person, now extinct, to the universe. In both cases, Biondo wanted to stress how Lucifer's actions affected humanity. In the letter to his nephew Paolo, Biondo wrote that Lucifer was 'neither a man nor an angel but a perfect falsification of the sole divine manifestation and Christian perfection'.¹⁶ Biondo clearly stated that Lucifer was no longer an agent; yet, through human lies, Lucifer continued to exist: their falsehoods gave voice to Lucifer's existence. Biondo pitted the Word of truth (John 14:6) against human words. Hypothetically, this antinomy concerning the Christian faith could also have universal validity for a false statement was necessarily anti-Christian and, conversely, speaking correctly and truthfully entailed recognising God-Truth,

¹⁰ Mag., fol. 76v: 'unus consumatus abusus'. The same word was used by Christ at the moment of his death on the cross (John 19:30). Add., fol. 105r: 'perché l'acque del diluvio sono cresciute quindexi cubiti de altezza'. See *Laude*, p. 113: 'l'acque del diluvio son salute, / coperti i monti, sommerso onne cosa'.

¹¹ CLARENO 1999, pp. 262–263.

¹² GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, pp. 138–164.

¹³ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 157.

¹⁴ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXII, cols 743–744 (*Conf.*, VII, 12–16).

¹⁵ Mag., fol. 76v: 'evanuit in suo conatu in nihilum tendens'.

¹⁶ Mag., fol. 76v: 'mihi non unus homo aut angelus, sed unius manifestationis divine et perfectionis christiane [...] una perfecta falsitas'.

even if there was no proclaimed faith or question about dogmas and creeds. The second passage is from *De amore proprio*. Here, Biondo called Lucifer ‘a misused grace’.¹⁷ In this context, grace meant a talent given by God so that it could be used to serve God. Like in the previous example, Biondo did not discuss Lucifer *per se*, but Lucifer was epitomised by what one did. Accordingly, ‘anti-Christ, hypocrites, pseudo-Christ, pseudo-prophets’ were Luciferian, for they professed a false truth *and* acted against the Gospel.

Once we establish Biondo’s priorities, we can see that Lucifer’s ‘evaporation’ meant that his obstinacy had ossified, but also that the world and history had become the stage of his damnation. Lucifer had disappeared but his actions had caused a rip in the universe’s fabric for, according to Biondo’s cosmic order, all beings were connected. All of creation began to suffer from it: his ‘consumption’ resonated in the lives of all. For Biondo, Lucifer no longer mattered as an individual; yet, the void he created was so vast that ‘only God can mend it’.¹⁸ Biondo’s sparse statements on Lucifer did not constitute a study of Lucifer. His intention was to clarify the sinful human condition. What we have here, in my view, is an example of the tendency that characterised lay piety and privileged ethical and moral aspects over dogmatic investigations. Both Silvana Seidel Menchi and Delio Cantimori connected it to the primacy of love over faith.¹⁹

Another important aspect of Biondo’s interpretation of Lucifer’s self-annihilation was that nobody was led to perdition by someone or something external. Sinners could be acting like Lucifer, that is, in a rebellious fashion, but the devil did not force them. To say this would introduce an element of involuntariness in the idea of sin, eliminating human accountability. Instead, the term ‘Lucifer’ stood for the immense responsibility connected to human freedom, which preserved the frightening seriousness of history. Biondo expressed the ineradicable tension he demanded from his followers in his poem *Al foco*: ‘believing without any pledge [...] without money or sign, [having] faith against faith, against every hope, the most faithful trust that sees the invisible’.²⁰

¹⁷ Add., fols 126v–127r: ‘nome de una gratia male usata, non de una persona né angelica né umana’.

¹⁸ Add., fol. 100r: ‘solo da Dio sanabile’. See Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17; and Luke 5:31.

¹⁹ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 48. SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 153, who stresses the shift from the abstract *sola fide* to *sola misericordia*.

²⁰ Sev., fol. 31r: ‘O creder senza pegno [...] senza / denari, o alcun segno, / o fede contra fede, / contra ogni speranza, / finissima leanza / che l’invisibil vede.’ On the translation of finissimo with most faithful, see BATTAGLIA 1961–2009, ‘Fine’, sig. 8, V, p. 1031.

4.1.2 The Abyss

For Biondo, moving away from God coincided with falling into the ‘Abyss’. Biondo spoke of the Abyss in two passages. The first is in a letter to Cecilia Gozzadini: ‘The mind, deceived by its own corrupt will, walks, without being aware of it, towards the Abyss, if God mercifully does not prevent her from doing it’.²¹ The second is in *De amore proprio*, addressed to Alessandra degli Ariosti, a friend of Cecilia: ‘[God] may grant to you at least not to run, together with the reprobate multitude, into the depth of the Abyss with all the impetus of your will while you think you are heading to Heaven’.²² The image of the Abyss was ubiquitous. One example from Jacopone da Todi will suffice: ‘*en un fondo scurato, / nel qual m’ha menato la mia cattivanza*’.²³

Was the Abyss an actual place, or was it a metaphor for the ‘blindness’ (*cecità*) and shame (Genesis 3:8; Augustine wrote: ‘as they hide from you, they become the Abyss’) in which all sinners found themselves once the light of God had disappeared?²⁴

Biondo described the Abyss as a kind of ‘depth’ (*profundum*). Within the frame of Ptolemaic cosmology that dominated the fifteenth century, the Abyss denoted the farthest point from God’s Heaven, that is, the centre of the Earth, where Dante placed the centre of gravity.²⁵ Unlike Dante, who comforted his readers by making Manfredi say that ‘divine mercy takes whoever turns to it’ and the devil complained because a single tear was sufficient to Buonconte of Montefeltro’s salvation, Biondo stressed the Abyss’s inevitability.²⁶ For Biondo, the human will was not only the power that presupposed the very existence of the Abyss but nothing else else could result from it. God, however, was willing to avert human beings’ inevitable destiny, the Abyss of annihilation. For him, escape from the Abyss lay exclusively in God’s hands (His eternal will).

Having established the two principal aspects of the Abyss (its depth and its certainty), Biondo had nothing more to say. Even though Biondo was unlike Dante, who spent a great of

²¹ For., fol. 32v: ‘Et così la mente, ingannata da la sua corropta volontà, non se ne avedendo, per questa via camina nel profundo del Abyssso, se da Dio non è pietosamente ritenuta.’

²² Add., fol. 140r: ‘ve sia concesso saltem con la reprobata multitudinone non correre nel profundo del abyssso con tutto lo impeto de la propria volontà parendovi camminare verso el cielo’.

²³ *Laude*, p. 56.

²⁴ Add., fol. 102v: ‘la vostra cecità, el vero lume negando, se faccia de quello tenebre’. AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXII, col. 857 (*Conf.*, XIII, 21): ‘filiis Adam oblitis Tui, dum se abscondunt a facie tua et fiunt abyssus’.

²⁵ ARISTOTLE 1939, pp. 242–247 (*De coelo*, II, 14, 296b–297a). DANTE 1988, I, p. 512 (*Inferno*, XXXIV, 110–111).

²⁶ DANTE 1988, II, p. 56 (*Purgatorio*, III, 118–123): ‘la bontà infinita [...] prende ciò che si rivolge a lei’; p. 88 (*Purgatorio*, V, 107): ‘per una lagrimetta’.

time depicting the *bolge* (circles) and devising creative punishments, he wrote a text entitled *On the Joys of the Blessed*, in which he attempted to illustrate the condition of the elect in Heaven.²⁷ Does this dual approach contradict what he said about Lucifer's total annihilation? Not necessarily. According to Francesco Renato, a Capuchin preacher and disciple of Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564), the blessed would live eternally, and the damned would be destroyed.²⁸ Renato argued that this was the only logical conclusion to the premise that God is love, for it was unfitting to God's infinite mercy to assign human beings to eternal damnation and suffering.²⁹

On the other hand, Biondo focused on the dichotomy between love and justice. If we follow Biondo's notion of the destruction of being to its logical conclusion, the Abyss should be considered non-being, the termination of existence. This conclusion is perhaps hinted at by the extreme darkness (absence of light) that the Abyss's profundity suggested. Since creation depended entirely on God ('He made us, not we'), those who decided to distance themselves from God turned themselves into obscurity and non-being.³⁰ As we will see, contrary to the dialogical-relational principle of love, rebellion led man to sink into himself.

4.2 Lucifer: The Exemplary Thief

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how *elongatio* resulted in a defective being who was then cast into a bottomless Abyss. This chapter explores how the ascent toward God could also upset the hierarchical order between God and man. Biondo described this ascending move through a specific cluster of terms. One of them was *privatio*.³¹ *Privatio* indicated both the act of removal and the resulting deprivation.³² This distinction between result and action was more clearly expressed by the terms *furtum* and *rapina*, which indicated the result of theft and robbery, respectively.³³

While *elongatio* resulted in a vacuum (something disappeared from man), *rapina* appeared to act directly upon God, for it led to *furtum*, which denoted the appropriation of someone else's possessions. According to Biondo, however, only God's grace could cross the

²⁷ Appendix, 10.

²⁸ On Francesco Renato, see ADDANTE 2016.

²⁹ CANTIMORI 1939, p. 52.

³⁰ Mag., fol. 78r: 'opus manuum illius, *quia ipse fecit nos et non ipsi nos*'. Italics is from Psalm 99 (100):3.

³¹ Ibid.: 'procul omni dubio sumus [...] *privatio ac deficientia et nihil*'.

³² See PETERS 1967, p. 180, 'stérēsis'. In Chapter 5, relying on Philippians 2:7 and the idea of disrobing, *privatio*'s positive meaning will be investigated.

³³ Add., fols 26r, 64r, 101v, 102r, 187v; Mag., fols 90r, 91r; For., fol. 27v.

metaphysical boundary dividing the world from the transcendental realm. Whatever was stolen must, then, be or at least concern something created because, as Biondo explained, ‘he who steals offers to the devil what was the property (*proprium*) of Jesus Christ’.³⁴ What was Jesus’s *proprium*? To answer this question, I explore how this act of stealing had its model in Lucifer and originated from his imagination and intellect.³⁵ One consideration is needed before continuing. According to my reading of Biondo, the angel possessed the same faculties as human beings. Therefore, Lucifer had a will, an intellect, and a memory. Consequently, he made use of *phantasmata* and could imagine things that did not necessarily exist but resulted from his cogitations. Because of these similarities, I will use both the text entitled *On Free Will* and texts concerned specifically with the faculties of human beings.

According to the pattern delineated in Chapter 3.5.1, the imagination was part of the intellect and aimed, therefore, for the truth. For Biondo, Lucifer tried to replace God’s revelation with intellectual images. The angel, who wanted to acquire God ‘in his own way’ (see Romans 1:21), approached God as an intellectual object.³⁶ Lucifer could enjoy truth only through his own intellectual exercises.³⁷ The almost universal apophatic argument that God lay beyond anyone’s intellectual capabilities would have been sufficient to dismiss Lucifer’s attempts.³⁸ However, Biondo grounded Lucifer’s error in the specificity of Christianity: the idea that the truth could only be approached through Christ.³⁹ This ‘stumbling block’ proved fatal for Lucifer’s intellect.⁴⁰

To clarify this point, I first need to explain how Lucifer saw the Son. It seems that, for Biondo, either the Son always had a human element, or Lucifer foresaw that the Son would acquire a human element at some point. The first prong of the argument does not seem possible. Orthodox Christian theology – and in fundamental matters such as these, Biondo showed no sign of originality – held that the Word became flesh at a specific moment and in a particular place.⁴¹ As for the second explanation, Biondo’s succinct text did not elaborate on his position.

³⁴ Add., fol. 60v: ‘furtum faciet donans diabolo quod erat proprium Iesu Christi’.

³⁵ Some of the points here expressed were also developed in GUIDA 2020.

³⁶ Add., fol. 132v: ‘a suo modo’.

³⁷ Mag., fol. 30r–v: ‘potuit dici quod ipsa intellectiva dum apprehendit verum ut verum habet delectari tanquam in proprio naturali obiecto sed, quando apprehendit verum non sub ratione veri sed sub ratione entis, non habet delectari in eo in quo non sistit, nec in eo in quo sistit, ente scilicet, quia non est eius obiectum et sic neutrobique habet delectari’.

³⁸ Positive statements about the divine were treated suspiciously well before Christianity (see MORTLEY 1986).

³⁹ 1 Timothy 6:16 and Hebrews 1:1–2.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁴¹ John 1:14; Luke 1:26–38; 2:1–20; Matthew 1:1–17; Galatians 4:4–5.

Thomas Aquinas had already denied that demons could predict the future, but we do not know whether Biondo was aware of Thomas's view.⁴²

To understand Lucifer's frustration, we need to start with the notion of obedience, which is not referred to in this passage but seems to be an integral part of Biondo's argument. Obedience was a fundamental part of the Son's nature, for the Son was eternally obedient to the Father. Obedience was also connected to the notion of *kenosis*, not in the restricted sense of the Incarnation but in a more extensive meaning that encompassed the eternal nature of the Son.⁴³ Therefore, obedience to the Father implied an 'emptying-out' (*kenosis*) on the Son's part. This brief explanation will suffice for the present discussion. I will return to the entanglement of Son, *kenosis*, and obedience in Chapter 5. Here, the focal point is that Lucifer's acquisitive intellectual approach conflicted irreparably with the Son's obedience.

This consideration, however, is still not enough. Lucifer was, according to Biondo, baffled by the inclusion of a temporal element within the eternal Trinity, which had turned the Son into an irreconcilable mix of *substantia* (the divine nature of the Word) and *accidens* (the mortal body of Jesus). Lucifer could not admit that the truth was not an abstraction but a being both eternal and mortal. In Biondo's account, Lucifer believed himself to be superior to Christ because, while he had a 'simple nature', Christ also had an inferior human self. Lucifer 'abhorred' Christ's dual nature.⁴⁴

In particular, we should note that since Christ acted as the mediator, or as Biondo called it, a 'third object', between the Father's hidden glory and Lucifer's senses and intellect, Lucifer did not reject the idea of mediation *per se* but the nature of this specific mediator (Christ), which offended Lucifer's pride.⁴⁵ From this point of view, Lucifer's mind was shaped by the same hierarchical structure that informed Biondo's world. Biondo recounted that Lucifer 'rose in the morning' (at the beginning of creation, that is) and, since he had been given all sorts of gifts, he was the noblest of the created beings. Now, the only reasonable way he could have accepted a mediator would have been if this mediator had been higher than him. However, the illogical hypostatic union defied Lucifer's 'natural reasoning', which, as Biondo pointed out, 'always steals from God's glory'.⁴⁶ To overcome this detestation and confirm his superiority,

⁴² THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo*, q. 16, a. 7.

⁴³ On the notion of *kenosis*, see HENRY 1957.

⁴⁴ Mag., fol. 31v: 'Quid est abominata in ente volitiva angeli? Hoc idem accidens. Quare? Quia illius naturam duplicem vidit, ex una parte inferiorem sua simplici.'

⁴⁵ Mag., fol. 29v: 'ad tertium utriusque partis communem obiectum'.

⁴⁶ Add., fol. 109r: 'sempre rubba a Dio et acquista al suo possessore honore et gloria'.

Lucifer bypassed reality and constructed, out of the figments of his imagination, a God who corresponded to his own expectations. Lucifer searched for the divine Son hidden beneath the mortal body of Jesus.⁴⁷ In employing his imagination to experience (*peirao*) Christ, Lucifer ended up stealing (*rapina*) from Christ his very nature and ‘trapped’ the boundless freedom of God in reason (*peirao*).⁴⁸

Free from the Christian paradox, Lucifer’s intellectual affirmation took the form of an ascent. Biondo’s primary source for Lucifer’s ascent was Isaiah 14:12–15.⁴⁹ Although this text referred to the Babylonian king, it was customarily read as a direct reference to Lucifer. Biondo also used Job 40–41 and Revelation 13. For him, the beasts mentioned in these passages symbolised Lucifer’s proud rebellion.⁵⁰ Both Revelation and Isaiah end with the demise of the aggressor, which helped Biondo reaffirm God’s final victory. As for Job, Biondo stressed one specific aspect to which I return in Chapter 6.5.1.

Let us now return to our opening question: What was the property of Jesus that the devil could steal? According to the data I gathered, Lucifer denied Jesus’s mediatorship. He did so by relying on his imagination and intellect with, replacing God’s love (revealed in Jesus) with discursive logic and mental abstractions. This finding does not mean that Biondo denied the importance of the intellect; rather, it reinforced how Biondo conceived of the intellect as a pyramid with the divine revelation at the top. For Biondo, ‘God infused the intellect with the desire to know the divine call’: nothing is known except what has been revealed by God.⁵¹ As stated by Thomas Aquinas, faith explained itself since faith (not the imagination) provided the ‘gift of the intellect (intuition) to see clearly in all the matters of faith’.⁵² In Biondo’s thieving Lucifer, we find the same antinomy we found in his self-annihilating Lucifer: the radical

⁴⁷ The similarity with Biondo’s idea of *spogliamento* (as it is examined in Chapter 3.3) is significant.

⁴⁸ Here I rely on Heinrich A. L. Seesemann’s analysis of the different meanings of ‘*peirao*’ and its derivatives (SEESEMMANN 1964–1979).

⁴⁹ Mag., fols 76v, 91r–v; Add., fols 120r, 208r. In the first source listed here one finds mentioned both Isaiah and another unspecified ‘locum’. From the wording, it seems that Biondo refers to a previously mentioned place in the Scriptures, which in this case would be Revelation. Whether he refers to 12:7–9 or 15:2, or both possibly, it is difficult to say.

⁵⁰ The Behemoth is only mentioned twice (Add., fol. 87r; Mag., fol. 79r). The two beasts a few times (Add., fols 26r, 123r, 126r, 154r; Mag., fol. 79r–v). The Leviathan is by far the most present (Add., fols 30v, 58r, 87r–88v, 116v, 118r, 122r–v, 136v, 154r, 181r; Mag., fols 76r, 79r–v, 81v). There are other biblical passages that deal with the Leviathan (Job 3:8; Amos 9:3; Psalm 74:13–23, 104:26; and Isaiah 27:1).

⁵¹ Add., fol. 65r: ‘Dio infonde, col desiderio de seguire la divina vocatione, intellecto ancora de conoscere el divino de se beneplacito.’

⁵² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Isaiam*, cap. 11: ‘donum intellectus, quod facit aliquo modo limpide et clare intueri quae sunt fidei’.

dichotomy between God's salvific Word and the human word, which falsified the truth, annihilated humanity, and denied God.

4.3 The 'Luciferian Squad'

In the two previous chapters, I explained how the two possibilities for upsetting the cosmic order were modelled on Lucifer. In this chapter, I want to reinforce the connection between Biondo's dogmatic and dry statements on Lucifer and his thoughts about the human condition. This comparison will allow us to clarify further the points on which Biondo disagreed with the philosophers and theologians of his time and illustrate what aspects of the contemporary spiritual practice Biondo fiercely rejected.

Whether Lucifer was cast down or 'vanished', his influence remained. Against Christ's mystical body, Lucifer's followers formed a 'squad' (*squadra*), as Biondo called it.⁵³ The concept of *sequela* was crucial: instead of imitating Christ, human beings 'emulated the stealing and the theft of Lucifer'.⁵⁴ Lucifer became the 'way' and the 'purpose' of their existence.⁵⁵ As Christ was the head of his body, so 'Lucifer's imperial majesty rules over temporal and earthly matters'.⁵⁶ 'With the sanctity and beatitude of a pope', Lucifer exercised his power 'within the ecclesiastical order'.⁵⁷ His dominance, however, was more significant in the 'interior prelatures', where 'he made himself like Christ and replaced him'.⁵⁸ Following Biondo, we can divide Lucifer's 'reprobate body' into two groups: the rationalists and the false devotees.⁵⁹

4.3.1 The Rationalists

Rationalists attempted to reach God through philosophical and logical arguments. For Biondo, the risk was that they would become so engulfed in their own theories that they would 'puff

⁵³ On the doctrine of the mystical body and its development, see MERSCH 1949. Except one instance (Add., fol. 147v), the term *squadra* is always used in a pejorative sense (Add., fols 125r, 126v, 127r, 136v, 147v, 150r). In Add., fol. 206v, it indicates the Venetian Senate, responsible for detaining the physician Giovanni Maria Capucci.

⁵⁴ For., fol. 27v: 'imitando el furto et rapina de Lucifero'. On the notion of *sequela Christi*, see *Dic. Spir.*, 'Imitation du Christ', VII, cols 1536–1601.

⁵⁵ Add., fol. 48r: 'Homini non preter id quod in angelo fuit presumptio est etiam modus et terminus peccati'.

⁵⁶ Mag., fol. 90r–v: 'regna la imperiale maiestà de Lucyfero, governante le cose terrene et temporale'.

⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 91r: 'regna ancora la pontificale sanctità et beatitudine del medesimo Lucyfero et antichristo mistico [...] nel ordine ecclesiatico et prelatione extrinseca'.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fols 90v–91r: 'regna [...] molto più incomparabilmente nella spirituale intrinseca prelatione [...] in loco de Christo simile a lui facto'.

⁵⁹ Ibid., fol. 91r: 'reprobo corpo'.

up' with pride and imperil their community.⁶⁰ These thinkers aimed to demonstrate that 'the natural truth agrees with the revealed truth, and the former serves and confirms revelation'.⁶¹ One could also be tempted to speak about God in an unfitting way. Biondo was not immune to it.⁶² Excessive speculation could also lead to 'the disappearance of faith'.⁶³ In this case, Biondo noted that 'the substantial authority of philosophy', based on arguments and observable facts, trumped the 'apparent authority of the Gospel and the Scriptures' – Biondo here depended on Hebrews 11:1: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'.⁶⁴ Biondo concluded that 'all the efforts of the human mind' were directed 'to harmonise the Gospel with philosophy, and to regulate and determine the Gospel according to philosophy, and to drag the Gospel where it can be bent' and 'never let it free', and finally, 'to subdue the Gospel under philosophy as if philosophy were the Gospel's true teacher. In this way, philosophy becomes the necessary corrector of the Gospel's falsehood'.⁶⁵

Biondo's fierce criticism of intellectualism and philosophy was based on Clareno's positions. At several moments in his *Liber chronicarum*, Clareno connected the decadence and problems of the Franciscan Order with the rise of professional scholars within it, a change mainly promoted by Bonaventure. As indicated by the historian Roberto Lambertini, Bonaventure saw in the union of *docti* and friars the fulfilment of the Franciscan Order's purpose.⁶⁶ Biondo applied the changes that took place within the Order of Friars Minor to society at large. He criticised how the hierarchy between the Gospel and philosophy had been subverted. Therefore, theologians and natural philosophers, supported by the phantasms of their imagination, considered their own 'natural principles as if they were solid' (compare Hebrew 5:12 but also Matthew 7:24–27). Further, their presuppositions emboldened them to 'measure the rays of the divine light according to their own rules and to subdue them'.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁰ Add., fol. 67r: 'gonfiati falsi sapienti et falsi sancti'. Ibid., fols 72v–73r: 'le mente avarae et superbe et ambitiose, et gonfiono et ingravidano'. The idea of puffing up is fundamental in 1 Corinthians (4:18–19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:1–13).

⁶¹ Add., fol. 147r: 'volere accordare la verità naturale con le verità infuse, et mostrare che naturale serveno a le infuse et quelli confermano'.

⁶² Mag., fol. 91v: 'Questa pace, da me amata et desyderata perché è sommamente amabile et desyderabile, me ha forzato a presumere de dire qualche cosa de lei che è ineffabile'.

⁶³ Add., fol. 147r: 'La evacuatione de la sua fede'.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 'è cosa evidente esser magior in substantia la auctorità de la philosophia che non è in apparentia la auctorità de lo Evangelio et de tutta la divina Scriptura'.

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 'tutto el studio de la humana mente [...] accordare lo evangelio con la philosophia, et regolare et determinare questo con quella tirandolo dove se po' piegare [...] lasciandolo libero et sciolto in alcun modo et in alcuna parte [...] sottomettendolo a quella como sua maestra et vera infallibilmente, et però necessaria emendatrice de la falsità de lo Evangelio'.

⁶⁶ LAMBERTINI 2000, pp. 7–12.

⁶⁷ Mag., fol. 79v: 'naturalibus principiis tanquam solidis innititur, ac multo maxime eius que divine lucis radios suis regulis metiri, ne dicam subdere nititur'.

reference to the human attempt to ‘measure’ God was frequent. We also find it in the rubric that precedes the *Third Mystical Hymn*, which – as stressed by Dionisotti – was taken from Dante.⁶⁸ It should be stressed, however, that Biondo could have also taken it from Jacopone da Todi who often spoke of God’s love in his *Laude* by using the term *esmesuranza* and its cognates.⁶⁹ In one poem, God’s immeasurable love turned Jacopone’s speech itself into something immeasurable (*smisurato*) that no longer functioned as a communicative means.⁷⁰

Their fancies were not just the product of intellectual inquiry (in this case, they could be abandoned once they were discredited) but the result of a willful desire for them to be true. In this scenario, ‘freedom (*libertate*), corruption (*corruptione*), pride (*presumptione*)’ fed each other in a vicious circle.⁷¹ The ‘rules’ sprouted from the ‘curiosity to understand subtle matters’; their initiative relied on ‘greedy love’ (*avido affecto*); their thirst for knowledge eliminated the distance God established through ‘election and vocation’.⁷² Notably, rules did not refer only to the charts of the religious orders but a way of living (*forma vivendi*) in its broadest meaning. Once again, we can notice a consonance of intentions between Valla’s desire to universalise the religious experience and Biondo’s attempt to adapt the Franciscan Order’s history to the personal dilemmas of every believer. In conclusion, just like Lucifer wanted to know God *a suo modo*, the human intellect ‘always steals from God and brings honour and glory to its possessor’.⁷³

4.3.2 The False Devotees: The Question of Prayer

Whereas the rationalists attempted to reach God by pursuing an intellectual path, the second group employed spiritual means. In a Latin text written by Peter John Olivi and translated into vernacular by Biondo, Olivi denounced the exercise of penance and other supposedly pious activities ‘to obtain supernatural visions, revelations, sensations, perceptions (*gusti*), raptures’; he pointed out that ‘the true revelations come not through desire and study of those faculties

⁶⁸ DIONISOTTI 1968, p. 267.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, *Laude*, pp. 74, 145, 169, 185–186.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷¹ *Add.*, fol. 48r: ‘Et quoniam natura ipsa, amplificata in sua libertate, qua potest velle quicquid vult et, ut vult, remanet etiam amplificata in sua corruptione propter presumptionem que in ea amplificatur in volitiva potentia per talem libertatem amplificata, ideo ipsa volitiva a presumptione corrupta et quasi presumptio facta, corrupte omnia appetit et magis ea que digniora sunt, atque ideo etiam plus fertur in illa.’

⁷² *Ibid.*, fol. 65r: ‘la humana curiosità de intendere le cose sottile, delectevole et maravigliose nella gulosità de lo affecto avido de gustare cose spirituale delectevole, overo fare cose grande et maravigliose tira nanci overo oltra la divina electione et vocatione’.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, fol. 109r: ‘sempre rubba a Dio et acquista al suo possessore honore et gloria’.

the soul has within itself, but they only come to a soul that is largely aware of its own defects and insufficiency'.⁷⁴ In Biondo's eyes, the false believers warranted the ultimate level of depravity and were more despicable than the rationalists, for they camouflaged themselves with humble and devotional prayers.⁷⁵ This pretence undermined the seriousness of God's complete revelation in Christ's Incarnation.

In Biondo's account, the misunderstanding of the true meaning of prayer was an integral part of the false devotees' self-presentation. From this point of view, praying could be positive and negative. Positive praying will be discussed in Chapter 5. Here I focus on the negative side of this act. According to the Franciscan Nicholas of Osimo, prayer was 'the intention of the mind toward God through pious and humble love', thus aiming at what was above humankind, namely God.⁷⁶ Prayer was better than charitable works and alms because it was available to all; for this reason, it was light and easy.⁷⁷ It did not need to be complicated: the most useful prayer (in terms of salvific merit) was the *oratio dominica*, the concise but highly effective Holy Father.⁷⁸ In his *Zardino*, Nicholas of Osimo examined various forms of prayers: hymns, psalms, mental and vocal prayers, and others. In his *Quadrigo spirituale*, prayer was the last wheel of the chariot that led man to God (the others being faith, works, and confession).⁷⁹ Consequently, human reformation ended in praying to God.

Unlike Nicholas, Biondo's approach to prayer was not systematic. The treatise *On Meditation and its Deceptions* is the closest work by Biondo concerning prayer that is comparable to other manuals on private meditation. One element that instantly stands out is the lack of attention toward the practice of mental reconstruction, which was extremely common at the time. For example, Nicholas of Osimo constantly invited the reader to recreate the places Jesus visited, the people he met, his actions, and his physical appearance. Nicholas was

⁷⁴ Sev., fol. 113r-v: 'le vere revelatione deli secreti de Dio et sentimenti spirituali non vengono per desiderio né studio de tal cose che l'anima habbia in sé, ma solo vengono nella anima la quale è in gran cognitione de soi defecti et insufficientia [...] chi se exercita nele cose de grande humilità et altre virtù perfecte et reverentia de esso Dio per aperta overo occulta intentione de havere le visioni, revelationi, sentimenti, et gusti et fervori supernaturali cade in quel medesimo delicto'. Text available in LODONE 2016b, pp. 338–343. On Olivi and his connection with the Italian zealots, see MANSELLI 1976.

⁷⁵ Add., fol. 67r: 'el loro [i.e. of the false devotees] occultamente malignissimo et periculosissimo stato [...] l'ultimo grado de la humana malicia et corruptione, et per tanto l'ultimo grado de la divina offesa'.

⁷⁶ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, prologue: 'oratione è dicta una intentione di mente verso Dio per pietoso et humile affect', p. 1: 'L'oratione adunque è per rispetto de una cosa la quale è sopra di noi, zoè esso Dio.'

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 23: 'La excellentia de la oratione si è per la sua legerosa e infaticosa facilità. Molti possono scusare de non dare elemosina, perché non hanno dele cose temporale. Altri non possono digiunare perhóché sono debili o vechi, o infermi del corpo [...] Ma da questa niuno si po' scusare [...] perhóché questa si fa con la sua mente e con lo core.'

⁷⁸ Ibid., chapter 4.

⁷⁹ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1475, Part 4.

unconcerned by the fact that the Gospel said nothing about Jesus's appearance; one could easily refer to the apocryphal letter attributed to Publius Lentulus, a document that Valla would discredit but that described Jesus.⁸⁰ Biondo, on the contrary, invited his readers to focus exclusively on the crucified Christ, specifically on his five wounds (first, the right hand, then the nail, the wound, the broken bones, and finally the nerves).⁸¹ To be clear, devotion to the cross was not particular to Biondo.⁸² Nicholas of Osimo dedicated three chapters of his *Zardino* to it: one on the wounds, one on Jesus's blood, and one on the seven words he said.⁸³ In the letters of Antoninus of Florence the theme of Christ's wounds (*piaghe*) recurred several times.⁸⁴

What is interesting about Biondo, however, is that the cross was not just a subject among others but the primary symbol of God's agency. For Biondo, meditation and prayer took place only when the believer was sincerely attracted to the crucifix. Biondo warned his readers: if during these meditations, 'one feels drawn or detained more than usual, one should follow him who draws them [i.e. Christ] until one feels the draw'.⁸⁵ As soon as the meditation grew strained, the prayer turned into a feigned deception. *Industria* (human effort) and attraction (divine call) were mutually exclusive. The main inspiration behind Biondo's warning was probably John 12:32 ('And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me'). Indeed, Biondo's passage appears to be a commentary on the Johannine verse. Biondo mirrored the pattern of the verse (the first half was assigned to the cross-elevation, the second to the attraction of human beings to Christ, their magnetic pole), its terminology (the Italian vernacular term *tirare* ['to draw'] was used six times), and the distinction of roles (the centrality of Christ against human obedience). Finally, the idea of divine attraction through Christ implied

⁸⁰ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, sig. 131. On Valla's criticism of Lentulus's letter, see LUTZ 1975, p. 92.

⁸¹ Add., fols 70v–71r: 'quanto po' più distinctamente formata la imagine del Salvatore crucifixo, dirizzi l'ochio suo prima a la piaga de la man diricta, et qui consideri tre cose: prima la acerbità de la pena, per essere un chiodo grosso et forse spuntato, conficcato fra nervi et ossa in quella sancta mano. Secondo consideri la grandezza et immensità de lo amore per el quale et con el quale volontariamente portò tal pena. Terzo consideri la extrema malignità de li suoi peccati per li quali el padre eterno così punì el suo figliolo. Et subito poi dia tre corrispondenti affecti a questi tre discursi de intellecto. Prima lo regratii de tanta pena per sé portata così indegno; secondo lo recambii de qualche amore forzandosi quanto po' ad amare così facto amico et fratello et Signore et suo Dio; terzo per farli cosa grata deliberi quanto pò et in ciò molto se forci a voler fare la sua volontà et guardarsi da la sua offesa dolendosi esser stato como è, sufficiente rasone de tanti dolori et pene al figliol de Dio per la grandezza de li suoi peccati. Poi passi a la man sinistra et fizza similmente, et poi al pede dextro, et poi al sinistro. Et ultimamente a la piaga del costato, ampliando tanto più tutte le cose predicte quanto meritamente po' vederlo già morto'.

⁸² On the vast subject of cross devotion, see BAUERSCHMIDT 1991, and the section entitled 'Spiritualità e teologia della croce nel Medioevo' in ULIANICH 2007, II, pp. 271–456.

⁸³ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, chapters 19–21.

⁸⁴ PIEROZZI 1858a, pp. 82, 93, 94, 118 (this is in connection with Job), 139.

⁸⁵ Add., fol. 71r: 'se in una de le predicte cose [i.e. meditations] o simile consideratione o affecti se sentisse tirare o ritenere più del usato, seguiti chi lo tira finché se sente essere tirato'.

that human efforts were counterproductive: ‘nothing better can be done than being led’.⁸⁶ One became Christian exclusively through the cross, but, significantly, no transformation or *sequela* took place because one wanted it but only because God realised it. More will be said on this subject in Chapter 5.

The consequence of what I have just highlighted is that the understanding of prayer as a type of request was explicitly denied. As Biondo explained to Alessandra degli Ariosti:

It is impossible to ask God for anything other than what He eternally willed and determined and that, at any moment, He does and gives to His own creation through His will and determination. It follows that it is a folly to believe, pointless to hope, arrogant to assume that one may ask more than the common grace and the common necessary salvation, that is, beyond the measure of the necessity which God, who wants everyone’s salvation, eternally established.⁸⁷

To ask beyond the measure of the necessity (*la misura de la necessità*) established by God was equivalent to trespassing His boundaries. These limits could also be interpreted as God’s attempt to restrain human potential (the basic theme of Genesis 3). One could either humbly accept a subordinate position with respect to God (i.e. to be attracted by the cross) or challenge God. Even though both the rationalists and the false believers opted for the second possibility, the latter were subtler than the former. Instead of openly confronting God, their prayers turned God’s grace into something due to them.⁸⁸ When this shift occurred, prayer ceased being a request – in itself already abominable to Biondo – and became a list of demands God had to satisfy.

4.3.3 Spiritual Averroism

Rationalists and false devotees did not necessarily act independently. In a short text on the three acts available to human reason, Biondo spoke of Averroes and those who followed him.⁸⁹ It is

⁸⁶ Ibid.: ‘Peroché non po’ meglio in questa via fare, che lasciarsi tirare essendo tirato’.

⁸⁷ For., fol. 27r: ‘impossibile è ad impetrare da Lui altro che quello che ha eternalmente voluto et determinato: et de momento in momento volendo et determinando fa, et dà a la sua creatura. Unde ne seguita verità: che è pazzo el credere, vano lo sperare, superbo el presumere de volere impetrare da Dio sopra le gratie comune, et la comune salute necessarie, overo sopra la misura de la necessità de quelle, quale Dio, che vole la salute de tucti, ha voluto eternalmente’. See Romans 8:26: ‘for we know not what we should pray for as we ought’, and 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

⁸⁸ Add., fol. 48v: ‘ex presumptione speratorum tanquam sibi debitorum et propterea etiam dandorum crescitque et ascendit’.

⁸⁹ See Appendix, 5.

unclear how much Biondo knew of Averroes and his theories or what he meant by his ‘followers’. As the historian Oskar Kristeller emphasised, Averroism (and Aristotelianism) had become a synonym for a multifaceted phenomenon whose proponents often held opposing views.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, as Eugenio Garin stressed, the distinction between Aristotelianism and Platonism must not be overemphasised, or at least it must not be based on a supposed distinction between an Aristotelic immanent and scientific interest and a Platonic spiritual drive; rather, it is mostly the case that they were integrated.⁹¹ As Bruno Nardi noted, one could also speak legitimately of Aristotelic and Averroistic spiritualism.⁹² For Biondo, these philosophers artificially forced their intellect beyond its limitations. By employing every possible trick at their disposal, i.e. fasting, prayers, and drugs, to amplify their mental capabilities, their over-excited minds underwent a supernatural experience. Biondo was not the only one who noticed this phenomenon. In Book 13 of his *Theologia platonica*, Marsilio Ficino spoke of philosophers who tried to transcend their bodily limitations.⁹³

A possible source for Biondo’s views could be Ugo Panziera, who, in one of his treatises, had described what appeared to be an encounter with practitioners of Sufism, a branch of Islamic mysticism.⁹⁴ The event took place most probably during his stay in Constantinople. Panziera recounted that they began the ritual by emptying their minds. They then waited for the thoughts sent by God. Some spoke in different voices (a form of glossolalia), others collapsed, and others began to act like beasts that had gone ‘out of their mind’. According to Panziera, ‘when the body begins to feel these mutations, it is an infallible demonstration that the mind begins to contemplate’.⁹⁵ For Biondo, false mysticism did not depend only on Islamic influences but was an inherent feature of a corrupted Christianity. Lucifer inspired Christians not with the Spirit of God but with the *Affrico*, a wind that resembled God’s Spirit, to substitute the descent of grace with an intellectual ascent.⁹⁶

In this chapter, I have illustrated how the example of Lucifer shaped his *squadra*. Biondo condemned both philosophers and false believers on the grounds that they attempted

⁹⁰ KRISTELLER 1990, pp. 111–118. See also TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 57–58.

⁹¹ GARIN 2009, pp. 33–74.

⁹² NARDI 1958.

⁹³ FICINO 2001–2006, IV, pp. 120–125. See also TRINKAUS 1995, p. 479.

⁹⁴ It is the second treatise in PANZIERA 1492, fols 25v–30v.

⁹⁵ Ibid, fol. 26v: ‘Quando el corpo comincia queste mutationi a sentire, è argomento infallibile che la mente incomincia a contemplare’.

⁹⁶ Add., fol. 88v: ‘facile cosa è al diavolo, da poi la immissione de tale desiderio secondo lo affrico loro, variare lo intellecto, ingannandoli ogni momento in mille modi’. On the topic of diabolical deceptions and discernment, see the voices ‘Discernement des esprits’ and ‘Illusions’ in *Dic. Spir.*, III, cols 1222–1291, and VII, cols 1392–1401.

to cross the boundaries of the natural realm. The former utilised their intellect; the latter employed their affections and feelings to express their love for God. In both cases, they infringed on God's freedom. Biondo's critique of both intellect and will leads us to the true purpose of rebellion: establishing self-love against God's love.

4.4 Self-love: Its Ascent to Quietude and Descent into Desperation

This final chapter examines how Biondo subsumed the two modes of rebellion under the notion of self-love. I will follow three steps that bring us progressively closer to the immobile centre of self-love, a point that, for Biondo, did not see beauty other than in itself, that was incapable of escaping desperation, and finally, that was unable to relate to other human beings in a conscious and meaningful way, let alone God.

4.4.1 The Abdication of Divine Beauty and the Enthronement of the Self

Self-love was strictly related to pride. In the *Commentarius*, a work on human spiritual diseases and their remedies, Biondo identified pride as the main disease of a corrupt nature and the source of all other evils.⁹⁷ Pride started from self-confidence in 'one's own industriousness or from a presumed or presumptuously hoped-for grace'.⁹⁸ For Biondo, self-love grew 'in measure and proportion to the dignity of one's gifts, habits, or potential'.⁹⁹ Under the spell of self-love, God's incommensurable love was compressed into temporal gifts and thus nullified:

To their glory, understood and willed, willed and understood as their purpose and excellency, and therefore chiefly and entirely in the centre, that is, in the mind of their proud heart, corresponds, with equal measure, proportion, and degree of their desire, the negation of divine love and wisdom with an equal degree of that true and substantial hatred.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Add., fol. 36r: 'presumptio [...] est principalis egritudo nature corrupte a qua procedunt cetera omnia mala'.

⁹⁸ Add., fol. 35r: 'mediante sua industria aut gratia presumpta, hoc est, presumptuose sperata'.

⁹⁹ Add., fol. 48r-v: 'amor proprius cuiusque crescit secundum mensuram et proportionem dignitatis donorum vel habitorum vel haberi possibilium'. See Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28.

¹⁰⁰ See Add., fol. 38v: 'gloriam suimetipsorum. Ad quam intellectam et volitam, volitamque et intellectam, sub ratione finis et optimi, atque ideo principaliter et omnino in centro, hoc est, in mente superbi cordis eorum correspondet equali omnino mensura et proportione ac gradu desiderii eorum predicti, negatio divine bonitatis et sapientie cum pari eque gradu odii veri et substantialis illius'.

This passage from the *Commentarius* shows how, in self-love, the intellect and the will became entangled with pride and actively replaced God's love with a hatred for God.

As shown by the rationalists and the false believers, calculations and logical arguments, phantasms and abstractions confined cosmic and divine beauty to their self-reflections. Again from the *Commentarius*, we learn that self-love 'places their beatific end as obstinately as blindly in what they have understood, seen, and love in themselves'.¹⁰¹ A self-loving mind was, therefore, rooted in narcissism. This notion must be handled carefully. Narcissism did not mean that one could not appreciate beauty; it meant that the standard of beauty was identified with the self. As we have learned with Lucifer, self-lovers did not contest the beauty and truth that God epitomised. Rather, they challenged how God-Truth-Beauty was reached. To Christ as the mediator, Lucifer set himself in opposition as the canon of beauty, which he proudly considered higher than Christ.

Biondo argued that God eluded 'rational understanding' (*sub ratione veri*) and could be known only through a created 'being' (*sub ratione entis*).¹⁰² In Biondo's text, the expression indicated Christ specifically, but it could also be taken to indicate total creation. In other words, God's glory could be recognised through His creation. However, just as perspectival and optical rules allowed the drawing of a three-dimensional physical world on a two-dimensional paper sheet with evident aberrations, translating the living God into the idea of God could not occur without defects and losses. As shown by the philosopher Hans Gadamer, this risk was present in any hermeneutical attempt.¹⁰³ As Biondo explained, the creations by human artists were 'without the grace of life'; despite their beauty, they were not living organisms but dead statues and mute portraits.¹⁰⁴ These works of art, which embodied the most profound human aspirations, were empty idols without substance or spirit.

If we think that Biondo was familiar with the splendours of Renaissance Rome and Florence, which inspired the eulogies of the humanists, here we see how removed he was from this movement. Instead, he resembled Giovanni Dominici when he wrote the much despised *Lucula noctis*. One could even speak of stubborn close-mindedness. In my view, however, that

¹⁰¹ Add., fol. 48v: 'suum beatificum finem tam obstinate quam cece constituit in se ipso beato in illis intellectu viso et dilecto'.

¹⁰² Mag., fol. 30r-v: 'ipsa intellectiva dum apprehendit verum ut verum habet delectari tanquam in proprio naturali obiecto sed, quando apprehendit verum non sub ratione veri sed sub ratione entis, non habet delectari in eo in quo non sistit, nec in eo in quo sistit, ente scilicet, quia non est eius obiectum et sic neutrobique habet delectari'.

¹⁰³ GADAMER 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Add., fol. 149r: 'le forme humane sono como li homini depinti et sculpti: senza la gratia de vita nelli suoi professori'.

would be extremely reductive. More interesting would be to stress the Christological perspective, especially when this was defined in terms of *kenosis* and self-annihilation, which Biondo adopted and tried to teach his followers.¹⁰⁵

Biondo likened idols to an arrow launched towards the sky to assault the seat of God.¹⁰⁶ In a more profound sense, however, idolatry was not predicated on external objects but on the self (self-adoration).¹⁰⁷ The journey of self-love took human beings into the deepest recesses of their selves. When Lucifer called himself ‘King’, he did not hold sway over creation as *aliud* (other) from him, the ruler, but as something that coincided with what he thought of it.¹⁰⁸ As the self-lover ‘flees from eternity’ – very much like Adam and Eve hid from God – so self-love came to be ‘located in the present time’.¹⁰⁹ As they stood in the centre of time (a parody of the fullness of time, see Galatians 4:4 and Ephesians 1:10), self-lovers ruled over themselves with their fantasies and reveries. Both memories and hopes were rejected as contradictions of the present.¹¹⁰ Other factual truths became irrelevant as long as they did not meddle with the centrality and presentness of self-love.¹¹¹

After self-love devoured both the world and history, one could finally become the ‘unmeasurable measure’ of the world and ‘of itself’.¹¹² Having measured God, man became the measure. In its final act, self-love replaced God with idols, but since the idols coincided with the self-lover, the created being supplanted God.¹¹³ In this way, self-lovers reached the peace they craved.¹¹⁴ This peace, however, was not that given by God but a kind of peace fashioned by human action. All the names ordinarily assigned to God would then become human attributes: this shift ‘was a robbery of God’s wisdom, justice, goodness, virtue, greatness, and

¹⁰⁵ I will deal with this issue in Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁰⁶ Add., 35r: ‘luminosa et clara malitia, que est sagitta perfecte nequitie que exit ab arcu semper extento vehementis nimium et impatientis voluntatis et appetitus fieri similem Deo in sua imaginata substantia bona et pulcra, forti et magna, sapienti et comunicabili per actus suos volatque tamquam res divina in die consumate excecantis notitie.’

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., fol. 31r: ‘Que idola nihil aliud sint quam diversi modi adorationis proprie.’

¹⁰⁸ Job 41:25: ‘ipse est rex super universos filios superbiae’.

¹⁰⁹ Add., fol. 107r: ‘partendosi da la eternità fugge, et nel tempo se asconde, et partendosi da Dio, verso sé medesima è portata in varii obiecti de suo dilecto et gloria’.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., fols 85v–86r: ‘privazione de ogni bene, et positione de ogni male, lascia nello intellecto una eterna indispositione a la visione de la vera luce, a la volontà de posser amar altri che se stessi, a la memoria in questa vita de posser conservare, né ricevere altra imaginatione che quelle per le quale lo esser proprio sia in sommo stabilito et magnificato in sé medesimo’.

¹¹¹ Ibid., fol. 107v: ‘non exclude [...] la visione del vero in quanto è vero in sé, et concordasi con tutte le verità, le quale per qualche particolare respecto in quel tempo non sono contrarie a la corruptione de essa volontà naturale’.

¹¹² Ibid., fol. 85r: ‘smisurata misura de se medesima’.

¹¹³ Ibid., fol. 83v: ‘et finalmente nel centro del suo idolatra core edificare sempre se et adorare occultamente’.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., fol. 85v: ‘La qual cosa significa che lo obiecto del intellecto de questi tali è la considerata così sublimata et copiosamente multiplicata grandezza. Et similmente la quiete del loro affecto è et ha riposo nella così de sé veduta et amata quasi divina grandezza’.

glory'.¹¹⁵ Both the *elongatio* and the *rapina* were thus accomplished, and this led to a fully anthropocentric system. It was at this point that the Trinity of love was replaced by its 'most wicked copy', the trinity of self-love: the Father was replaced by the self-loving I; the Son was replaced by the idol of 'self-justifying justice, of wickedness that claims to make people virtuous (*bonificare*), and of wisdom that produces foolishness'; finally, the Holy Spirit was replaced by a kind of love that 'loves its corrupt state'.¹¹⁶

4.4.2 A Prison of Blind Anxiety

Self-lovers found a quiet within themselves. Could a self-centred being sustain itself in its self-contained and self-created world? Biondo answered negatively; the whole endeavour of self-love could be appropriately classified as 'contrary to nature'.¹¹⁷ So what were the traits of this quiet? To answer this question, let us start with a telling passage:

This inclination [self-love] is so violent, and this weight is so ponderous, heavy, and powerful that in any way through human power, it cannot be changed from its path and from its evil tendency, which drags it to its centre and away from God and true eternity. I said 'true' because self-love tends towards eternity, albeit in a temporal sense. Therefore, self-love does not aim at true eternity, which is not temporal, but towards the becoming temporal of eternity, that is, towards the temporal glory and pleasure, eternally desired, and taken and understood by the will [of the self-lovers] as eternal. However, this glory is not eternal and, therefore, is nothing. As a result, this inclination and this weight is led to evil while fleeing the good, led to falsehood while fleeing the truth, and led to privation while fleeing being. The more the intellectual act becomes central [that is, self-centred], the more self-love is brought into the being of the creature, that is, it becomes wickedness, malice, falsity, privation, and nothingness [...] Slowly

¹¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 85r: 'è uno rubamento a Dio de sapientia, iustitia, bontà, virtù, grandezza, et gloria'.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 140r-v: 'apparendo prima nel amor proprio [...] como prima persona de una pessima trinitade et generando poi como seconda persona [...] el secondo sentire più sensibile et superficiale de certa propria iustificante iustitia et bonificante iniquità et sapiente faciente stultitia [...] una terza quasi persona da l'un et l'altro de questi producta, quale è un certo acto passivo de amare el proprio et comune intrinseco et extrinseco essere corrotto stato apparente [...] Nella quale tre male proprietà consiste la prefata pessima similitudine de la Sanctissima Trinità'.

¹¹⁷ Mag., fol. 38v: 'Hic est contra naturam et huius actus est finis simpliciter amor proprius creature.'

but surely, self-love makes the will impotent and unable to will anything contrary to its own imagined idol, made of pleasure and one's own worthiness.¹¹⁸

The first characteristic of this tendency is that self-love appeared to dominate the will like a 'tyrant'.¹¹⁹ The hypothetical battle of self-love and will ended with the victory of Lucifer (i.e. self-love), who came to 'dwell in' the created being.¹²⁰ Once Lucifer settled within a human being, he used the will to reinforce his attempt to replace Christ with himself and become the 'measure'.¹²¹ Reality, however, was more complex. For Biondo, the will always remained 'the true mother' of any inclination or act; in fact, self-love emerged from the will and not the other way around.¹²² Despite originating from the will, self-love turned against it and enslaved it. However, it was not self-love that coerced the will and led it; the will itself followed its master. The meaning of Leviathan, which Biondo assigned to self-lovers, highlighted this highly dialectic aspect of self-love: self-lovers 'followed' their own dreams.¹²³

The second defining characteristic of self-love was that it could only create fantasies and images. In the passage above, Biondo neatly distinguished between eternity and temporality. However, self-love bent this distinction and mixed the opposing elements, thereby encouraging the created being to advance 'towards eternity in a temporal way'. The issue here did not concern the mechanism of the will primarily (as it does in Romans 1:19, for instance). Rather, as Augustine noted, once mental images became idols – that is, the target of the will, where quietness was thought to be – the question was whether the mind could reach the quiet

¹¹⁸ Add., fol. 107r-v: 'Et questa inclinazione è tanto violenta, et questo peso è tanto ponderoso et grave et tanto potente che è omnino per humana virtù irreflexibile dal suo camino, et da la sua pessima verso el suo centro de sé tendentia et fuga da Dio et da la eternità vera. Et dixi vera perché etiam verso la eternità tende, ma temporalmente, et però non verso la eternità vera la quale non è temporale ma verso la sua temporalità, cioè verso la sua temporale gloria et dilecto, eternalmente voluto, et però preso et concepto da la volontà como eterno perché non è, et però è niente. Et così questa inclinazione et questo peso, fugendo dal bene è portato nel malo, fugendo dal vero è portato nel falso, fugendo dal essere è portato nella privatione, et tanto più dentro è portato, et nel suo esser portato tanto più malo overo malitia et falsità et privatione et niente doventa, quanto più è centrale l'acto de la sua mente [...] a poco a poco fa de la potentia volitiva una vera impotentia et impossibilità de volere cosa contraria al suo idolo imaginario de dilecto et excellentia propria.'

¹¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 33r: 'qui non vult ei [God] subiici, subiiciatur sibi ipsi, nequissimo omnium tiranno'.

¹²⁰ Ibid., fol. 122v: 'loro volontariamente fanno loco et habitatione in sé'.

¹²¹ Ibid., fols 32r: 'ut similis in ea fiat deo altissimo Jesu Christo', 48r: 'apostate angelo presumptio fuit prevaricationis origo et mensura'. Moreover, this act subverts the natural order since the role of Lucifer was to guide mankind to God; now humankind helps Lucifer to erase God. See Ephesians 3:10, in which the *Ecclesia* (humankind) is meant to show to the powers of the world (Lucifer) the Glory of God.

¹²² Add., fol. 106r: 'signoreggia tyrannicamente in tutte le sue potentie et specialissimamente nella volontà, vera sua madre'.

¹²³ Ibid., fols 122v–123r: 'andando nanci a lui [i.e. Lucifer] per la libertà de l'arbitrio et havendo lui sempre in sua compagnia et sequela gratiosa [...] per qual compagnia del diavolo, da lui da principale denominati, sono anco chiamati Leviathan, che significa Prosequens eos, cioè continuamente et senza intermissione et secondo li loro voleri seguitante loro'. On the meaning of the name Leviathan, see JEROME 1844–1865, col. 839: 'Leviathan, additamentum eorum'.

to which it aspired.¹²⁴ In Christian terms, the question was whether we could identify God as an object of thought with the Trinitarian God. If a distinction should be made – and for Biondo, this was the fundamental ground where every question was resolved – what then did a created being love? The Trinity or God as an object of thought?

For Biondo, the human mind developed a multiplicity of thoughts.¹²⁵ God's several gifts constantly nourished this production.¹²⁶ Suppose we focus on the thoughts produced by the mind. In that case, Biondo's criticism of the intellect, which echoed the apophatic stance pervasive among many Christian thinkers since the early Patristic literature, leads us to the conclusion that God consistently defies our preconceptions.¹²⁷ One could then find peace in acknowledging the impossibility of thinking of God appropriately. For Biondo, however, the problem – and this was a genuine Christian problem – was that even if one were to acknowledge that God was incommensurably beyond any human capability, this recognition would not suffice. The mind would not rest in what it was forced to accept (*non amata verità*) but only in what lay at the end of its ability to will (*el fine de electione de la sua volontà*).¹²⁸ The kind of peace provided by apophatism was always bound to fall to pieces, for one would look for a more fundamental hidden deity.

The problem was also structural. In the multiplicity of thoughts, the human mind could become subject to dispersion.¹²⁹ According to *The Imitation of Christ*, a key text for lay piety, which had multiple editions and *volgarizzamenti*, attributed at times to Thomas à Kempis and at others to Jean Gerson, interior recollection was a necessary prerequisite to acknowledging Christ.¹³⁰ Fragmentation originated from the fact that each thought struggled towards a

¹²⁴ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, col. 53 (*Doc. chr.*, II, 23.36).

¹²⁵ For., fol. 19r: 'Multiplicano le voglie, le faccende, li studii, li discorsi in infinitum, cum le false necessità et vere superfluità.'

¹²⁶ Add., fols 72v–73r: 'gonfiono et ingravidano de varii venti et figlioli, de li quali li venti mai lasciano quietare da varii desiderii, li figlioli mai finiscono de essere con dolore parturiendo non parturiti'.

¹²⁷ See MORESCHINI 2013, pp. 177–229, but also the chapters on Clement and Origen. The Patristic thought arises from the continuous confrontation with Neoplatonic and Gnostic ideas.

¹²⁸ Add., fol. 129v: 'lo intelletto, benché veda, non se posa nella veduta dal suo affetto non amata verità. Overo similmente Dio commove lo affetto ad amare de sé dimostrandosi non como bono ma como savio, bello o utile, et così lo intelletto non lo po' vedere vero bene, et pertanto transcorre verso el fine de la electione de la sua volitiva et li se posa con le imagine de la excellentia propria ricevute da tal lume et fervore de lo affecto in Dio tendente, ma non persistente'.

¹²⁹ The fundamental text for this aspect is the sermon *De igne sacro* (Mag., fols 1r–17v). This text comments on of 2 Maccabees 1:18–35. Biondo interpreted this passage allegorically. Biondo saw the events of Jewish people (destruction of the Temple, deportation, slavery, liberation, return to Jerusalem, finding of the holy fire, and reconstruction of the Temple) as the journey of a mind into God. On the notion of dispersion and its opposite, see *Dic. Spir.*, 'Introversion', VII, cols 1904–18; 'Recueillement', XIII, cols 247–267.

¹³⁰ THOMAS À KEMPIS 1494, fol. 7r (II, 1): 'Homo internus cito se recollegit, quia nunquam se totum ad exteriora effundit', and THOMAS À KEMPIS 1491, sig. diir: 'L'huomo interiore presto si raccoglie imperoché mai non si sparge tutto alle cose exteriori.'

conclusion; however, since none of them could claim priority over the others – as they were all born out of the mind, they could all be equally supported and justified by reason. Furthermore, mental divisions could produce contradictory thoughts that would overlap and demand attention. As the mind was absorbed in the multiplicity of ephemeral goods discovered by the intellect and pursued by the will, it would lose sight of God, the greatest good and the end of all thoughts.¹³¹ For Biondo, however, to look at the local antinomies between the different thoughts within a mind would be superficial. All minor contradictions could be summarised in the foundational dichotomy between the love and hatred of God. This conflict represented the idolatry of thought that Biondo and Saint Paul had in mind (Romans 1:21). There was a pantheon of phantasms within one's mind, among which the mind wandered in a state of constant restlessness (*evagatio et inquietudo*).¹³²

Although the mind was lost in the forest of make-believe cogitations or factual notions, it still endeavoured to find solutions to the problem of the greatest good. For Biondo, these 'various' attempts were invalid since the intellect and the will acted blindly.¹³³ The more men attempted to discern the correct definition of good, the more they grew blinded by their own definitions.¹³⁴ Biondo warned his readers that the age of darkness was at hand.¹³⁵ In his mind, his age coincided with the rise of self-love. The reason was that fantasies based on self-love promised a light that did not illuminate so much as it blinded and lured its adherents into a self-created pit. The fantasy of quietness and truth was, in fact, a 'snare' placed by the 'divine judgement' to trap self-lovers.¹³⁶

4.4.3 The Circle of Solitude

Biondo used many terms to describe the phenomenon of self-love. For example, he called self-love *retornante* and *recurvus* because it 'returned' to itself like a snake biting its tail. The term *reflexus* added the opposition of subject and object, which was instantly deleted by the act of

¹³¹ The self-love sees 'vere et bone apparente' but not the 'solo vero bono' (Add., fol. 129v).

¹³² Mag., fol. 15v: 'Secundus malus lapis et universalis quidem, sed minus est ipsa evagatio et inquietudo multiplex potentiarum.'

¹³³ Ibid., fols 15v–16r: 'multiplicis actus qui prodit ex illa, est cecus semper et varius discursus intellectus'.

¹³⁴ Ibid., fol. 22r: 'recidit a lumine in proprias [...] tenebras'. See also Add., fol. 107v: 'questo malo amor proprio tanto centrale et tanto occulto et latente [...] è de sua natura non solo cieco in sé totalmente, ma excecante el suo troppo signoreggiato possessore'.

¹³⁵ Add., fol. 105r: 'ogni cosa hoggi di è coperta de tenebre et caligine de amor proprio'.

¹³⁶ Ibid., fol. 66r: 'el laccio conveniente per divino occulto iudicio, a lo regnante hoggi di luciferiano et antichristiano spirito de falsa bontà, falsa sanctità, falsa perfectione, falsa intelligentia et sapientia, et falsa contemplatione'. The implications arising from the argument that it is God who places the snare are investigated in Chapter 6.

absorbing the object into the subject. When the created being reflected on itself, the mind grew self-contained, so much so that its fantasies no longer received new external input. A veritable outside no longer existed: the *kosmos* was forgotten. The created being became obsessed with its own recycled fantasies. Since self-love retained an outward appearance – false devotees, as we have seen, prided themselves in exterior practices – Biondo introduced the term *reciproce* (mutually). Close to the above *reflexus*, the term *reciproce* did not indicate a connection with other living beings but involved exercises in sterile self-reflection. For Biondo, self-love was above all a *laqueus* (*laccio* in vernacular Italian), a term that can be translated as ‘snare’ and ‘noose’.

The variety of Biondo’s vocabulary mirrored his persistent fixation with self-love. More than the range of terms, what mattered was the *Urgestalt*, the form that lay beneath the snares and acted as a noose. This form, more specifically, was a circle (*circulo*) – not a static circle but one that tightened or closed in on itself. We can consider this form a Warburgian *Pathosformel*, a pattern found throughout history that summed up universal feelings and emotions.¹³⁷ To clarify the feelings to which I refer here, we can look at Dante’s depiction of Hell. Dante designed his Hell as a concentration camp of concentric circles (*bolge*). The descent to the centre took the form of a spiral vortex, which sucked the travellers (Dante and Virgil) closer and closer to the immobile centre wherein Lucifer lay, with his wings spinning uncontrollably (perhaps emulating his troubled thoughts).¹³⁸ The opposite was true in Heaven: to the centripetal forces of self-love, Dante opposed the centrifugal forces of love, which liberated people and transported them into eternity and infinity. In Hell, tears streamed from Lucifer’s six eyes.¹³⁹ The same, said Dante, happened to the damned trapped in the frozen lake of Cocytus.¹⁴⁰ Lucifer and the sinners were at the centre of their own circle, and there was no contact among them, marking the final repercussion of self-love.

For Biondo, self-lovers were beaten by the frigid wind *Aquilone*, which penetrated their souls. This freezing wind replaced the *Austro*, the warm wind of God’s love.¹⁴¹ Self-lovers became ‘inflamed by self-love’; the wind ‘branded’ them.¹⁴² ‘[H]aving departed from true divine love’, they sunk headfirst (*inghiozzati*) into their self-love.¹⁴³ Each one lived in perfect

¹³⁷ MURANO 2016. The term is here used in the largest sense and outside of its original field.

¹³⁸ DANTE 1988, I, pp. 505 and 508 (*Inferno*, XXXIV, 6 and 49–52).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 508 (53–54): ‘con sei occhi piangëa, e per tre menti / gocciava il pianto e sanguinosa bava’.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 473 (*Inferno*, XXXII, 37–39).

¹⁴¹ Add., fol. 83r: ‘Aquilone vento frigidissimo contrario a lo Austro vento calido signante lo Spirito Sancto’.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, fol. 83r–v: ‘el diavolo a li suoi bollati del suo segno [...] infiammati da lo amor proprio de se stessi’.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, fol. 83v: ‘inghiozzati tanto et dilongati dal vero amore divino’.

solitude as if they were in a prison cell.¹⁴⁴ In Biondo's *Third Mystical Hymn*, the fate of self-loving humanity was described in clear terms:

quanto più in sé entra 513

et cresce in suo parere

e obstinato volere

in suo mal più se incentra 516

[...] *Legge a sé facto et norma* 521

et dirictura et centro,

sta sempre incluso dentro

*a sé facto suo forma.*¹⁴⁵ 524

Far from being content with their confinement, self-lovers rested 'unhappily' in their own self-made circle.¹⁴⁶ They desperately sought for a reliable truth, yet, detained within themselves, they could not find nor verbalise it. They talked continuously, but their words were not theirs: they belonged to a spirit that ruled over them. This powerless desperation was 'always unstable and ignorant of quietness, for it constantly despairs obtaining what it longs for'.¹⁴⁷ The issue appears to be that the created being desired what only God could give. At a more fundamental level, the self-lover understood God Himself as an object that, supposedly, they could obtain. Drawing from Psalm 102 (103):21, the children of self-love were either lion cubs that roared to steal from God the food they desired (*littera comune*) or lions (*littera hebraica*), for they imitated and participated in Lucifer's malice; in either case, they judged God as 'unworthy and unfair'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., fol. 139v: 'amore de voi medesima sola, de una solitudine excludente con el creatore ogni creata et creabile creatura'.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., fol. 165r: 'The more [the created being] enters itself / and grows in his own opinions / and obstinate will, / the more it centers itself on its own wickedness. / Having become law and norm to itself, / way and center, / [The created being] is always enclosed within itself / having become form to itself.' The poem is edited in LODONE 2017, pp. 36–59.

¹⁴⁶ Mag., fol. 30r: 'stetit in sua substantia infeliciter'.

¹⁴⁷ Add., fol. 59v: 'est semper instabilis et quietis ignara quoniam desperat consequi posse desideratum'. See also PIEROZZI 1858a, p. 184: 'ti debbi guardare di non ti disperare della misericordia di Dio, che non ti possa o voglia perdonare i tuoi peccati, come fece Caino e Giuda'.

¹⁴⁸ Mag., fol. 117r: 'Li membri del quale et principali figlioli sono chiamati nel Psalmo centesimo tertio cagnoli de leoni cioè leoni piccolini et secondo la littera hebraica Leoni cioè diavoli piccolini generati dal diavolo per vera imitatione et participatione de malicia et veri diavoli per vero consenso perfectione de volontà et plenitudine de nequicia. Et è dicto de loro, secondo la comune lettera che rughiano a fine de rapire et per forza rubare prima et poi de cercare industriosamente da Dio la esca cioè el cibo da sé desiderato.' Add., fol. 118r: 'indegno ed iniquo Dio'.

In this chapter, I showed the range of images that Biondo employed to convey to his reader the serious dangers associated with self-love. We saw how narcissistic and self-reflective love rejected the world in favour of one's representation of it. I also highlighted how the peace (*quietudo*) that it offered was a deception: self-love imprisoned men and women within themselves. Finally, in the *Third Mystical Hymn*, self-love was identified with autonomous and self-legislating law: it shaped people, gave them a purpose, and defined their will. Yet, judging by their anger and frustration, self-lovers could not eliminate God. Their relationship remained as contradictory as their understanding of love: love was no longer a centrifugal and diffusive force but, castrated, it imploded within the individual. For Biondo, a self-loving being remained tied to the leash (another translation of *laqueus*) of its self-love, a leash that shortened and tightened daily.

What can be evinced from the sources is the abject evaluation of human industriousness and the consequent *dignitas* that may arise from it. In his conscious critique of *dignitas* and *industria*, Biondo diverged significantly from the humanists, who centred these concepts within their anthropological and theoretical approaches. Whereas Giannozzo Manetti praised human faculties and achievements, Biondo radically distinguished between what God planned and what men desired. Biondo put together a picture of humanism from which God had been banned and which, therefore, could produce nothing but self-delusion, self-inflicted suffering, anxiety, and mortal solitude. It remained true that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, but the latter remained far from achievable. Biondo's tragic depiction of the human condition was not delivered through a schematic and logical argument but through images (biblical and not) that appealed to basic human emotions: beauty, freedom, and love.

CHAPTER 5: The Grace of God

In Chapter 4 I examined how Biondo believed that human industriousness, modelled on Lucifer's rebellion, produced the hubristic idol of self-love. The consequences were frustration, desperation, perdition, and the negation of God. A possible solution to the quandary of self-love was proposed by the Benedictine monk Benedetto da Mantova in the first draft of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, as we anticipated in Chapter 3.4. According to Benedetto, God's merciful forgiveness would undisputedly absolve human beings of every sin and therefore release them from self-love. Consequently, acts of penitence were considered unnecessary and beyond the demands of faith. Seidel Menchi argued that the idea of universal forgiveness promoted the idea of impeccability, which was shared by many Italians at the end of the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth.¹ Forgiveness also had a social role. According to Tullio Crispoldi (1510–1573), a priest who worked under the bishop of Verona, Gian Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), a society based on mutual forgiveness could dispense with the idea of God or with knowing or recognising God.²

Jacopone da Todi took the opposite position to Benedetto da Mantova and argued that God was love but also a *statera* (steelyard).³ God had two hands: one for mercy, the other for justice.⁴ The centre of Jacopone's proposition could be found in repentance and confession: man must admit his sins and turn to God for forgiveness.⁵ Some might say that God was so merciful that He would forgive them, in truth, God's forgiveness followed penitence and a real change in their lives.⁶ For Jacopone, penitence was invaluable: Heaven was given through it.⁷ However, this penitence did not coincide with penitential activities, which for Jacopone were nothing but hypocrisy.⁸ What mattered was spiritual conversion: 'Here a desire for the invisible God takes form: / the soul does not see, but regrets every sin; / the miracle becomes infinite:

¹ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, pp. 143–167. On impeccability, see *Dic. Spir.*, 'Impeccabilité', VII, cols 1614–1630.

² CRISPOLDI 1540, sigs Giii–Giv: 'Questo rimedio del perdonare è sì grande et sì presente che Dio a fare questa legge ha posto in pericolo tutta la religione che a lui si deve, peroché pare una legge fatta solo da homini a salute di tutti li homini, per la quale apertamente si dice Dio non volere considerare le ingiurie che gli facemo, sebene innumerabili fussero, pure che noi tra noi ne perdoniamo et ne amiamo [...] questa legge non esser legge di Dio che voglia reggere li homini, ma solo esser legge di homini.' This passage has been examined by GINZBURG 1976, pp. 44–49.

³ *Laude*, p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55: 'Fuggi da la man pietora e vai verso la man de vendetta'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14: 'con pianto confessare; sí porrai reguarire.'

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13: 'Dio sí è piatuso, lo me porrà parcire. / La veretà risponde: Tu allegghi falsamente / ché Dio mai non perdona se non è penitente; / pentir sofficiente non l'hai in tua redetate: / partirte dai peccate con verace pentire.'

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'O alta penetenza, pena en amore tenuta! / grand'è la tua valuta, per te ciel n'è donato.'

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31, 59–60.

Hell becomes Heaven, / frantic love breaks out, lamenting the past life'.⁹ If this conversion did not occur, Christ would become an inflexible judge. In one of his most dramatic pieces, Jacopone has the sinner ask for a blessing after being condemned to eternal perdition; yet God cursed the sinner.¹⁰ As explained by Prosperi, this was precisely the position adopted by the innumerable *misericordie*, the lay congregations that took care of those sentenced to death. A procession accompanied the condemned to death with crosses and tables representing the Passion of Christ to the very end: since the salvation of their souls was at stake, their conversion was paramount.¹¹

Forgiveness and penitence were both crucial for Biondo, but what he deemed central was a radical transformation, what in technical terms is called *metanoia*. Aloisi Mantino, a sixteenth-century priest studied by Seidel Menchi, comforted his parishioners by stressing the coincidence between *certitudo salvationis* and *certitudo electionis*. Unlike Mantino, Biondo maintained that salvation meant 'to be moved and guided by grace; for he who has not been moved cannot be guided'.¹² Just as Biondo had done in his youth, a conversion meant turning entirely to God. Grace did not allow one to continue indifferently down the previous life path. The idea that one could be redeemed through meritorious works and the notion of impeccability would have been preposterous to Biondo.

Salvation was found exclusively in obedience to God. If salvation depended entirely on God's guidance, then men had to leave the domain of action (*actus*) and enter that of passion (*passio*).¹³ Scholastic philosophers and theologians called obedience *potentia oboedientialis*. By this phrase, Thomas Aquinas understood the capacity to receive ('*potentia passiva ad recipiendum*') from the First Agent ('*agens primum*') what could never be fulfilled by corresponding actions ('*non potest impleri*'); the exception was Christ.¹⁴ For Biondo, Christ

⁹ Ibid., p. 105: 'E qui se forma un amore de lo invisibile Dio: / l'alma non vede, ma sente che glie despiace onne rio; / miracol se vede infinito: lo 'nferno se fa celestio, / prorompe l'amor frenetico piangendo la vita passata.'

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39: 'Poi che da te me parto, damme la benedizione / [...] Ed io sì te maledico, d'ogne ben si' tu privato! / vanne, peccator inimico'.

¹¹ PROSPERI 2013, p. 154.

¹² SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 146. Add., fol. 73v: 'da la gratia è mosso et guidato, che guidato esser non po' chi mosso non fu'.

¹³ The importance of this passage is so fundamental for the experience of God that the article 'Passivité' in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (XII, cols 357–360) is nothing but a collection of references to the many articles where this topic is central.

¹⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 3, ad. 3: 'quod capacitas creaturae dicitur secundum potentiam receptibilitatis quae est in ipsa. Est autem duplex potentia creaturae ad recipiendum. Una naturalis, quae potest tota impleri; quia haec non se extendit nisi ad perfectiones naturales. Alia est potentia oboedientiae, secundum quod potest recipere aliquid a Deo; et talis capacitas non potest impleri, quia quidquid Deus de creatura faciat, adhuc remanet in potentia recipiendi a Deo. Modus autem, qui crescente bonitate crescit, sequitur magis mensuram perfectionis receptae quam capacitatis ad recipiendum'.

represented the epitome of obedience as he was both ‘active passion and passive act, the most active and passive agent, the only true agent and patient’.¹⁵ Biondo preferred to use the expression *virtù passiva* (passive virtue) regarding human beings. The following passage reveals the intricacy of passivity and activity underlying obedience:

It happens that, properly speaking, the act [of the elect] is more passion than act [...], for, in this act, there is no rebellion originating from the natural and corrupted will. Therefore, while it remains utterly divine regarding its execution and operation [...], this act remains human only because of the ability not to contradict but patiently endure God’s action, which is truly suffering and not acting. [...] This act, therefore, which is improperly called act and properly called passion, is their only act.¹⁶

How could one actualise obedience to God? What would one receive when obeying God?

In this chapter I investigate how man moved from human to divine agency. I also identify the traits of the external principle that alone could initiate the reformation. Having explained that human salvation depended on divine grace (which, for a Christian, means accepting Christ as the way to salvation), in the next section, I delineate Biondo’s definition of grace. Particularly, I focus on the notion of sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) that, significantly, Biondo understood both in ontological and personalistic terms. In Section 3, I investigate how grace’s transformation of the human being demanded self-emptying (*spogliamento*). This section is divided into two parts. I begin with an examination of Biondo’s experience of faith in Christ. Then I examine how he conveyed his personal experience to his followers. Finally, in Section 4 I explore Biondo’s understanding of the blessed vision and its possibilities.

5.1 Christ as Form and Norm

According to Bonaventure, obedience to God implied the voluntary acceptance of a necessary divine helper (*divinum auxilium*) to lead human beings to their perfection (i.e. their salvation).¹⁷

¹⁵ Add., fol. 219v: ‘passione activa et acto passivo [...] lo agente attivissimo et passivissimo Christo Iesu [...] solo vero agente et patiente’.

¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 114r–v: ‘advene che lo acto de tali è più propriamente passione che acto [...] nel quale perché non è alcuna rebellione de essa naturale et corropta volontà, però ello resta tutto divino quanto a la sua proprietà de lo agere et operare cioè volere et resta humano solo per la proprietà del non contraddire, ma sostenere patientemente Dio in sé operare. Il che è vero et proprio patire, non operare [...] Questo acto però, quantunque impropriamente chiamato acto, et propriamente chiamato passione, è però de questi tali solo proprio acto’.

¹⁷ BONAVENTURE 1882–1902, V, pp. 296–297 (*Itin.*, I, 1): ‘Cum beatitudo nihil aliud sit quam summi boni fruitio; et summum bonum sit supra nos, nullus potest effici beatus, nisi supra semetipsum ascendat, non ascensu

Biondo described the interplay of necessity and freedom underlying the act of obedience by using the idea of *forma*. The term form (*forma*) can be defined as the ‘internal principle’ of every created being.¹⁸ Scholastic theologians and thinkers alternatively substituted *forma* with the terms *essentia* or *ratio*; Biondo did the same. His preferring *forma* to *imago* (i.e. image in the sense of *eikon*) might signal a tacit criticism of the humanists, who highly emphasised the notion of the image of God in man and praised the human capabilities to realise their own salvation. As Trinkaus indicated, we should not classify the humanists as naïve optimists; the awareness of human sinfulness and abject existence expressed by the many treatises on the *contemptus mundi* did not disappear. What emerged was the idea that the human will was replete with possibilities.¹⁹ Granted, the balance could tilt to the other side, an unregulated Pelagianism.

The choice of *forma* over *imago* might also indicate Biondo’s past scholastic studies (most probably, steeped in Aristotelian jargon).²⁰ However, it should be stressed that the term *forma* had been largely and variously popularised. For example, it recurred innumerable times in Jacopone’s *Laude*. Here the opposition of deformation and reformation, their respective ugliness and beauty, disorder and order, was often underlined. Jacopone exhorted man to reject his old form and welcome a new one in order to be reshaped in his defining form were continuously stressed. The theme had its origins in Paul (Ephesians 4:22–24 and Colossians 3:9–10). Giovanni Dominici commented on these verses (*Induite novum hominen*) in the inaugural lecture (*salutatio*) of his course on the Song of Songs and used it as the interpretative key to understanding how the Bridegroom (Christ) transformed the Bride and loved her.

For Aristotle, the form was one of the four causes of being (the formal cause).²¹ The form was intimately related to the purpose of a being (*telos*), for it was by achieving its purpose that the form reached its full expression; in this case, Aristotle spoke of entelechy (*entelecheia*), the form’s ‘complete actuality’.²² Aristotle regarded purpose as one of the four causes of being

corporali, sed cordiali. Sed supra nos levare non possumus nisi per virtutem superiorem nos elevantem [...] divinum auxilium.’

¹⁸ EISLER 1904, I, pp. 333–337; WUELLNER 1966, pp. 106–109.

¹⁹ See TRINKAUS 1995, especially Part 2, pp. 171–321, where human dignity and human misery are analysed through a series of different figures.

²⁰ The fundamental passages for the Christian notion of form (*forma* and *morphe*) are Galatians 4:19; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 11:3, and 2 Peter 3:5. For the relevance of the term ‘image’ (*imago* and *eikon*), see Genesis 1:26; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15, 3:10; 1 Peter 1:15.

²¹ ARISTOTLE 1933–1935, I, pp. 16–17 (*Metaphysics*, I, 983b), 210–217 (V, 1013a–1014a); 1929–1934, I, pp. 116–139 (*Physics*, II, 194b–195b) On the distinction between Platonic and Aristotelian *eidōs*, see PETERS 1967, pp. 46–51, ‘*eidōs*’.

²² ARISTOTLE 1933–1935, I, pp. 266–269 (*Metaphysics*, V, 1021b–1022a), 458–459 (IX, 1050a); see also PETERS 1967, pp. 57, ‘*entelecheia*’, and 191–192, ‘*télos*’.

(final causation).²³ By equating the end and the cause, the final causation confirmed that the universe was teleologically oriented: its purpose corresponded to its essence. Perfection coincided with the fulfilment of the purpose, which became the critical element of existence. This correlation between form and purpose was also valid for Biondo, for, as seen in Chapter 4.1, Lucifer did not perform his purpose and so, he edged towards non-existence.

5.1.1 An Example of Poetic Theology

What was the form of human beings? For Biondo, the answer was simple: ‘Jesus Christ is the true and unique form’.²⁴ To understand the value of this statement, we need to place it within a broader context, and, significantly, the best vantage point we have is a poem. In the *Third Mystical Hymn*, Biondo let Christ speak:

*perché io [Christ] non son lor forma,
perché non han mie norma
tutti imperfecti et brutti.* 632

*Ma lor stessi a sé sono
fine, forma, et dirittura,
legge, arte, et misura,
et amabile bono.*²⁵ 636

These lines, which continue the argument elucidated by the lines I quoted in Chapter 4.4.3 on self-love, show that Biondo could only speak about Christ as form *and* norm (*mie norma*). In line with most preachers who dealt with lay people, Biondo felt an urgency to stress the inseparability of doctrine and ethics, with greater emphasis always placed on the latter.²⁶ The connection between *forma* and *norma* also emerged in Jacopone’s *Laude*: ‘*con Dio se conforma e prende la norma*’.²⁷ The absence of Christ was not simply the lack of an idea but directly impacted the believer’s life: it indicated a ‘disfigured appearance’.²⁸ Biondo reflected here elements of classical thought, characterised by a close equivalence between beauty and

²³ On causality in Aristotle, see WHITE 2018; FALCON 2019.

²⁴ Add., fol. 120r: ‘Iesu Christo [...] la vera et unica forma’.

²⁵ Ibid., fol. 166r: ‘For I am not their form, / for they do not have my norms, / they are all imperfect and ugly. / They are to themselves / end, form, and way, / law, art, and measure, / and a good worth of being loved’.

²⁶ See, for instance, the epistolary of DOMINICI (1969) and PIEROZZI (1858a). But also the letters of AGOSTINO DI PORTICO (2019) to the nuns he supervised.

²⁷ *Laude*, p. 142.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 22: ‘aspetto desformato’.

morality.²⁹ The Latin *formosus* (beautiful) is a cognate of *forma* (shape); the ancient Greek ideal of *kalokagathia* united beauty and goodness. Delumeau stressed that the connection between beauty and morality was also related to the idea of contempt for the world, which led some Christians to consider the world's beauty as deception.³⁰ Examples of this belief abound.³¹

The second quatrain emphasises a strict correlation between form and norm. It does so in negative terms by elaborating on what happens when God is rejected. Speaking of Christ as the beginning and the end (v. 634: *forma* as the formal cause and *fine* as the final cause) also means that Jesus is the way (*norma*), which connects the two poles of existence (beginning and end), the law (*legge*) that regulates life, the art (*arte*) that creates life, and the measure (*misura*) according to which one's life is valued. In this respect, the term *dirictura* is particularly significant. We can translate this word to rectitude. In this case, it defines goodness while connecting Christ with the 'lovable good' mentioned in verse 636. In vernacular, *dirictura* also indicates what is done harmoniously and adequately. From this point, it ties with the *legge*, *arte*, and *misura*. When Biondo applied *dirictura* to Christ, Christ became both the atemporal good and the right temporal way humans should follow to reach the 'lovable good'. The evangelist John made Christ's duality apparent wherever Christ claimed to be the 'light of the world' (John 1:9, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35–36, 46): Jesus was both the light as the object and the light as the medium.³² First, this concept meant that the *fides qua creditur* (the faith which allows believing) and *fides quae creditur* (the content of faith, faith itself) were inseparable, and secondly, that faith in the future kingdom of God could not be separated from the faith informed by neighbourly love (*fides caritate formata*).

²⁹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 39, a. 8, *contra*; ECO 2007, pp. 23–41.

³⁰ DELUMEAU 1990, pp. 9–34.

³¹ Just to remain close to Biondo, see, for instance, *Laude*, pp. 33, 36, and 38.

³² See also the parable of the lamp under a bushel: Matthew 5:14–16; Mark 4:21–23; and Luke 8:16–18 and 11:33–36, where emphasis is given to the role of the Church as light of the world. Biondo wrote a treatise on light and the nature of light (Mag., fol. 62r: 'in alio tractatu de luminibus, de natura lucis huius, plura edidimus que faciunt ad propositum opus'), which unfortunately has not survived. The role of light in Christianity was extremely common. NICHOLAS OF CUSA (1979, pp. 37 and 113), influenced by Dionysius and in direct opposition to Aristotle, recognised it as a conclusive metaphor for God. Augustine explored its meaning during the Creation and associated it with intellectual created beings (AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, cols 258–260 [*Gen. ad lit.*, I, 17]). Alexander of Hales distinguished between the angelic beings (*intelligentiae*) and the natural-bodily light (ALEXANDER OF HALES 1924–1979, II.1, In3, Tr2, Q2, Ti1 [ns 265–275], pp. 326–335). It should be pointed out that the *Summa halensis* is the result of a group effort and not of Alexander of Hales exclusively. On the various aspects concerning the *Summa*, its redaction, doctrines, influence, and reception, see the two recent volumes edited by Lydia Schumacher (SCHUMACHER 2020 and 2021). The Franciscan Grosseteste understood light as the structure-substance that holds the universe together; particularly, he was intrigued by its expansive nature (GROSSETESTE 1942).

5.1.2 The Limits of Industriousness and the Primacy of God's Agency

Having ascertained that Jesus was the form and that this form had to be actualised in some definite norms (see James 2:26), how could one obtain it? The idea of Christ as the form was problematic because it did not coincide with the idea humans had of it. As Biondo explained to the nun Cecilia Gozzadini:

The [human] love for God is not God [...] Similarly, the joy of God, that is, the act whereby He enjoys Himself, and our savouring of God as a source of joy are not God [...] Those who love the love of God for their own sake love more themselves than that love God. In doing so, they turn neither God nor that love for Him into their aim, quietude, and rest, but into themselves.³³

This passage clarifies that the form could not be found at the end of an intellectual investigation. To illustrate what was needed for Jesus to come and settle within human beings to begin their reformation, let us look at a passage from *De amore proprio*. At the end of it, Biondo made 'a worthwhile digression' on the possibility of reforming the religious orders. This long digression – lasting fourteen folios, a quarter of the whole treatise – starts with a dense passage:

Thanks to his special grace, God wants me to see and perceive clearly that the human will that is not originally moved by Him never truly goes towards Him. And just as the movement of the will does not start from Him, so it cannot have Him as its end and term. [...] I therefore clearly say and affirm that just as there is only one true and eternal principle of everything whereby everything that is not Him is made through love (*per bontà*), created as inferior to Him and depending on Him, so in every mind and in every aim intended by the will in which God is not the only principal end that is understood and willed truly and entirely, in that mind and aim I say that He is not in any way included according to grace, but that He is excluded in all the ways through which He can be the life or form of such thing or such mind. The reason is that, where God is not taken as the only clear truth, He is also not the true principle and end, and where He is not the first principle and end, He is in no way at all the second nor the third thing, even if this may seem correct to other people. For, if God is not understood as the cause and

³³ For., fols 30v–31r: 'lo amor de Dio non è Dio [...] Similmente el dilecto de Dio, cioè l'acto de Lui dilectarsi, et el gusto de Lui delectevole, non è esso Dio [...] chi ama per sé lo amor de Dio, ama più sé che quello amore. Et fa suo fine, quiete, et riposo, non Dio né quello amore, ma sé solo'.

the first mover of everything, He is not understood at all. In this way, God – as *He who is* [Exodus 3:14] – is not willed, loved, and known, but He is another thing, which is not God nor anything else but only blasphemy and the negation of God. Therefore, where God is not the first mover of the will, He is also not the end; that is, He is not the thing that is wanted. And where God is not the mover, then the mover is the self-love of the creature, and the creature – and not God – is also the end, willed, loved, and worshipped by itself.³⁴

Leaving aside the issue of the religious orders, to which I return in Chapter 6.1, this passage shows the influence of Scholastic Aristotelianism, primarily when Biondo referred to God as the ‘first mover’ (*primo motore*).³⁵ The full significance of this passage, however, is revealed only when one highlights the scriptural subtext, in particular, the links to Exodus 3:14, where Yahweh called Himself ‘I am that I am’, and the biblical definitions in Revelation and Deutero-Isaiah, where God introduced Himself as ‘Alpha and Omega’, ‘the beginning and the end’, or ‘the first and the last’.³⁶

The first consideration is that the biblical statements were self-definitions: these titles were appropriate to God because He pronounced them.³⁷ In his inquiry on God, Biondo no longer followed an inductive approach, that is, moving from sensible observations and towards mental abstraction – which is what Aristotle suggested explicitly to do in his investigation into the first principles – but only from God Himself (*per sua spetiale gratia*).³⁸ The result was no longer a natural law that would reveal what God is, but God’s self-disclosure, which Biondo

³⁴ Add., fols 141v–142r: ‘Lui per sua spetiale gratia vole che io veda et senta chiaramente che la volontà quale Lui non move originalmente, non camina mai verso Lui veramente. Et como da Lui non ha havuto principio el moto, cosi non ha Lui anco per suo fine et termino [...] Dico adonca et affermo chiaramente che como è uno solo vero et sempeterno principio de ogni cosa, da quale per bontà sola è producto in essere ogni altra cosa che Lui non è, da esso creata da sé inferiore et da sé dependente, cosi in ogni mente et in ogni cosa voluta nella quale è trovato Lui non essere solo et principale fine inteso et voluto veramente et totalmente, in quella affermo Lui non esser incluso in alcun modo gratiosamente ma esser da quella escluso in tutti li modi per quali possa esser vita o forma de tal cosa o de tal mente, perché Lui dove non è solo veramente et chiaramente non è anco vero principale et fine, et dove non è principale et fine non è in alcun modo né secondo né terzo utilmente, etiam se cosi ad altri paresse, perché Lui se non è inteso esser causa de ogni cosa et primo motore, non è inteso Lui. Et cosi non è voluto né amato né conosciuto Lui cioè quello che è, ma un’altra cosa, la quale non è Lui né altra, ma solo una biastema et negatione de Lui. Et però dove Lui non si trova primo motore de la volontà, non è anco fine cioè non è la cosa voluta. Et perché dove Lui non è motore è motore lo amor proprio de la creatura, et cosi essa creatura è anco fine, voluto et amato et adorato in loco de Dio da sé stessa.’

³⁵ ARISTOTLE 1929–1934, II, pp. 122–174 (*Metaphysics*, XII).

³⁶ Revelation 1:17–18, 2:8, 21:6, and 22:13; Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, and 48:12.

³⁷ In Revelation, with the exclusion of the one in 21:6, all the affirmations are uttered by Christ.

³⁸ ARISTOTLE 1933–1935, I, pp. 2–8 (*Metaphysics*, I, 980a–982a).

described as an act of love (*per bontà*). God was no longer treated as a natural object, for He was the one to tell human beings who He was.

The second element in the passage above is that, although one was both utterly dependent on God and removed from Him (*da sé inferiore et da sé dependente*), nevertheless, out of sheer love (*per bontà*), God initiated a dialogue with the sole aim of the salvation-perfection of humankind.

God's otherness can be read in two ways. The first reading radicalised God's authority, implied in His demand for absolute prominence (*solo*).³⁹ In this case, if God was aloof and divorced from the creation, no person could ever lay claim to what belonged exclusively to God. From the notion of authority, one could easily infer that God was a secretive entity who forced His way in the world to obtain whatever He wanted. The consequence of this interpretation of authority was the idea of God's will as arbitrary power, developed mainly by the Franciscans John Duns Scotus (1265/66–1308) and William Ockham (c. 1287–1347).⁴⁰ What is lost in this interpretation, which mistook God's primacy for capricious omnipotence (*potentia absoluta*), was that God's otherness was always actualised 'through love' (*per bontà*).⁴¹ The possibility that God's will might become obscure had severe implications for Biondo's conception of the Church. I will turn to them in Chapter 6.

God's otherness could also be read in personalistic terms, emphasising God's personhood and actions in the world. As pointed out by the philosopher and historian Étienne Gilson, 'how could personality be anything but the mark of being at the very summit of its perfection, in a philosophy like the Christian philosophy where *everything is suspended from the creative act of a personal God?*' (emphasis added).⁴² When Biondo wrote that God remained the absolute principle even when human beings failed to recognise Him as such, the significant point is not the failure to argue for the primacy of God – He was and remained after all the undisputed principle of everything; human disbelief could not affect this truth. However,

³⁹ See *Laude*, p. 182: 'lo sommo sí vole essere amato / senza compagnia.'

⁴⁰ The fallacy in this argument is that God is understood, just as we comprehend human beings, as divided between what He is and what He wants, between being love and having authority. The dangerous suggestion is that divine omnipotence is no longer understood in connection with the Johannine definition 'God is Love'. While the latter affirmation has no longer serious value as it fails to explain God entirely, the implication is that there are times when God would not act as love, leading to the hypothesis that, if God so willed, it would have been meritorious to hate Him (GILSON 1944, pp. 598–608 and 652–654).

⁴¹ On the notions of *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, see CASTRUCCI 2016, pp. 25–39, where the positions of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham are analysed.

⁴² GILSON 1940, p. 204. See, however, the whole chapter (pp. 189–208) for its discussion on how Christian thinkers attempted to define individuality, personhood, both for humans and God.

human beings, motivated by their disbelief, transformed God into a thought, thus jeopardising their own salvation and the possibility of realising their perfection. For Biondo, the stumbling block of the Christian faith was that salvation and perfection were brought about by an *alius* and not by an *aliud*, that is, by the living God who personally approached the created being ‘out of love’ (*per bontà*) and not by a human idea, a system, or a doctrine (and indeed not theology).⁴³ The tension between *alius* and *aliud* will become even more evident in the next section where I analyse how grace was understood by Biondo both in substantial and personalistic terms, but I will argue that only when God was understood as a person (*Datore*, i.e., ‘Giver’ in Biondo’s terms), was Biondo’s religious discourse elevated beyond the platitudes of a faith detached from human life.

In this section, I showed how the *forma* (Christ) appeared to believers of its own volition. This action occurred *per bonta* (‘out of love’). The *forma* was understood by Biondo both as an *alius* (a person) and an *aliud* (a thing). It clearly spoke of love but could also become obscure and incomprehensible. In both cases, the freedom of God was preserved, but what was the cost of this latent indeterminacy? This question will be answered in Chapter 6.5. In the next sections, we examine grace, the critical category that underpinned divine self-communication and allowed Christ (the form) to settle within human beings and begin their reformation (the norm).

5.2 Grace and the Graces

In Section 5.1.3, I asked how human beings obtained Christ, the formative principle of their redemption, and we saw that Jesus was not obtained (as if he were an intellectual object) but came of his own will, unimpeded and freely, displaying, therefore, his personality. For Biondo, Christ entered only through grace, *per sua spetiale gratia*. However, what is grace? This chapter aims to answer this question and show that Biondo integrated two opposing views on grace. On the one hand, we have an ontological definition of grace (which could answer the above question: How do men and women obtain this form?) According to this substantial definition, grace was almost a tangible thing that sat within the human mind. On the other hand, we have a personalistic definition of grace. From this point of view, grace actively approached human beings. This difference was not only doctrinal but, as is always in the case of Biondo,

⁴³ On the difference between *aliud* and *alius*, see DS 573, quoted in M. GAGLIARDI 2017, p. 437 and n. 115. See also NICHOLAS OF CUSA 1979, where non-Otherness is indicated as the most appropriate name of God, before love, good, one, being.

he tried to join doctrine and practice. In this juncture, I will argue that these two spheres were reflected in the language Biondo adopted. To show this duality, I have divided this section into three parts. As I move from a substantial ontological definition toward a personalistic interpretation of grace, I want to emphasise how the ontological categories that Biondo employed to define grace were burst open and collapsed. This shift was caused by the need to deal with a personal God and a personal grace and was therefore complemented if not replaced by vivid metaphors, visual imagery, sentiments, and feelings (the characteristic armoury of Biondo's poetic theology).

5.2.1 What Is Grace? Grace as 'It'

The following section aims at establishing a formal-metaphysical definition of grace. In a text dealing with the definition of *habitus* in the soul, Biondo defined grace as a habit or disposition infused by God.⁴⁴ A more precise account of grace can be found in *De amore proprio*:

These graces are of two kinds. The first and more excellent, which is also more universal and more particular at the same time than the rest, is the grace that makes one pleasing to God (*gratia gratum faciens*). I will say nothing about its nature and act, except that God never infuses it in the rational or elevated parts of the soul but only in a new higher part, created by God in the soul. [...] Other graces, which remain in the soul regardless of the grace mentioned above, are infused in the elevated natural part of the soul. They do not exceed in height the level which the secondary causes can reach. And when they are infused in the soul at the time that love (*caritas*) dwells in it, they are infused in the highest part of the soul, which I have mentioned above. [...] Many acts, born out of these graces gratuitously given (*gratie gratis date*), separated from the *gratia gratum faciens*, can produce graces acquired with the favour of the secondary causes and whose operation is more or less removed from the devil. The devil, however, can produce in the human being acts of the same nature, mainly in the region of the flesh, the senses, or the lower part of the reason.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mag., fol. 37r: 'Quid est habitus in anima? Est dispositio ad aliquem actum, quae adeo dum sit ille habitus dicitur infundi, et hec dispositio dum infunditur, non tollit eo ipso contrariam dispositionem, sed actus ab illa elicit illam denique tollere possunt. Quid est actus? Et in quo differt ab habitu? Est voluntatis per gratiam libere motus secundum illam dispositionem cuius dicitur actus.' See Appendix, 11.

⁴⁵ Add., fols 134v–135r: 'Queste gratie sono de due sorte. La prima et più eccellente, et più universale et particolare in seme che tutto el resto, è la gratia gratum faciente. De la natura et acto de la quale qui non voglio altro dire se non che questo: non se dà mai cioè non è mai infusa da Dio nel anima in alcuna de queste parte de sopra nominate, cioè nella rationale, né nella elevata, ma sempre è data da Dio in una parte nova più alta da Lui

In line with the tradition, Biondo distinguished between the singular *gratia gratum faciens*, traditionally called sanctifying grace, and a plurality of graces (*gratiae gratis datae*, also called general or common grace).⁴⁶ The significance of the terms *gratus* and *gratis* is examined in the next section. The two types of grace were separated on several levels. God alone could provide the *gratia gratum faciens*; He placed it in an area appositely created for it, distinguished from reason and intellect. On the other hand, the *gratiae gratis datae* sat in the ‘natural part’. ‘Secondary causes’ and the devil could contribute to their creation. Finally, in a Latin text describing how grace acted in nature, Biondo wrote:

One should know that these graces are divided into two. The first one is the universal love or *gratia gratum faciens*. It is the grace that some theologians distinguish from charity and that we call theological charity, which Paul places before the associated faith and hope [1 Corinthians 13:13]. By contrast, the second grace is simply called grace; if one can say so, its parts are more numerous than the parts that constitute the first grace.⁴⁷

Biondo reaffirmed the numerical difference between sanctifying grace, consisting of a single body, and common grace, made of ‘several parts’. The unity of the *gratia gratum faciens* referred to the single will of God’s ‘universal love’ and the love that, following Saint Paul, human beings must possess and fulfil. In the same text, Biondo continued:

It should be known that when grace is in the soul, it works in as much as it is a created being and not the Creator, that is, to the extent that it is something that has an essence, and it posits or signifies in the soul a sort of new substance, created out of nothing and

facta nel anima. [...] Alcune altre gratie, quale possono stare nel anima senza la prefata gratia et stanno anco con quella, sono infuse nella parte elevata naturale, cioè non excedono de altezza el grado a quale possono elevare le secunde cause. Et quando sono infuse nel anima nel tempo che in quella è la carità sono infuse nella parte più alta de essa elevata parte prenominata. [...] Molti de li acti quali producono le prefate gratie gratisdate da la gratia gratum faciente separate, possono produrre alcune gratie acquistate con favore de le secunde cause et operatione più o meno remota del demonio. Alcuni acti ancora de questa natura po’ el demonio produrre nel homo, maxime nella regione de la carne o de li sensi o de la rationale più bassa.’

⁴⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I-II, q. 111, a. 1, *contra*: ‘duplex est gratia. Una quidem per quam ipse homo Deo coniungitur, quae vocatur gratia gratum faciens. Alia vero per quam unus homo cooperatur alteri ad hoc quod ad Deum reducatur. Huiusmodi autem donum vocatur gratia gratis data’; and PIEROZZI 1959, IV, col. 471: ‘divisio realis’. Thomas and Antoninus of Florence list further divisions, which are not relevant for this discussion.

⁴⁷ Mag., fol. 55v: ‘Sciendum etiam quod ee gratie inter se primam sectionem patiuntur in partes duas. Quarum prima est ea que dicitur universalis caritas seu gratia gratum faciens, ea videlicet que a nonnullis contra caritatem distinguitur, que theologica a nostris nuncupata, fidei et spei sociabus suis a Paulo praeponitur. Secunda vero, gratia simpliciter nuncupatur cuius sunt multo plures quam superioris partes si modo dici possit.’

capable of reforming the soul itself, entirely or partially, according to the nature of that grace.⁴⁸

Uncreated grace (God) must not be confused with the created grace (sanctifying grace). Biondo, who thought here in substantial terms, saw grace as a being (*creatura*) created out of nothing and placed in the soul. Not everyone would agree with this definition. The Master of the Sentences, Peter Lombard (1096–1160), claimed that the Spirit was given to the believers.⁴⁹ I have listed the differences between sanctifying grace and general graces in the following table:

<i>Gratia gratum faciens</i>	<i>Gratiae gratis datae</i>
Universal love Theological virtue <i>Caritas-agape</i> (1 Corinthians 13)	<i>Gratia simpliciter</i>
Essential A new substance Created <i>ex nihilo</i> Capable of reforming the human being	They exist regardless of the <i>gratia gratum faciens</i>
It produces one act	They produce several different acts
Single	Multiple
A habit created and infused by God	A habit received either by God, secondary causes, or the devil
Supernatural: It is in a new higher part of the soul	Natural: It is in the elevated rational part of the soul

In the remaining of this chapter, I will deal with sanctifying grace. *Gratiae gratis datae* will be discussed in Chapter 6.

To summarise: sanctifying grace resulted exclusively from God’s infusion, which surpassed the limits of nature (*ordo naturalis*) to place something new (*nova quaedam substantia*) within the creation, in a new space (*in una parte nova*). We can guess that Biondo’s primary interest was soteriological and admonitory: salvation was *always* gained through

⁴⁸ Mag., fol. 55r: ‘Preter hoc sciendum etiam quod gratia cum in anima operatur, quatenus creatura est et non Creator, hoc est quatenus essenziale aliquid, et novam quandam substantiam de nihilo creatam et anime ipsius reformatricem ex toto aut ex parte pro natura ipsius gratie ponit seu dicit in anima.’

⁴⁹ PETER LOMBARD 1916, I, p. 106 (I, 17, 1): ‘Nam ipse Spiritus sanctus, qui Deus est ac tertia in Trinitate persona, ut supra ostensum est, a Patre et Filio ac se ipso temporaliter procedit, id est, mittitur ac donatur fidelibus’.

grace, which lay beyond human reach. However, he did not say much about how grace interacted with humankind. We know that, for Biondo, the connection between God and creation, disrupted by the Fall, was restored only in that place, the *apex mentis* (the summit of the mind) theorised by Scholastic philosophers and mystics. Unfortunately, outside of the *apex mentis*, sanctifying grace was fragmented into many graces originating either from God or Lucifer.

Two conclusions can be drawn from what argued so far. On the one hand, Biondo confirmed the superiority of interior piety over exterior rituals and penitential activities. The latter could at most be regarded as common grace, but one could not identify or discern with clarity its origin. The notion of discernment was central for Biondo, and I will return to it in Chapter 6.1. On the other hand, grace exposed the human condition. Lack of merit could no longer be attributed solely to the misuse of the will by human beings. If they willingly decided to adhere to God, there would be no grace. Meritlessness could coincide with human corruption, but, in a more fundamental sense, it was one of creation's defining traits.

Grace's soteriological function must be paired with God's creativity. Grace was the stage where history occurred, and it anticipated human wickedness: 'where sin abounded, grace abounded much more' (Romans 5:20). However, if this was the case, one might question the significance of human will and the limits of God's election (after all, for Biondo, salvation meant 'to be moved and guided by grace; for he who has not been moved cannot be guided').⁵⁰ One might also ask at what point grace was given to human beings. This question makes sense only when a radical separation between nature and grace was presupposed (something Biondo gave for granted). The title of one of Biondo's texts, 'How grace works in nature', hinted at this assumption.⁵¹ To ask about the beginning of grace's operation implied that grace was not working in a perpetual way. This crucial aspect is investigated in Chapter 6, for this issue becomes evident only in the supposed divergence between God's will and love.

This section looked at how Biondo defined grace in ontological terms. I am aware that the discussion was doctrinal and consequently devoid of pastoral concerns (although, as I elucidated in the previous paragraph, it was not inconsequential for Biondo's followers or the Church itself). Nonetheless, this examination was necessary to highlight the conflict when

⁵⁰ Add., fol. 73v: 'da la gratia è mosso et guidato, che guidato esser non po' chi mosso non fu'.

⁵¹ Appendix, 13.

Biondo moved towards a personalistic definition of grace. For Biondo, this change in definition, which also affected his writing style, occurred when one recognised grace as a gift.

5.2.2 An Etymological Assessment

The shift from grace as a substance to grace as a gift was exemplified in one text on which I focus my attention in this section.⁵² For Biondo, the term *gratia* had two possible origins: the adjective *gratus* and the adverb *gratis*.⁵³ *Gratus* could refer either to a person who was made agreeable to someone else (passive sense) or a person who was grateful for a benefit or a gift received (active sense). From the two meanings of the term *gratus*, Biondo deduced two aspects of grace. Firstly, being grateful and being made agreeable (the two meanings indicated by the adjective *gratus*) originated from an action that preceded (*prevenit* is the word used by Biondo) the corresponding human states of gratefulness and agreeableness. In Scholastic terms, we can speak of *gratia praeveniens*, a grace that preceded human action.⁵⁴ The second aspect was that the person who was made agreeable and grateful did not necessarily know the person (in this case, God) who loved them first; it could also happen that they did not realise that they were loved.⁵⁵ The implication was that grace worked secretly and was unhindered by human understanding or ignorance. Conversely, one's gratefulness could be misdirected entirely.

The adverb *gratis*, too, had two meanings. According to the first, grace disregarded personal merit.⁵⁶ This aspect was already implicit in the idea of *gratia praeveniens*. Biondo warned his readership that from the lack of merit, suggested by grace's gratuitousness, one could not infer either that one was 'loved' by God or that one was led to God while forgetting entirely about oneself.⁵⁷ These conclusions – being loved (made agreeable) and reaching God

⁵² See Appendix, 14.

⁵³ Mag., fol. 58v: 'Nec mirum videri debet in tractatu rei altissime ac dignissime grammaticorum venari suffragia. Nempe quoniam res nominibus signentur, de gramaticis sumere opus est quod est tanquam ipsorum proprium apud ipsos. Non enim dedignatur quisquam veritatis amator veritatem undecumque proquirere ac ubicumque compertam honore debito atque amore pariter prosequitur. Igitur et nos de gratia loquituri prius verbi eius vim et pondus de gramatice fonte scrutemur.' A similar etymology is found in OSBERNO 1996, I, pp. 298–299. UGUCCIONE DA PISA (2004, II, pp. 543–544) starts from the adverb *gratis*, which is related straightaway to grace, and only later comes to the adjective *gratus*. BALBI (1971) follows Ugucione.

⁵⁴ On the distinction between *gratia praeveniens* and *gratia subsequens*, see THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I-II, q. 111, a. 3, *contra*.

⁵⁵ Mag., fol. 59r–v: 'Potest enim fieri, et fit frequente, ut alteri gratus quis sit quem ipse non novit nec si se amet intelligit.'

⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 59v: 'Primum eorum est ut gratis fieri dicatur comuniore usu quod sine merito fiat.'

⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 60v: 'Licet enim hoc fonte deducta gratia, dicat nobis donum Dei se esse, quod qui accipit non ideo quia mereretur accepit, sed tamen ideo meruit accepisse quoniam accepit. Non tamen pervenit ad illud caput primae deductionis: quo quis gratus datori et dilectus fit, neque ad illud quo datorem agnoscens animo atque opere, totius in Eum fertur sui oblitus'.

(equivalent to praising God) – were included in *gratus* but not *gratis*. In other words, disparaging oneself by acknowledging one's lack of merit was not the same as praising God.⁵⁸ In Biondo's words, the state of virtue required both the infused grace and the annihilation of the disposition contrary to it.⁵⁹ While self-criticism was confined to the human sphere, God's praise transcended the mortal realm. The term *gratis* also indicated that causality and effect were no longer linked:

According to the second meaning, which is more rarely employed, something happens gratuitously when something wicked is turned into good for no logical reason. This fact can be divided into two rubrics. According to the first, one has only a cause; according to the second, one has only the effect, for one cannot name the cause of something that has no effect, nor can they name the effect of something with no preceding cause. For this reason, something happens gratuitously when it happens without a cause, and likewise, something can be said to have occurred gratuitously when there is no effect.⁶⁰

The term *gratis* highlighted the ambivalent position in which human beings lived. On the one hand, human action was discarded: God's grace was given regardless of human contribution or intention. On the other hand, grace demanded a personal response that acknowledged the gratuitous character of God's offering. Here, it is essential to clarify that by 'effect', Biondo meant the temporal outcomes of grace; by 'cause', he meant the eternal source of grace (i.e. God). We return, therefore, to the distinction between the many *gratiae gratis datae* and the one *gratia gratum faciens*. According to the meaning of *gratis*, there were two ways to misinterpret grace's activity. First, some people saw no clear purpose in God's temporal actions, even though they acknowledged Him as their cause. Grace could appear to force or contradict human nature, to the point that the conflict between what human beings desired and what grace allowed could almost be perceived or classified as a form of punishment. Others, on the other hand, appreciated the actions of God, but not the fact that such acts occurred

⁵⁸ In a certain sense, disparaging oneself could be compared to what the scholastics labelled *yrónia*, which indicates when one pretends to have less than one has and which can be confused with humbleness. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, II-II, q. 113. See also DI MAIO 1989, pp. 314–328, where he analyses Wisdom 7:13: '[sapientiam] sine fictione didici, et sine invidia communico'.

⁵⁹ Mag., fol. 37v: 'Quid est virtus? Est anihilatio aut maxima debilitatio dispositionis, contrarie actui aut habitui cuius est illa virtus, ut libera quotiens opus est posset operari gratia in homine actus secundum habitus illi datos. Virtus igitur non supponit solum habitum infusum et actum elicitem quamvis non dicatur proprie habitus sed supponit habitum contrarium annihilatum aut maxime debilitatum.'

⁶⁰ Mag., fol. 59v: 'Secundum vero quod rarius usurpatur: est ut gratis fieri dicatur quod nulla rationabili causa mali in alterum fiat. Hoc ipsum autem in duo capita scinditur. Cuius alterum causam tantum habet, alterum vero solum effectum, quoniam neque causam dicere quis possit cuius effectus nullus sit, neque effectum cuius non praecessit causa. Igitur hac ratione et gratis dicitur fieri quod sine causa fit; et eque gratis dici potest factum cuius effectus sit nullus.'

beyond their temporal contingency. As Biondo explained, common grace was unquestionably related to sanctifying grace; however, it could quickly become a deceptive illusion of false beatitude when human beings appropriated it improperly.

Biondo's etymological analysis has illuminated four essential aspects of grace: (1) through grace, human beings were made agreeable to God; (2) through grace, human beings showed gratitude to God; (3) grace was given regardless of human merit; (4) finally, grace could be misinterpreted. These four points connected grace to the notion of a gift. The first two aspects relayed that grace was the gift that made human beings agreeable and thankful.⁶¹ With the last two points, Biondo warned his readers that the tie linking the Giver (*Datore*) to what was given should always be recognised.

5.2.3 Who Is Grace? Grace as 'Thou'

The sources examined in Chapter 5.2.1 showed that Biondo appeared to understand grace chiefly in extrinsic terms; he posited an ineradicable discontinuity between nature and God.⁶² For Biondo, grace had no place in nature: it was a new substance, which God placed in a newly prepared area within human beings, a foreign body (*Fremdkörper*) – to take up an expression by the theologian Karl Rahner.⁶³ The previous section added the concept of the gift to the idea of grace as a substance. It might be argued that the *donum* merely replaced *substantia*. This, however, was not the case. Biondo did not consciously reflect on grace's relationality; however, by understanding grace as a gift, he introduced personalistic and communicational elements in his theology of grace.

In Section 1 of this chapter, I focused on ontological categories and analysed in what sense Christ was the form of humanity. Here, I aim to emphasise the role of personalistic elements, which Biondo connected to the Person of the Spirit. Before continuing with Biondo's pneumatology, I want to point out that I am not setting Christ against the Spirit but examining how the 'two hands of God' actualised the Father's love in the economy of salvation.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Mag., fol. 60r: 'gratia vel est donum Dei, quo quis de non grato fit gratus Illi et de non dilecto dilectus'.

⁶² On the debate between intrinsic and extrinsic views, see OAKES 2016, pp. 1–46.

⁶³ RAHNER 1961–1992, I, pp. 297–317.

⁶⁴ The expression 'the two hands of God' comes from IRENAEUS OF LYON 1872, p. 145 (IV, *praefatio*): 'per manus eius plasmatus est, hoc est, per Filium et Spiritum sanctum'.

Let us start with an excerpt from a letter to the nun Cecilia. In this text, Biondo focused on the notion of the gift and the risks associated with its misunderstanding:

The gifts should turn the person who gives them into an object of love. To phrase this idea better, if the gift is perceived as an object of love, the person who gives the gift not only seems to be as worth loving as the gift itself but exceedingly more than that. And yet, those who have been given the gift and love the gift independently of the person who gave it to them, having forgotten the person and being unable to see the person in the gift (they only see the gift), do not see the giver, nor the gift, but only themselves in the gift. For, if they reminded themselves of the gift and that it was a gift, they would be driven to recognise the giver in the gift and through it. However, since they do not recognise the giver or the gift, they look at what has been given to them as their own property, not as a gift. And when they see the gift as their own (which it is not), they look at it as something genuinely different from God Himself (God cannot be divided because He is one, that is, one simple and rational spirit), and within themselves, they know it as themselves.⁶⁵

In this very eloquent passage, those who failed to understand the relationship behind divine gift-giving were described by Biondo as prisoners of their own tragically self-referential selves. The significant merit of this excerpt is that Biondo's primary concern (i.e. Cecilia's moral edification) depended entirely on recognising the centrality of the Holy Spirit (*ignis caritatis*) in the process of human inner reform. Biondo spoke of a Giver, a gift, and the most elusive of the three, the relationship that tied them together. Although the Giver and the gift appeared to be the main subject, Biondo was at pains to demonstrate that it was not enough to acknowledge one or the other. To understand them both correctly, Cecilia had to underscore their indissoluble tie continuously. Only then could she begin her reform. I highlight this point by suggesting three key considerations.

⁶⁵ For., fols 31v–32r: 'Deveno li doni fare amabile el datore de quelli. O, per dir meglio, se pare amabile el dono, el donatore non pare solo como el dono, ma è veramente tanto amabile quanto quel dono pare, et molto più smisuratamente. Ma a colui a chi è donato et ama el dono fuora del donatore, dementicato del donatore, et non vedente sempre quello nel suo dono, ma solo el dono, vede non già el donatore, né el dono, ma sé solo nel dono, dementicato non solo del donatore, ma ancora del dono. Perché se del dono se ricordasse, et quello esser dono recongnoscesse, forzato seria in quello et cum quello recognoscere el donatore. Ma perché non reconosce né el donatore né el dono, lo riconosce suo et non donato. Et riconoscendolo suo, perché suo non è, veramente altra cosa che Lui medesimo, et Lui non è divisibile, peroché è uno cioè semplice et rationale spirito, lo conosce in sé medesimo sé medesimo.'

1. By connecting the gift to the Giver, Biondo stressed the meaning of prayer, as is apparent in the following passage:

Grace is the gift of God, through which he who has been made agreeable, dear, and lovable to God, without his merit, recognises the Giver and, according to his abilities, loves what he has received and what he is. The reason is that he feels that whatever he possesses has been given to him and that whatever he is occurred by God and through God. This person surrenders to the Giver with his heart and with his works. He wants to love Him as much as he can; praise the Giver Himself as much as he knows and can; obey His will, that is, to be at the service of His glory, with all himself, both inwardly and outwardly.⁶⁶

These ‘words, heart, and actions’, which constituted the human response to God’s gift, took the form of a prayer. For Biondo, prayer corrected any ontological and objectifying thinking about God, for prayer showed that grace existed only in praise and thankfulness to the Giver. As Dante clarified in the *Vita nova*, beatitude lay exclusively ‘in those words which praise my woman’.⁶⁷ Since one of the cornerstones of Christian life was to live in thankful obedience, the hypothetical instant in which the anonymous gift turned into the ‘gift of the Giver’ should be understood as the crucial moment of change and conversion (*metanoia*): the birth of a renewed life. Without necessarily forcing language, it could be said that the human praise of God became one’s gift to God, who in turn came to be pleased with His creation. It is evident that the always superabundant and incomparable grace remained at the origin of both actions – as stressed at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), ‘between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them’ – but the entanglement of agreeableness and thankfulness, affecting both the creation and the Creator, tied the two poles together in a reciprocal embrace.⁶⁸ This point was perfectly expressed by the Benedictine and later Cistercian monk William of Saint Thierry (c. 1085–1148): ‘It is not just us to delight in God, but God also delights in our goodness’.⁶⁹ This principle was also available

⁶⁶ Mag., fol. 60r: ‘donum Dei est gratia, quo Deo gratus, carus, et dilectus, sine proprio merito factus quis agnoscit Datorem atque amat, pro viribus, totum quod accepit atque est. Quoniam quicquid habet accepisse et quicquid est ab Ipso et per Ipsum esse se sentit, reddens Datori corde, ore atque opere, volens amare quantum potest, laudare quantum et scit et potest Datorem ipsum ac eius voluntati quod est laudi eius ex se toto intus et extra servire.’

⁶⁷ DANTE 1999, p. 85: ‘mi disse anche questa donna che m’avea prima parlato, queste parole: “Noi ti preghiamo che tu ne dichì ove sia questa tua beatitudine”. Ed io, rispondendo lei, dissi cotanto: “In quelle parole che lodano la donna mia.”’

⁶⁸ DS 806: ‘inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda’.

⁶⁹ WILLIAM OF SAINT THIERRY 1962, p. 216: ‘Non solum etenim nos fruimur Deo; sed et Deus fruitur bono nostro’.

outside of the cloister, as Nicholas of Osimo tried to tell lay people: ‘when we pray, we speak with God. And when we read, God speaks with us’.⁷⁰ Prayer was one’s ‘gift to God’.⁷¹

2. In the letter to Cecilia, Biondo unveiled the Spirit as the dimension whereby the Word could be heard. Outside of it, the gift lost its meaning. As Biondo pointed out, it would be a huge mistake to see the gift independently of the Giver (*el dono fuora del donatore*). Was he here speaking of Christ or the Spirit? Who was the gift? Both questions are misleading. Biondo’s sentence is fundamentally Trinitarian: we have the Giver, the gift, and the dimension out of which (*fuora*) they cease to exist. The three Persons of the Trinity were intrinsically conjoined.⁷² This aspect was made particularly evident by the term *suo* (see John 1:11: ‘He came unto His own’ and confront it with Lucifer, who wanted to have God *a suo modo*). Grace was not something that belonged to human beings but was external. Yet, it was in grace that they would forever dwell. The *fuora* was always a hypothesis. This consideration confirmed what Biondo said in the passage from *De amore proprio* examined in Chapter 5.1.2: God’s authority was uncontested whether men acknowledged it or not.

From this point of view, understanding the gift as a ‘new substance’ had the advantage of stressing the total otherness of grace. However, for the gift to remain a *datum*, human beings must not recognise it as an object but as God himself. The unique nature of sanctifying grace was that God always communicated Himself (*communicat se*): the Giver gives the gift of Himself.

3. In understanding grace as a dialogical relationship, metaphysical notions of form, being, and essence were set aside, and anthropomorphic elements came to the fore. Biondo explained the interaction between God and creation using human sentiments: gratefulness, tenderness, agreeableness, and love (*dilectio*). Biondo spoke of hatred when the relationship turned sour. This kind of language is ubiquitous in the Bible. For Israel, there was no doubt that Yahweh was an actor in history and space. He spoke to them repeatedly with passionate love and anger. His love was inseparable from jealousy.⁷³

One way to explain Biondo’s adoption of anthropomorphic categories would be to distinguish between popular piety literature, which used affective language to express the

⁷⁰ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, sig. 3: ‘quando noi oriamo noi parliamo con Dio. E quando noi legiamo, Dio parla con nui.’

⁷¹ Ibid.: ‘presente a Dio’.

⁷² On *circumincessio* or *perichoresis*, see DS 1331; M. GAGLIARDI 2017, p. 438.

⁷³ On divine jealousy, see RENAUD 1963.

divine mysteries in simple terms, and scholarly treatises, which would rely on metaphysical terms and dogmatic definitions, as they supposedly attempted to deal with God ‘seriously’. As pointed out by McGinn with respect to Catherine of Siena, a significant feature of vernacular theologians was to use metaphors, images, symbols, and a wide range of similitudes.⁷⁴ Like Catherine, Biondo did not respect this artificial division. Anthropomorphic and affective images percolated and infiltrated his writings at almost every turn. One plausible explanation is that Biondo’s interest in the salvation of his readers was so urgent that he could not distance himself from the matter. Agostino di Portico expressed a similar approach when he invited the abbess Alessandra to give herself to her nuns with utter dedication.⁷⁵ As his readers were at risk of eternal perdition, Biondo had to act; he did so with the help of graphic imagery (beasts, demons, angels, and love, fear, hatred, anger).

As stressed by Delumeau, fear played a significant role in shaping the Christian faith in Western Europe, especially in the early modern period.⁷⁶ However, I argue that, for Biondo, this sort of language was not simply a means of scaring his readers. The attempt to understand God as a loving person and a terrifying judge (therefore, as a relatable person) made abstract definitions insufficient. More than the entanglement of cataphasis and apophasis, which ultimately was resolved in favour of the latter, all theologians (including Biondo) were forced to set aside their methods and consider the personal sphere at some point. Some did so at the outset. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) began his *Proslogion* with prayers. On the other hand, Augustine ended his *De Trinitate* with an admission of failure.

This affective approach did not mean that Biondo refrained from logical clarity and lucid exposition. The texts I collected in the Appendix (5–14) reflect Biondo’s systematic stance. Nevertheless, they can be compared neither to his vernacular poems nor vernacular treatises (including the *Commentarius*, which was originally written in the vernacular). This evaluation is based not only on the different genres to which they belong and the language employed (Latin versus vernacular) but also on their affective categories and one’s reliance on sentiments, feelings, and emotions, which seem to be the most pertinent tool available to theological thinking. As pointed by Nussbaum, emotions involve cognitive judgments: they are intentionally ‘about something’, are sustained by a whole set of beliefs and ideas, display the worthiness of the object, and finally, they confess human lack of self-sufficiency because

⁷⁴ MCGINN 2012a, p. 215.

⁷⁵ AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, pp. 239–240: ‘è l’arte de l’arti il governo dell’anime [...] hora non sete più vostra, ma di codeste figlie’.

⁷⁶ DELUMEAU 1990.

of the utmost value of the object, which can never be fully possessed.⁷⁷ In Biondo's case, God was the ultimate object of his interest. Biondo approached Him in multiple ways. In doing so, Biondo did not only show that God deeply mattered to him, but he also confessed his utmost reliance on Him who, in turn, fulfilled him. By contrast, speculative classification – originating from the attempt to separate emotions from reason – appears to be too narrow when applied to the living God. In this case, I certainly agree with Dionisotti, who said that if everything else Biondo wrote got lost, the *Third Mystical Hymn* would be enough to illustrate his views.⁷⁸ The same cannot be said about the fragments of his Latin scholarly production.

Far from being an obstacle and the relic of an allegedly primitive way of thinking, therefore, anthropomorphism (i.e. understanding God through human emotions) reveals that the gift Biondo spoke of was the living God, who could only be approached through gratitude and *dilectio*. The Johannine statement 'God is love' found its counterpart in what Thomas Aquinas said about the defeat of the intellect: 'God cannot be defined. Since everything defined is understandable to the intellect of the person who defines it. God, however, is incomprehensible to the intellect. Therefore, even though it is said that God is a pure act, this is not His definition'.⁷⁹ In this respect, the accusation often levelled against Thomas's Aristotelian scholasticism must always be attentively evaluated.⁸⁰ The *lawlessness* of love (what I mean here is the absence of rules and laws on which human beings can rely to make sense of divine love) becomes the grounds for Biondo's apophatic investigation. To his nephew Paolo, Biondo wrote: 'I tell you that you cannot obtain this spirit [i.e. being obedient to God] neither through your effort nor industriousness, but only thanks to a gift of God, which, I am absolutely sure, cannot be devised by you but only given to you and then found in yourself'.⁸¹ For Biondo, the purpose of his writing and preaching was to engender a radical transformation, making the use of affective language mandatory. God had to be approached with fervour. Only then could one counter the complaint about the cooling of charity – a common literary topos in Biondo's time.

⁷⁷ NUSSBAUM 2001, pp. 19–31.

⁷⁸ DIONISOTTI 1968, p. 267.

⁷⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 3 ad 5: 'Deus definiri non potest. Omne enim quod definitur, in intellectu definitis comprehenditur; Deus autem est incomprehensibilis ab intellectu; unde cum dicitur quod Deus est actus purus, haec non est definitio eius.'

⁸⁰ See, for instance, GARIN 2009, p. 155: 'Che cosa v'è, infatti, di comune fra il Signore di carità predicato da Gesù e l'atto puro immobile nella sua immutabile eternità? Chi più pagano di san Tommaso?'

⁸¹ Mag., fol. 72r: 'Quem ego te animum neque labore proprio neque industria consequi posse, sed Dei munere, uti oblato tantum et reperto in te ac non invento, certissimum est mihi.'

Far from being rejected as a byproduct of high theology (i.e. *summae, quaestiones, postillae, expositiones, and lecturae*), the spiritual literature at the end of the Cinquecento proved this compelling need. Its extraordinary printing fortune testified to it.⁸² Indirectly, this has also been confirmed by the results of recent historiography, which, following the advice of Cantimori, has emphasised the significance of the piety literature for a correct evaluation of this historical period.⁸³

We can conclude this section by recapitulating what has been demonstrated thus far. The Word and the Spirit separated the creation from God *and* annulled the distance by introducing the creation into the incomprehensible space of love. Grace was the communication of love for the perfecting of humankind. Despite the evident discrepancy between the two partners, the idea of the gift shows that divine otherness and mortal creation were connected in a mutual dialogue that, significantly, took place in time and space. Grace was, therefore, the invitation for the creation to partake (*participatio*) in divine communication (*communicatio*).⁸⁴ Next, we turn our attention to the nature of this participation.

5.3 *In vacuum tendit plenitudo gratiae: Grace's Realisation through spogliamento and Penance*

Participation in Christ was granted 'through sanctification of the Spirit' (1 Peter 1:2). A widespread assumption (which soon became commonplace) was the concept that participation in God's life required quiet and solitude. For example, in *De otio religioso*, Petrarch praised his brother Gerardo and the Carthusian monks, who lived at Montrieux, for their asceticism, which allowed them to devote themselves to God (*vacare Deo*).⁸⁵ In the literature for lay people, the advice was reduced to seeking a quiet room and giving some time to daily prayers. In the *Vita nova*, Dante fled the din of urban life, searching for a quiet room.⁸⁶ In the *Opera a ben vivere* (A Work to Live Well by) by Antoninus of Florence, the empty room became the

⁸² For a first indication of the extraordinary number of texts that were printed, a look at the incomplete but impressive catalogue put together by SCHUTTE (1983) will suffice.

⁸³ CANTIMORI 1967; SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, pp. 12–13.

⁸⁴ DI MAIO 1989, pp. 223–225, explained that what we call communication when we examine God's point of view is participation when it is examined from the human end. Communication is God's act of self-giving; participation is human answer to God's revelation.

⁸⁵ PETRARCH 1975, p. 572: 'Vacate et videte [...] in quibus [...] tota spes, tota denique continetur intentio finisque ultimus, quicquid agendum, quicquid optandum sperandumque vobis est in vita non solum transitoria sed eterna.' For the significance of this work in Petrarch's thought, see TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 28–47.

⁸⁶ DANTE 1999, p. 49: 'partito me dalle genti, in solinga parte andai [...] misimi nella mia camera là ove io potea lamentarmi senza essere udito'.

mind of which Christ took possession.⁸⁷ In the *Zardino de oratione*, Nicholas of Osimo instructed his readers to empty their minds and refurbish them with the people, places, and events narrated in the Scriptures.⁸⁸

Biondo acted within this tradition commonly referred to as *theologia cordis*, that is, the idea that the Spirit of Christ shaped the individual and the individual, in turn, generated Christ in his own heart.⁸⁹ For Biondo, grace worked ‘in the soul’ and ‘produced its various and almost opposite effects’ in the secret chamber of the heart.⁹⁰ However, unlike Nicholas of Osimo, Biondo maintained that ‘the fullness of grace points towards emptiness’.⁹¹ This section illustrates how emptiness defined participation in God: how the kenotic nature of the Son was replicated in the emptied heart of the believer. I have decided to divide this section into two parts. In the first, I analyse how the doctrine of *kenosis* (the emptying-out of the Son as He accepted the Incarnation; see Philippians 2:7–8) became a central tenet of Biondo’s faith and to what extent Biondo identified himself with the crucified Christ (*cruciformiter* and *cristiformiter*). In the second, I examine how the idea of emptiness formed the core of the hortatory and parenetic injunctions that Biondo addressed to those who wanted to follow in Christ’s footsteps (*sequela Christi*).

5.3.1 *Mancare è la sua forma: A Crucified Life*

For Biondo, the task of the Son – which, as I established in Section 1 of this chapter, was the principle that ruled human life – was to ‘deplete himself’.⁹² This statement clearly referenced Philippians 2:6–8 and the concept of *kenosis*, which this pericope illustrates: the Son obeyed the Father by emptying Himself of His divine glory (*forma Dei*) and adopting the form of a servant (*forma servi*). However, this pericope did not stand on its own (especially at a time when exegesis allowed interpreters to freely connect the biblical books to highlight a specific point). Therefore, the Father sent the empty Son into the world for the salvation of humankind (John 3:16; 8:42). In Romans 8:32, it is said that the sending of the Son revealed God’s

⁸⁷ PIEROZZI 1858b, p. 202: ‘se n’ha [Dio] fatto una camera e uno abitacolo, per abitarvisi dentro’.

⁸⁸ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, sig. 131: ‘Anchora ti sarà utile formarti nela mente li lochi e le terre, e le stantie dove lui conversava. Et le persone che singularmente erano in sua compagnia. [...] E cossì essendoti representate quelle persone e quelli lochi per questa memoria locale più facilmente reduchi a memoria tutti li facti e le operatione che fece in questa vita esso Misser Iesu Christo. E cossì intrando nel tuo cubiculo incomincerai a pensare la vita sua de parte in parte, con industria di tempo, non trascorrendo ma con riposo’.

⁸⁹ On the *theologia cordis*, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Cor et cordis affectus’, II, cols 2278–2307; RAHNER 1995, pp. 25–143.

⁹⁰ Mag., fol. 41v: ‘Varios effectus et quasi contrarios operatur sepe gratia in anima’.

⁹¹ Mag., fol. 57v: ‘In vacuum tendit plenitudo gratie’.

⁹² Sev., fol. 28v: ‘Mancare è la sua forma’.

superabundant love for humanity; the Son was not ‘spared’ (*epheisato, pepercit*), but became expendable ‘for us’ (*pro nobis*).⁹³ As 2 Corinthians 8:9 further explains, God’s richness was spent for the creaturely destitution. Biondo did not necessarily need to quote from the NT. He could easily find all these concepts in the *laude* of Jacopone.⁹⁴ Let us now look at an illuminating extract:

The doctrine I publicly proclaimed – but only with the necessary words and either out of necessity for my office or love for advice – speaks, declares, and shows, in words and emotions, nothing else but that Jesus Christ, both God’s natural Son, equal to his Father, and the Virgin Mary’s son, is our God and Lord, who, as the Apostle said, ‘thought that to be equal with God was not robbery, but emptied himself going through everything’.⁹⁵

This passage was drawn from the letter Biondo wrote in his defence against the accusations of heterodoxy.⁹⁶ We could compare this apologetic document to the much more famous *epistola excusatoria* written by Angelo Clareno to Pope John XXII, the leading persecutor of the spiritual Franciscans, who in the Constitution *Cum inter nonnullos* (1323, DS 930–931) declared poverty heretical.⁹⁷ Whereas the illiterate and *idiotae* (among them we could almost surely place the majority of Biondo’s followers, even Giovanni Maria Capucci, the physician who so zealously propagated Biondo’s ideas among Venetian women) did not always have the means or the confidence to express their faith in clear terms, Biondo’s quasi-credal confession demarcated with precision the core of his faith: Jesus’s hypostatic union and his *kenosis*. Notably, as we have seen in Chapter 4.2, these were the two elements concerning Jesus that Lucifer could not accept.

The Son’s *kenosis* was not just an abstract idea but became the principle that shaped Biondo’s entire life. In *De amore proprio*, he explained to Alessandra degli Ariosti:

⁹³ In 2 Corinthians 1:23, Paul considered his office to be so impelling that he could not spare himself. Apostleship took priority over any imaginable risk. This point is examined in Chapter 6.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, *Laude*, pp. 83–86, 144–150, where the events of Jesus’s Incarnation and death are seen entirely from the point of view of human salvation (*pro nobis*)

⁹⁵ Add., fol. 26r: ‘Ipsa vero doctrina publice quidem sed necessariis tantum communicata vel necessitate officii vel caritate consilii, nihil aliud in verbis et sensibus sonet ac sentiat, declaret atque ostendat, quam unicum esse ac naturalem et Patri equalem Iesum Christum dei et Marie virginis filium deum et dominum nostrum, qui “rapinam non sit arbitratus esse se equalem deo, sed per omnia exinaniverit semetipsum” ut inquit Apostolus’. The reference is to Philippians 2:6–7.

⁹⁶ See Appendix, 3.

⁹⁷ The letter can be read in CLARENO 1980, pp. 239–253. On its interpretation, see BURR 1996.

Because God is felt to be my substance, I offer Him as payment to every created being. And because God is felt to be my voluntary and active justice, which He makes passive, I offer Him to everyone as much as God wanted, and, according to any of His natural, civil, moral, temporal, eternal, carnal, or spiritual laws, which are all most sacred, God wants me to be His exclusive debtor in a substantial way, for He is my every goodness truly and absolutely. God wants that, if possible, I should communicate Him to them, if I can, in the same way in which He can communicate Himself to them in the time, the way, and the measure in which He made and makes me a debtor. And because God is understood to be my active truth, which makes my truth passive, that is, true to the extent that it conforms to and is formed by God's truth, I offer Him to everyone in the measure that He has promised Himself through me. And because God is felt to be the active love, which makes my love passive, I offer Him to everyone to the extent that His goodness has united me somehow to some creatures. He can help them in all their needs which have been ordained to His will. Through me, He makes His will in them and by them wanted and loved, lovable and desirable. And as God is felt to be the active wisdom that variously shapes my passive wisdom, I communicate Him according to His properties which I have already mentioned, and according to my duty, and necessity, for the order and the measure of His communication wants to correspond to the end of His will through the order of His loving judgements.⁹⁸

In this excerpt, two ideas intersect. The first idea is God's total predominance over Biondo. Through *spogliamento*, one becomes *christiformiter*: Christ actively entered and took possession of the self.⁹⁹ Obedience to the *forma Christi* demanded the rejection of everything else (see Luke 14:26). As a result, Christ supplanted all preconceptions about justice, truth,

⁹⁸ Add., fol. 156r-v: 'perché Lui è sentito esser la mia substantia, è dato da me in pagamento ad ogni creatura. Et perché Lui è sentito essere la mia iustitia voluntaria, et activa, el quale fa la mia iustitia passiva, Ello è dato da me tanto a ciascuno quanto Ello ha voluto, et vole secondo le sue qualunque lege o naturale o civile o morale o temporale o eterne o carnale o spirituale, tutte sanctissime, che io sia debitore substantialmente de Lui solo, che è ogni mio bene veramente et ogni mio bene assolutamente, a quelli che in quel tempo et in quel modo et a quella misura, che Lui me ha facto et fa debitore, se a me possibil fusse, comunicarlo como è a Lui possibile comunicarsi a quelli. Et perché Ello è inteso esser la mia verità activa, el quale fa la mia verità passiva cioè tanto vera quanto è conforme et formata da quella, io lo do a ciascuno quanto Lui ha per me sé medesimo a loro promesso. Et perché Ello è sentito essere la mia carità activa, che fa la mia carità passiva, io lo do a ciascuno quanto quella bontà me ha congiunto per alcun modo ad alcuna creatura, et po' quelle subvenire a tutte loro necessità ordinate al fine de suo beneplacito de quelle. El quale beneplacito è da Lui per me in quelle et de quelle voluto, et amato, amabile et desiderabile. Et perché Lui è sentito essere la mia sapientia activa formante variamente la mia passiva, io lo comunico secondo le preditte sue proprietà et mia obligatione et così necessità volendo l'ordine et la misura de sua communicatione corrispondere al fine de suo beneplacito per l'ordine de li suoi iudicii amabili'.

⁹⁹ Colossians 3:9–10; Ephesians 4:22–24.

love, and wisdom. The second idea is Biondo's transformation into a conduit for God's self-communication: Christ spoke through Biondo for human beings' salvation.

Accepting Christ was not painless. Like Jesus, Biondo also had to empty the chalice.¹⁰⁰ The 'interior struggle' was, first and foremost, a conflict of dissenting wills:

I cannot do what I want or how I want to do it, either for my own or others' sake. I can only do what is given me to do, to the extent and according to the way in which it is given to me.¹⁰¹

In addition to alluding to Romans 7:14–25, this passage suggests that the establishment of grace did not bring peace (not at first, at least) but occasioned clashes between human desires and God's truth. Under the pressure of *spogliamento*, Biondo's self grew truncated and alienated. The contradiction of the self was what caused suffering (*poena*).

Biondo understood the descent into suffering as passion. Passion was the name that indicated the last moments of Christ's life. It was also the paradoxical act – the sole positive act envisaged by Biondo – which relinquished any pretence of being an act *per se*. According to what we have discovered on the personal dimension of the gift, passion meant following the example of the self-giving *alius*: one's self-abandonment to God.¹⁰² Moreover, passion produced nothing meritorious in the person who suffered from it. Finally, those who followed Christ and underwent passion declared nothing about themselves. Indeed, their words contradicted worldly wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–19) to the point that they who pronounced them risked their own lives. Clarenò particularly stressed the danger associated with the proclamation of the evangelical truth.¹⁰³ It is in this context that we can also speak of holy foolishness.¹⁰⁴

Just as Christ's form was to 'deplete himself' for the proclamation of the Father's kingdom, so Biondo had to relinquish his own will. The extent to which Christ ruled over Biondo's life was apparent in this letter to his friend Giovan Battista Bartoli:

¹⁰⁰ Add., fol. 139v: 'la carità me forza bere questo calice como molti altri per divino honore et salute de li electi'. Parallel passages in Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42. See also Matthew 20:22–23; Mark 10:38; John 18:11.

¹⁰¹ Add., fol. 141r: 'Non posso quello che io voglio, né como io voglio, né per me medesimo né per altri, ma solo quello me è dato quanto et como me è dato'. See also For., fol. 21r: 'battaglia intrinseca'.

¹⁰² On this notion, see *Dic. Spir.*, 'Abandon', I, cols 2–49.

¹⁰³ See CLARENÒ 1999, pp. 128–130: 'et scientiae et lectioni se dabunt, et praeponent verba virtutibus, et scientiam sanctitati, et fastum et arrogantiam humilitati [...] Humilitati vero adhaerere studentes [...] quasi insanos despicient, et tamquam inutiles et nullius momenti homines vilipendent.' (Emphasis added). This passage introduces Clarenò's account of the persecution against John of Parma.

¹⁰⁴ On the theme of holy foolishness, see GAGLIARDI 1997; I. GAGLIARDI 2017.

I live by chance, by understanding that I am ignorant and by ignoring knowledge. I do not do what I want to, neither according to God nor to the world, but what I am now forced to do sometimes by myself, sometimes by God, in ways known only to Him when He forces me, if not in everything I do, at least in part. Therefore, those who follow and keep my rule – which is the rule that governs my action – receive plenty of light and look at themselves in the mirror of God’s eternal disposition and in His unfathomable arrangements of things in time, in the present, and this very moment, for they find themselves participating in all of God’s secret counsels. For my part, I confess that I do not understand any of the particular reasons behind my life and actions, although perhaps, in general, here and there, I have some knowledge – not complete, though – which quietens down my senses and makes me live like a dead person, that is, by dying every day. And while I am in the final stretch of my life, I keep dying because the love that keeps me in my horrendous death is stronger than death. And in the final degree and state of that life, I live in God’s omnipotent life. This may suffice this time.¹⁰⁵

To sum up, one significant aspect comes to the fore. Biondo did not offer his followers a systematic treatise about the Son’s self-annihilation; he directed them to his own experience. Pietro Dolfino, the general of the Camaldolese Order, recognised Biondo’s exemplary Christian life: it was because faith and life appeared joined in Biondo that he allowed the *converso* Giovanni da Bologna to join Biondo’s community.¹⁰⁶

5.3.2 *Spogliamento*

A necessary presupposition to understand how Biondo communicated the idea of emptiness to his readers was that he placed it within the tradition of the *contemptus mundi*. As explained by Delumeau, the scorn for mundane matters implied a rejection of the world.¹⁰⁷ This approach,

¹⁰⁵ Add., fol. 182r: ‘io vivo a sorte da me con ignorantia intesa et cum scientia non conosciuta; et faccio non quello che io voglio né secondo Dio né secondo el mondo, ma quello che hora son forzato, da me alle volte, alle volte da Dio per varii modi a Lui solo noti nel tempo che me forza, se non in tutto in gran parte. Sì che chi da me piglia regula cioè de mio operare e mantienla, ha gran lume, et specchiasi continuo nella eterna dispositione et temporale presente et momentanea inscrutabile distributione divina trovandosi cum Dio a tutti li secreti consigli. Io per me confesso che io non intendo in particolari alcuna rasona del mio vivere et operare benché forsi in genere, or nanci or poi, ne ho non piena ma pure qualche notitia la quale dà quiete al mio senso e fammi morto vivere cioè morendo ogni dì. Et facendo tuttavia el tratto ultimo non finire de morire perché è forte como la morte e più l’amore che me tene nella mia morte horrenda, et nel ultimo grado et stato di quella vivo de sua vita onnipotente. Et basti per questa volta’.

¹⁰⁶ See LODONE 2020a, p.81: ‘l’ottima reputazione e la fame tua e dei tuoi compagni’.

¹⁰⁷ DELUMEAU 1990, p. 12.

pursued primarily by monks who sought a secluded life, was also adopted by Biondo and recognised by Pietro Dolfín.¹⁰⁸ However, as Lodone pointed out, the similarities between Dolfín and Biondo were only superficial.¹⁰⁹ In the *Commentarius*, Biondo wrote that his intention was ‘not to teach what ought to be done but what must be fled and turned down’.¹¹⁰ Biondo maintained that rules were just a collection of ‘diabolical illusions’.¹¹¹ The soul had to undress itself to liberate those who were ‘submerged and buried’.¹¹² Biondo expressed the idea of *spogliamento* (disrobing), which underpinned the adage *nudus Christum nudum sequi* (the naked follow the naked Christ), in many ways.¹¹³

5.3.2.1 *Tagliare*

The first group of terms concerned the image of removal. In the treatise *On Meditation*, Biondo described ‘the preparations and dispositions’ that shaped one’s path towards divine love as ‘forms of stripping and removing all the external obstacles that prevent one from freely and continually thinking about oneself and God’.¹¹⁴ Eventually, the readers were told to ‘sever (*tagliare*) from the will, once this has been submitted to careful examination, everything pleasant or unpleasant’.¹¹⁵ The injunction included any passion, emotion, or feeling. A possible influence on Biondo’s thought was perhaps Matthew 5:29–30; however, Biondo did not specifically make this connection or commented on this pericope.

The problem with passions was that they were considered uncontrollable forces that could disrupt the harmonious balance between the mind and the body.¹¹⁶ The Church Fathers held an ambivalent stance towards them.¹¹⁷ The Eastern theologians, who emphasised deification (*theosis*), were inclined to admit the merits of impassibility. For the sixth/seventh-

¹⁰⁸ See LODONE 2020a, p. 81: ‘Avendo professato una vita regolare, infatti, non potrà non progredire molto per l’esempio di voi tutti, vedendo che dei sacerdoti secolari emulano spontaneamente il proposito e l’istituto dei regolari.’

¹⁰⁹ LODONE 2020a, p. 82.

¹¹⁰ Add., fol. 41v: ‘Mei propositi est [...] docere non id quod agendum sit, verum id quod fugiendum et declinandum’.

¹¹¹ For., fol. 27v: ‘illusione diaboliche’.

¹¹² Add., fol. 199r–v: ‘sono remasti [...] in vero odio de Dio et amor proprio sommersi et sepulti’.

¹¹³ See CLARENO 1999, p. 104: ‘ad exemplum Christi Iesu redemptoris, qui nudus in latronum medio in cruce pendit et mortuus est, fixe [Franciscus] proposuit ut nudus et a saeculo segregatus’. On the notion of nudity, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Nudité’, XI, cols 508–517.

¹¹⁴ Add., fol. 64v: ‘le remote preparatione et dispositione a questo acto, quale in substantia percorse sono li spogliamenti et tagliamenti de tutti li extrinseci impedimenti al continuo et libero pensare de se stesso et de Dio’.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 70v: ‘tagliare da la sua volontà bene examinata ogni cosa per sé piacente o despiacente’.

¹¹⁶ CICERO 1966, pp. 411 (IV, 11–33). See KRAYE 2012.

¹¹⁷ On the notion of impassibility, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Apatheia’, I, cols 727–746. On the reception of impassibility into Christian thought, see POWELL 2016, particularly pp. 7–170; and NGUYEN 2018.

century Christian monk John Climacus, apathy (*apatheia*) was a sort of ‘enrapture’, which allowed access to the contemplation of God, and ‘a foretaste of the general resurrection’.¹¹⁸ The Western doctors of the Church rarely used the category of impassibility, and when they did, they were often critical of it. For instance, in his effort to separate the Christians from the Stoics, Augustine accentuated the necessary presence of mercy and love within the soul of the wise.¹¹⁹ Impassibility was especially favoured by mystics, who pursued it in their meditations. The Dominican Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1328) referred to it as either *Abgescheidenheit* or *Gelâzenheit* (both can be rendered with detachment).¹²⁰ A possible source for Biondo’s understanding of impassibility could have been the translation of Climacus’s *Ladder* by Angelo Clareno.¹²¹ It should be said that the idea was widespread and popularised in many poems and spiritual texts. Jacopone da Todi made great use of it in his *Laude*.¹²²

5.3.2.2 *Recisio*

A fuller understanding of *spogliamento* can be reached if we look at the term *recisio*, which also indicates the act of removal. In the *Commentarius*, Biondo presented this act as a ‘remedy’:

Unless one is an idiot or a privileged person, as there is none today, anyone who is sure of his faith, who has reached the age of majority and is likely to believe (or at least is afraid and doubts) that at some time or other he offended God and he is not sure (as nobody is sure according to ordinary law) that he received from God a complete remission and indulgence of his sins, this person should believe that which is possible. This is the remedy I suggest. And this person should think it is highly likely that he did not yet receive the remission and indulgence of his sins, although he should hope so. I would advise him that he hope that it is absolutely the case that he will receive that remission before he dies and that in the meantime, in that hope, he does all the good that he can according to the grace that will be granted to him. Necessarily, the result of this remedy is a complete elimination (*recisio*) of all those circumstances that can bring

¹¹⁸ JOHN CLIMACUS 1982, pp 282–283 (ch. XXIX).

¹¹⁹ See AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIX, col. 1528 (*Sermones*, CCCXLVIII, 2): ‘Nam et Stoici se fortissimos praeferunt, et non propter corporis voluptatem, sed propter animi virtutem, idipsum non timere propter non timere custodiunt, typho turgidi, et non sapientia sanati, sed errore durati. Eo quippe minus minusque sani sunt, quo aegrotum animum a se ipsis sanari posse crediderunt. Hanc autem putant esse animi sanitatem, ut nec misereri dicant debere sapientem. Si enim miseretur, inquit, dolet: quod autem dolet, sanum non est’.

¹²⁰ MEISTER ECKHART 1981, pp. 285–294; 1986, pp. 399–400.

¹²¹ On Clareno’s activity as translator, see GAIN 2007; POTESTÀ 2020.

¹²² See, for instance, *Laude*, pp. 224–227.

about the presumption mentioned above through the noxious act of blinding and obstinacy.¹²³

In this passage, removal no longer referred merely to elements concerning human nature but occasioned the actualisation of God's grace. The shift from elimination as a requirement for knowledge (a human affirmation) to elimination as a prerequisite of faith (a divine primacy) grows more evident when we consider that the term *recisio* also denoted diminution. The subject who experienced *recisio* became 'small' (*piccola facta*).¹²⁴ What emerged next was the disparity between God and the believer. In this shift from knowledge to practice and in the word *piccola*, it is possible to see an echo of Franciscan authors. We should note, however, a significant difference. Clareno, for instance, used the idea of minority to criticise the rise of theological studies within the Franciscan Order (something that he equated with pride). For instance, Elias of Cortona was 'devoted to philosophical subtleties'.¹²⁵ Biondo appeared more concerned with the needs of his secular audience. Therefore, he praised the idea of minority mostly in general terms. However, when he wrote *De amore proprio* for Alessandra degli Ariosti, a member of the Franciscan family, the connection between humility and studies surfaced and was discussed at length.

5.3.2.3 *Spuntamento* and *expolliatione*

I now look at the two nouns *spuntamento* and *expolliatione* (with their respective verb forms *spuntare* and *expoliare*). The primary meaning of the vernacular term *spuntamento* is either to trim or to make something dull or smooth. The term *expolliatione*, which Biondo also uses in its corresponding Latin form *expoliatio*, means primarily removing, undressing, and, secondarily, plundering or disarming.¹²⁶ Biondo favoured the first meaning. Although

¹²³ Add., fols 36v–37r: 'Remedium est hoc, ut quicumque certus est, aut si non est stultus aut multum privilegiatus, qualem scio hodie aliquem non esse, qui pervenerit ad annos discretionis, probabiliter credit aut saltem timet et dubitat aliquando deum offendisse mortaliter et non est certus, sicut per legem communem certus nemo est, totalem remissionem et indulgentiam habuisse a deo peccatorum suorum, credat illud quod possibile est. Et ipse debet existimare multum verisimile esse, hoc est, nondum accepisse se indulgentiam et remissionem illorum quamvis debeat sperare et ego ei consulam ut speret fore omnino ut recipiat illam priusquam ex hac vita decedat, opereturque interea in ea spe bonum omne quod potest secundum gratiam que fuerit illi concessa. Ab hoc remedio ex necessitate provenit *recisio* totalis omnium earum partium que possint in actum excecationis et obstinationis nocivum pefatam producere presumptionem.'

¹²⁴ Add., fol. 93r: 'tanti sono li beni che de qui nascono che sono omnino indicibili peroche questo è el *vero fonte de la vita* [Revelation 21:6; John 4:14] purché in esso la creatura piccola facta humilmente se bagni.'

¹²⁵ CLARENO 1999, p. 216: 'Subtilitatibus philosophiae frater Helias devotus'.

¹²⁶ See Colossians 2:11, 15; 3:9.

spuntamento and *spogliamento* are semantically unrelated, in Biondo, both terms relied on a medical subtext to convey their meaning. From *De meditatione*, we learn that:

when the created being has shrunk in an appropriate space and time, if it is attracted and invited by the Spirit to desire perfection, it would be helpful for it to trim (*spuntare*) its will. Through this act, the created being will see how its iniquity proliferates and sprouts unceasingly.¹²⁷

Biondo reiterated a similar point in a text concerning the notions of habit and virtue:

[A human being] cannot completely undress (*expoliare*). As a result, he remains somehow clothed with some sort of implicit self-referential (*reciprocus aut interpretativus*) self-love – the kind of love which I say is enough to poison the whole being. Only grace, without our intervention (*sine nobis*), can wholly and finally divest us of our vicious self-love, which is the line dividing the human being from God.¹²⁸

Despite human efforts, the cancer of self-love ‘proliferates and sprouts unceasingly’, affecting the whole being (*totius esse*). Within this context, the terms *perdere* (with its cognate noun *perdimento*) and *guastare* (to break or ruin) take on a special significance. *Perdere* and *guastare* indicate that something is lost or broken. They also suggest that something is rotting and decaying. What was lost or spoilt was the mortal who had retreated from God, the fountain of life itself (John 4:10–15 and 7:37–38). Therefore, the terms signalled that the created being had perished. *Spogliamento* and *expoliatione* worked towards the acknowledgement and the elimination of a disease.¹²⁹

For Biondo, this disease (self-love) was the ‘line dividing the human beings from God’ (*limes inter Deum et hominem*); its presence was the reason for their absolute ‘dissimilarity’ (*dissimilitudo*).¹³⁰ The mutual exclusivity of love and self-love could be interpreted in terms of

¹²⁷ Add., fol. 69r: ‘quando la creatura se è ristretta in tempo et loco conveniente, se tirata et invitata è da lo Spirito a desiderio de perfectione, utile le seria qui [...] spuntare le sue volontà, nel quale acto venirà a vedere la sua iniquità continuo pullulante et germugliante’.

¹²⁸ Mag., fol. 40r: ‘Quia non potest se totaliter sic expoliare, ut non remaneat vestitus aliquo sui amore reciproco aut interpretativo qui sufficit pro veneno totius inquam esse, sola autem gratia sine nobis facit ultimam illam et totalem expoliationem nostri viciosi amoris. Qui est limes inter Deum et hominem’. Here it is interesting to note that, from a linguistic point of view, Biondo characterises this love as *reciprocus* (in that it acts as a mirror reverberating the false opinions of one’s soul) and *interpretativus* (in that it acts as a broker in the conflicts of the soul). A modern rendering for these activities is ‘self-referential’.

¹²⁹ The terms *extirpare* (to eradicate) and *mortificare* (to kill and to mortify), both used by Biondo, convey a similar sense.

¹³⁰ On this crucially qualitative distinction, see THOMAS AQUINAS, *De potentia*, q. 1, a. 6, *contra*: ‘voluntas divina non potest velle contrarium suae bonitatis, quam naturaliter vult. Peccatum autem est defectus quidam a divina bonitate: unde Deus non potest velle peccare’.

health and sickness. Until they made room for love, human beings would remain sick. However, since Biondo considered a sin in terms of privation and absence, we reach the paradoxical position that the manifestation of self-love would unveil not-being. In his eyes, there was no other evidence of self-love apart from the absence of love. The essential contradiction of self-love, which attempted fruitlessly to gain the status of being, confirms what Chapter 4 has already established: self-love was the impossible attempt by human beings to gain existence on their own. In medical terms, it is as if patients were attempting to recover by resorting to the very illness that made them unhealthy in the first place.

The only remedy against self-love was another kind of void: that produced by the grace of Christ's Spirit. As Biondo explained to Giovan Battista Bartoli, Jesus was 'the compassionate physician who, for you, has turned everything into a healthy cure'.¹³¹ Grace did not destroy the gap between man and God but led man across it. To understand the sort of cure enacted by grace, let us look at what Biondo said about Alessandra, the wife of Strinato degli Strinati:

I encourage her to mitigate her desire and be like the person who dances on one foot while waiting for the right note. I believe she is doing it already, but it is my duty to remind her of it. When cravings sting, she should trim (*spunti*) them so that she may become round like a ball, which can easily roll everywhere.¹³²

In a letter concerning the death of Barbarina, a secular woman whom Biondo greatly admired, Biondo recounted:

At the time [of her death], having been taken by the light beyond the senses and made strong, [Barbarina] was content with her suffering [...], unsure, though, whether she would live or die. She was, therefore, ready for both outcomes.¹³³

¹³¹ Add., fol. 211r: 'el pietoso medico che ve ha facto de ogni cosa medicina salutare'. It was a common trope to compare Christ or God to a physician; see PIEROZZI 1866, p. 5: 'il misericordioso Iddio, come ottimo medico, dà non quello che piace allo infermo sempre, ma quello che gli è più utile'.

¹³² Add., fol. 187v: 'io la conforto a temperare el suo desiderio, et stare sempre como chi balla in un pie expectando el sono. Credo che ella faccia così ma pure è mio debito a rammentargliene. Quando le voglie pungono, spunti quelle, per essere tonda como palla a lesina che con equale facilità si volge a ogni lato'. And he continues: 'Levi la mente a la divina providentia donatrice de le cose necessarie a chi si contenta di quella che più non si pò havere se non per furto et rapina' (ibid.). See also AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, p. 282: 'Entra nel ballo de' sancti, va sempre inanzi, humiliati e canta giulivo con cuor vago d'amore di Dio, porta in capo, cioè in cuore, grilanda di fiori [...] fa' saltaregli di virtù in virtù [...] pervenghi alle nozze eterne'.

¹³³ Sev., fol. 99r: 'fo in quel tempo, per quel lume sopra el senso portata et gagliardamente facta, contenta de sue pene [...] incerta però se haveva per alhora a morire o a campare. Et però parata a l'uno et l'altro'. I have discussed this document in GUIDA 2021, pp. 18–19.

The two passages show that being healthy corresponded entirely to being obedient. Consequently, Biondo invited Alessandra to ‘smooth herself’ so that she could ‘roll’ (*volgere*) easily wherever God wished. The same purpose underpinned the image of dancing. God was both the director and the player, and He decided the music; Alessandra, on the other hand, had to follow the tempo, the rhythm, and the symphony composed and executed by God.¹³⁴

In this section, I examined how Biondo understood the idea of emptiness and how he conveyed it to his readers. In the first part, I examined the complete obedience that Biondo gave to Christ and the existential transformation that the Passion of Christ had in his own life. In the second part, I explored the various terms Biondo used to make the idea of emptiness compelling to his readers. All these terms can be summed up by *evacuatio*. Yet, each term highlights an element of his thought: the Franciscan influence, Biondo’s apophatic stance, the idea of impassibility, his understanding of spiritual direction as medicine, and finally, the idea of obedience that underpinned each aspect of *spogliamento*. The result was *vacuitas*, the ‘*nova pars*’ created by grace and ready to welcome the Spirit. *Evacuatio* and *vacuitas* were not mutually exclusive: achieving *vacuitas* did not mean that one had done away with *evacuatio*. Both were always in progress and subject to failure or improvement. Through *spogliamento*, the human being grew capable of receiving God (*capax Dei*).

5.4 *Intrinsecarsi con el suo Dio: The Intelligible Union with God*

Human reformation realised through *spogliamento* concluded with the mystical union with God (*unio mystica*), the ‘great mystery’ (Ephesians 5:32).¹³⁵ Like for Petrarch, *vacate et videte* (Psalm 45 [46]:11) summarised the experience of the Christian faith, so, for Biondo, the purpose of reformation was to gain intimacy (*intrinsecarsi*) with God.¹³⁶ This event was traditionally referred to as the deification or the divinisation of man.¹³⁷ In a note to a poem written by Giannozzo Sacchetti, Biondo wrote:

¹³⁴ The image of the dance may appear to be puerile and, once again, a sign of naïve anthropomorphism. However, it clearly highlights the dramatic nature of the God-creation relationship. On the idea of dance in medieval and early modern preaching, see LEGIMI 2000.

¹³⁵ Within the vast literature on this subject, see at least *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Union a Dieu’, XVI, cols 40–61; PELIKAN 1971–1991, III, pp. 303–307; TROTTMANN 1995; MCGINN 2012b.

¹³⁶ PETRARCH 1975, p. 572. Add., fol. 64r: ‘dal divino Spirito invitate et tirate [...] de intrinsecarsi con el suo Dio’. For the various meanings of *intrinsecarsi*, see BATTAGLIA 1961–2009, ‘Intrinsecare’, VIII, p. 358.

¹³⁷ For an introduction on how the notion of deification developed in the Eastern and Western Churches, see FINLAN AND KHARLAMOV 2006 and ORTIZ 2019, respectively.

The soul, having, like Christ, lost its own person, acquires, in Christ, the divine person. In Christ and with Christ, the soul becomes God, as long as this union, annihilation, and transformation last. To this deified soul, then, Christ-God becomes its God, who is no longer the idol of self-love, as is always the case in the time when the soul is not thus transformed.¹³⁸

The union with God required that the soul became wholly engaged in God.¹³⁹ The Church Fathers and the mystics wrote extensively on this subject. Particularly significant for its impact on Western views on the subject was Augustine's reading of Paul's rapture to the third Heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). In his *Genesis ad litteram*, Augustine interpreted this event as an extra-sensorial experience that had led Saint Paul to an intellectual 'vision' of God's 'transparent truth'.¹⁴⁰ However, we should not underestimate the role of works attributed to Augustine. Ugo Panziera is a case in point.

In one of his treatises, Panziera mentioned a text entitled the *Scala Paradisi* (not to be confused with the work by John Climacus) or *Scala Claustralium*, attributed erroneously by Panziera to Augustine.¹⁴¹ The author, a Guigo II the Carthusian († c. 1188), wrote the *Ladder* to explain how monks ought to move from reading (*lectio*) to meditation (*meditatio*), then prayer (*oratio*), to reach contemplation (*contemplatio*) at the end. As a result of its brevity, the various *volgarizzamenti*, and the attribution to Augustine, Guigo's method exercised a long-lasting influence both inside and outside cloistered spaces and became a standard guide on meditation and contemplation.¹⁴² However, while in the cloister, it was possible to preserve the order of the procedure; outside of it, some could easily dismiss the *lectio* as a mere preparatory step and jump straight into contemplation. An example of this tendency was Panziera himself. In his treatise on the meaning of Christ's life for contemporary readers, Panziera replaced the literal level with its allegorical interpretation.¹⁴³ From this point of view, the passions and feelings aroused by reading the Scriptures had only a relative value. One should not dwell on

¹³⁸ Sev., fol. 94r: 'Et lei, persa la sua persona propria, come Christo, acquista la divina persona in Christo, et doventa Dio in lui et con lui, fino che dura questa unione, annihilatione, et transformatione. Et allora Christo Dio con lei cossi deificata anima è el suo Dio de lei, non è più suo Dio lo idolo del falso amor proprio como è sempre ne l'altro tempo quando non è cussi transformata.'

¹³⁹ See AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, cols 477–478 (*Gen. ad lit.*, XII, 27): 'ab hac vita quisque quodammodo moriatur, sive omnino exiens de corpore'.

¹⁴⁰ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, col. 476 (*Gen. ad lit.*, XII, 26): 'perspicua veritas [...] ineffabilis visio veritatis [...] claritas Domini [...] per speciem non per aenigmata'.

¹⁴¹ PANZIERA 1492, fols 50v–51r. The whole text is in PL 40, cols 997–1004. A famous vernacular translation which enlarged the original text extensively is that by the Augustinian monk Agostino da Scarperia. See AGOSTINO DA SCARPERIA 1863; and GIACOMINI 1960.

¹⁴² BAIER 2009, p. 330.

¹⁴³ PANZIERA 1492, fols 127r–151v.

them as they could compromise their relationship with God. Self-examination and confession played a more significant role; it was at this point that *spogliamento* (the attempt to eliminate emotions) occurred.¹⁴⁴

As seen above in Sectio 3.2 of this chapter, Biondo also negated the role of the senses. Consequently, for Biondo, the mystical ascent was an intellectual exercise that advanced progressively through ‘meditation, intelligence, and contemplation’.¹⁴⁵ At the first level (*meditatio*), even though God remained the leading agent (‘Grace is there to perfect nature’),¹⁴⁶ the human mind relied mostly on its faculties and secondary causes (the influence of stars, for example).

After a ‘legitimate exercise’, God might want to satisfy the human ‘natural appetite for investigation’ by showing them the ‘revealed truth’.¹⁴⁷ Then, the mind stopped ‘wandering about’ (*ambulabat*) and was appropriated by divine grace.¹⁴⁸ Reason ‘changes name, act, and way of acting’; it ‘approaches the naked truth, without accidents’; this state was called ‘intelligence’ because human beings were made similar to the angels, the ‘separated substances’.¹⁴⁹ In an exegetical piece concerning 2 Maccabees, Biondo mentioned the prophet Elijah’s ascent (2 Kings 2:11). What interested Biondo was not that Elijah had become Yahweh’s champion before the supporters of Baal and therefore earned God’s approval, but that he had eventually stopped ‘wandering about’ (*vagari*) and finally allowed God to possess

¹⁴⁴ See BONAVENTURE 1882–1902, V, p. 296 (*Itin.*, Prologus, 4): ‘Exerce igitur te, homo Dei, prius ad stimulum coscientiae remordentem, antequam oculos eleves ad radios sapientiae.’

¹⁴⁵ Mag., fol. 20v: ‘omissis eorum principii et mediis usque meditationem perfectam, dicam aliquid quomodo eorum meditatio transeat in intelligentiam et quomodo intelligentia intellectum pariat et contemplationem’. For this section, I rely on the Text 5 in Appendix.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., fol. 21r: ‘Quid enim mirum si idem agens diversis mediis idem agat, idem per medium gratie et per medium nature dum gratia est ibi perficiens naturam’. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sent.*, II, d. 9, q. 1, a. 8, arg. 3: ‘Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit.’

¹⁴⁷ Mag., fol. 21v: ‘post legitimum exercitationem rationalis in meditatione Dei vel sui vel eorum quae ad alterutrum cognitionem ducunt, quando Deus vult, sollicitam rationalem in investigatione quesitae veritatis et cause rei, novo lumine vestiendo, sistit auferendo ei naturalem appetitum inquirendi ostensa aliquantulum veritate’.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., fols 21v–22r: ‘tunc rationalis quae prius per seipsam ambulabat, mota quidem a gratia et adiuta ac concomitata, sed insensibiliter et quasi ex se, nunc non sue sed gratie motu agitur, quasi ipsa non ipsa sit in se, sed in gratia, sicut vere est’. A similar advice in PIEROZZI 1858a, p. 169: ‘bene dice e divotamente santo Anselmo: Quid vagaris per multa, o homunio? O omicciolo, perchè vai vagando, discorrendo per tante cose, cercando beni al corpo tuo e all’anima tua? Ama e cerca quello bene dove sono tutti i beni: e questo è Iddio’.

¹⁴⁹ Mag., fol. 22r: ‘rationalis mutat nomen sicut et actum ac modum agendi et iam sue discursu intelligens nudam quodammodo veritatem appropinquat ad separatarum substantiarum similitudinem, que vident rerum nudam substantiam omissis accidentibus. Et ideo intelligentia appellatur, quia eius similis sit, et eius actus est intellectus id est veri ac cause visio’.

him entirely.¹⁵⁰ Biondo saw Elijah as an allegory for the mind: divine union happened when one focused their thoughts exclusively on God.

For Biondo, men and women could not lift themselves towards God; to achieve contemplation, they had to be ‘elevated against their merit and beyond their forces’ by another ‘created being’ (i.e. grace).¹⁵¹ This process also required that one ‘incinerate himself and, through self-annihilation, place himself under God’.¹⁵² In contemplation, humans acknowledged the absolute disparity between creation and God *and* also reached absolute proximity to God: they saw themselves entirely *sub specie Creatoris*. In contemplation, human consciousness resided in the *apex mentis*, ‘the highest and most perfect region’.¹⁵³ The *apex mentis* was like ‘the tip of a sword’: all the aspects, the elements, and the faculties of human nature converged there.¹⁵⁴ One approached ‘the light of truth’ and acquired ‘the vision of the true light’.¹⁵⁵ This light, which was Christ, could only be received here because this was where Christ dwelt.¹⁵⁶ The *apex mentis* was the liminal space between creatureliness in its proper sense and the ‘new area’ created by the Spirit for grace.¹⁵⁷

For Biondo, however, the union could not be entirely confined to the intellect. He emphasised that, in the summit of the mind, one was allowed to marry Christ.¹⁵⁸ This wedding took place on the cross.¹⁵⁹ For Biondo, divine love was ‘crucified’ and demanded full abnegation.¹⁶⁰ He lamented that, since the crucified Christ was ‘neither glorious nor well-

¹⁵⁰ Mag., fol. 6v: ‘habito vehiculo, Helias noster in celum fertur. Non ociose vagatur in terra sui novi discursus per suas novas et mirabiles excellentias’.

¹⁵¹ Mag., fol. 22r: ‘ab infirmitate rationalis, pondus laboris non ferentis et in se ipsam recidentis, si aliunde non detur ab alio extrinseco, id est a creatura. Et ideo que dum elevaretur sensit se contra proprium meritum et supra vires elevari’.

¹⁵² Ibid., fol. 22v: ‘seipsam incinerat et sub Deo anihilat, proficiens subinde tantundem in sui quantum et in Dei cognitione’.

¹⁵³ Add., fol. 121v: ‘regione de la mente più alta et più perfecta’.

¹⁵⁴ Mag., fol. 57v: ‘Hic proprie acies est gladii et cuspis suprema.’

¹⁵⁵ Add., fol. 26v: ‘lumen veritatis’; *ibid.*, fol. 85v: ‘la visione de la vera luce’.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 103r: ‘stringetevi a Christo vera luce, et perfecto maestro. Et Lui, che illumina ognuno che ha luce, ve illuminarà secondo el bisogno tanto almeno che porete vedere le vostre tenebre’. See *ibid.*, fol. 136r: ‘colui che habita nella prefata cima, el quale è Iesu Christi’.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 122r: ‘el quale loco è contermino in alcun modo a la cima de essa rationale elevata, la quale propriamente è el loco nel quale Dio se unisce a la prefata cima de la volontà et infonde nel anima la sua carità’.

¹⁵⁸ Add., fol. 40r: ‘concessum est etiam in hoc ipso sedere ad mensam illam nuptialem in novissimo loco’.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., fol. 64v: ‘occorrere al sposo per consumare con lui su la croce glorioso matrimonio’.

¹⁶⁰ For., fols 33v–34r: ‘crucifixo amore. Del quale ve dovete reputare indegna et così non partecipe per fino che non sentiate quello in voi formato, stabile, et fixo, patente de tucti li suoi de ogni sorte contrarii vostri universali et particulari vitii in voi regnanti et dominanti, recti però et dominati et signoreggiate, et verso el fine de la sua destructione et morte vera, cioè anichilatione totale nel suo regnare et dominare, continuamente portati da infinita et ineffabile sapientia Jesuchristo, vostra guida et capo, vita et forma, fondamento et substantia, sopra ogni humano, et de pura creatura intellecto sensibilmente, allora voi a sé assomigliante et in sé transformante, a cui sia laude et gloria eterna’.

dressed', nobody wanted to marry him; and he could not contribute with 'a rich dowry' to make the Bridegroom more appealing to his Bride.¹⁶¹ In a similar tone, Antoninus of Florence mordaciously wrote: 'almost everyone leaves the universal good, i.e. God, and prefers to love onions and garlic'.¹⁶²

Eventually, human inadequacy brought an end to contemplation.¹⁶³ What was tasted in the *excessus mentis*, the supernatural ecstasis, was an imperfect and transitory experience.¹⁶⁴ In the afterlife, however, the elect would be 'lifted over any temporal height' and moved 'above time and any mutability, in pure and true eternity'.¹⁶⁵ Here, one would receive the vision of God:

Through this gift, we saw the glory of his formative power dwelling within us. And this is not any kind of glory but the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father. We saw [...] by having a taste of both intellectual and sensible experience and by participating in his divine and eternal person after we had been introduced into his eternity and made co-eternal by the eternal. We did not see something temporal or corruptible, or lacking some goodness, or imperfect in some part, but something full of all sorts of plenitude, which does not exclude anything that exists and indeed includes every mode of being into one perfect being, because it is full of the grace which elects, gives, creates, and produces everything, full of every goodness in and with his chosen and beloved rational and intellectual created being; and it is full of truth, which corresponds to his elective grace.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ibid., fols 22v–23r: 'Non si trova chi voglia Dio, se non vestito et glorioso. Io ho poco, et Christo non posso maritare senza gran dote. Non è chi lo voglia. Lui me aiuti et mi consigli. Non trovai ancora in questo loco chi volesse tre parole de vita eterna se non li ho dato prima segurtà, pegno, et arra de la vita presente.'

¹⁶² PIEROZZI 1858a, p. 85: 'quasi tutti lasciano il bene universale, Iddio [...] e vanno dietro ad amare cipolle e agli'.

¹⁶³ Add., fol. 103v: 'è necessario che lo acto de la persona extrinseco remanga imperfecto et vicioso'.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., fol. 22r: 'eius actus est intellectus, id est veri ac cause visio quedam, licet imperfecta in comparatione eius quam habitura est postea separata'. See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

¹⁶⁵ Add., fol. 89v: 'tirati in alto [...] et elevati sopra ogni altezza del tempo'. See also Mag., fols 83v–84r: 'supra tempus et mutabilitatem quamlibet in pura sola et vera eternitate'.

¹⁶⁶ Mag., fol. 77r–v: 'Quo munere vidimus gloriam eius formative habitantis in nobis. Gloriamque non qualemcunque, sed unigeniti a patre. Vidimusque [...] gustu experientie intellectualis atque sensibilis, ac participio sue divine atque eterne persone in eternitate eius introducti, atque eterno facti coeterni [...] Vidimus autem non temporale aliquid aut corruptibile, aut vacuum bono aliquo, vel imperfectum ex parte ulla, sed plenum quiddam plenitudine omnifaria, nihil quod est excludentis ac propterea omnem essendi modum in uno perfecto esse concludentis, quoniam est plenum gratie electricis, donatricis, creatricis, et productricis, boni omnis in sua et cum sua electa et dilecta rationali et intellectuali creatura, plenum quoque veritatis, correspondentie ad ipsam gratiam electricem'.

Biondo investigated the heavenly vision in a more detailed way in *On the Joys of the Blessed*.¹⁶⁷ The several repetitions and the broken sentences indicate that the text, which echoes one of Panziera's treatises, was a work in progress. In this writing, Biondo elaborated on the doctrine of the dowries and other theological points.¹⁶⁸ Biondo did not refer to his own life nor did he appeal to the religious experience of his readers. For these reasons, what we have in the manuscript is highly derivative and uninspired. One aspect is significant, though: the elect would see that God was 'content with Himself and enjoys His own blessedness'.¹⁶⁹ *Beatitudo* meant taking part (*participatio*) in God's love of Himself. At this point, the elect would sing and dance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix, 10. On the notion of beatific vision and its development, see BOERSMA 2018.

¹⁶⁸ On the notion of dowries, see BYNUM 1995, pp. 131–132.

¹⁶⁹ Mag., fol. 36v: 'est in se simpliciter se ipso contentus atque ipsius beatitudine delectatur'.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., fol. 35r: 'Beatorum corpora non sunt ociosa sed proprium actum exercent tripliciter: cantu et corporis modulato gestu ac extrinseco manuum exercitio; in tactu perito organi musici convenientis proprie glorie; perfectioni cantus competit vocis perfectio que tribus concluditur plenitudine, suavitate, flexibilitate.'

CHAPTER 6: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*

In Chapter 5, I examined how the *forma Christi*, understood both as ontological *substantia* and personalistic *datum*, could be welcomed in man through *spogliamento*. For Biondo, those who followed the Son in his *kenosis* and walked with Christ on the path toward the cross tried to relinquish anything that contradicted God's will. In doing so, they dwelled 'in Christ' and, in turn, Christ's Spirit settled in them. This 'new person in Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:17) pursued an intellectual and affective union with God. During one's lifetime, however, this vision was partial and transitory. The complete vision would be available only after death (1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 13:12). Chapter 5 ended with a description of God as 'content with Himself' enjoying 'His own blessedness'.¹ According to this first line of inquiry, salvation comes to a final act in a private experience.

However, Biondo also expressed his faith in connection with the radial nature of divine love. Following the Dionysian axiom, 'love expands itself' (*bonum diffuvisum sui*), he wrote that God is the love (*bonitas*) that communicates itself (*communicat se*). The inescapable faults of human beings could not impinge on God's communication; on the contrary, 'by communicating itself, love wants to perfect the faculty'.² As seen in Chapter 5.3, there was an interior search for God, which led Biondo to embrace Christ fully, but he also felt the need to convey his ideas to others. We found a doctrinal language but also one that was filled with poetic images. We discovered a notion of grace that was confined to the self and one that was personal and made its way into the human heart.

Two parallel strands run, therefore, through Biondo's thought: love's communicability ('the good communicates itself') and a self-contained God 'who is content with Himself'. The purpose of Chapter 6 is to analyse how centrifugal and centripetal forces also impacted Biondo's definition of the Church. In my view, it is here that the opposing tensions that characterised Biondo's proposition emerge.

Before I continue, I should add a few words to clarify the choice of the title for this final chapter. The phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (there is no salvation outside the Church) was used in various forms by several Church Fathers (for instance, Origen, Cyprian, Fulgentius,

¹ Mag., fol. 36v: 'est in se simpliciter se ipso contentus atque ipsius beatitudine delectatur'.

² Mag., fol. 28v: 'Ex parte obiecti erat bonitas volens se ipsam delectabilem communicando perficere potentiam'.

and Augustine) and appeared extensively during the Middle Ages.³ The phrase was read in an exclusivist sense, implying that salvation was denied or made inaccessible outside the Church. Such a location was supposed to be inhabited by heretics, sinners, unbelievers, and pagans who, consequently, were excluded from eternal salvation.⁴ This interpretation was attacked by Sebastian Franck in his condemnation of baptism as a sign of affiliation and, thus, of separation.⁵ However, it could also be read in an inclusivist way.⁶ The shift depended on whether the Church was seen as a static self-sustained entity (in this case, the *extra* was excluded from the *intra*) or as a living, growing organism (in this case, the evangelising mission became pre-eminent). Even though the phrase is not found in Biondo's writings, I believe the two opposing interpretations exemplify the various tensions between the centrifugal and centripetal forces that underpinned Biondo's religious thought.

Firstly, these two interpretations affect how we understand grace. Even though they do not question grace's pre-eminence, they, however, lead us to the following questions concerning grace: If the Church's role is unclear, what is the connection between divine love, which takes human beings upward towards God, and neighbourly love, which is expressed outwardly and horizontally? As Jacopone wrote, 'sweet thing is to love a creature / but [to love] the Creator is the sweetest'.⁷ In other words, should sanctifying grace be severed from the grace of neighbourly love?

Furthermore, through a *sacramentum electionis* – a sign that was invisible yet real – one became a Church member, but was Biondo also able to see the Church as a *sacramentum salutis*, a sign of salvation for others?⁸ In terms of love, assuming that neighbourly love was evaluated as valid (after all, it was a '*dolce cosa*'), was this love confined to the Church or did it embrace those outside of it? Was love confined to the elect and entirely oblivious of the *extra*? Did this reading not contradict the expansive nature of love?

Finally, if the sign of the divine election was invisible (as the invisibility of grace suggested), what was the purpose of preaching? Then, what was the meaning of Romans 10:17

³ See MAZZOLINI 2016.

⁴ This aspect was particularly acute when sinning had severe social repercussions. See TENTLER 1977, pp. 4–6. Moreover, see the important considerations in MERLO 2003, p. 209–214, who analysed how the Franciscan Order shifted from a position of poverty into a position of dominance.

⁵ WILLIAMS AND MERGAL 1957, p. 154. On Franck, see ERDOZAIN 2016, pp. 39–48.

⁶ On the two ways in which this phrase can be read, see BEINERT AND SEMMELROTH 1967–1978, pp. 409–417.

⁷ *Laude*, p. 250: 'dolce cosa è amar la creatura, / ma 'l Creatore più dolce che mai sia'.

⁸ On the church as a sign, mystery, and guarantee (all possible rendition of the word *sacramentum*), see BEINERT AND SEMMELROTH 1967–1978.

(‘faith cometh by hearing’)? Who was the speaker? For Christians, God Himself calls human beings to salvation, but what was their role? Augustine saw the Church as a historical phenomenon. Consequently, for him, salvation and its preaching were also historical events. Was this connection between history, salvation, and the Church present in Biondo’s thought? We have already seen in Chapter 5.4 that, for Biondo, history and temporality hindered the contemplative vision (however transitory this might have been). What were the implications for the Church?

Once these premises are clear (grace’s primacy, the sacramental mission, and the temporal nature of salvation), the phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* can help us to establish the foundation of this chapter of the dissertation and stress further why the notion of love was central for our understanding of Biondo’s religious proposition.

To clarify my position and the problem that I am confronting in more depth, I would like to quote the words of the theologian Karl Rahner:

We can express the whole problem of the church in a very simple question: Is man religious merely through his transcendental relation, however this is to be interpreted more exactly, or does this indubitable and fundamental relation of God to man and man to God in what we call Spirit and grace have itself a tangible and concrete history? Basically and ultimately, there are only two possibilities in all of the forms and mixed forms of religion. Either history is itself of salvific significance, or salvation takes place only in a subjective and ultimately transcendental interiority, so that the rest of human life does not really have anything to do with it.⁹

I will leave aside whether Rahner’s position is universally accepted amongst Christians. What matters here is that, for Rahner, one must make a radical choice: one can *either* move towards interiority *or* embark on an outward journey. I argue that we cannot adopt this depiction when dealing with Biondo (or at least it does not fully describe his position). In this chapter, I want to elucidate further how Biondo belonged to that group of believers who, as indicated by Prosperi, could not decide between the two Churches (*due chiese*), the interior Church where Christ reigned supreme, and the institutional community of believers.¹⁰ Biondo was able to balance the two Churches within the circle of his followers – and, to some extent, at the local level of Modigliana (although conflicts with the local magistrates and the Savonarolians

⁹ RAHNER 1978, p. 345.

¹⁰ PROSPERI 2007.

suggest that the balance was already disrupted). However, when he had to balance the pre-eminence of interior faith with the external rites and sacraments of the Church of Rome, an irreparable rupture took place. This split did not take the form of a sect or a heresy – Biondo maintained his position in the Roman Church and never disputed its role – but was based on a radical interpretation of election and the abrogation of time, understood as Satan’s possession. The unwanted consequence of the dismissal of history was not only doctrinal or confined to Biondo’s criticism of ecclesiastical institutions but also affected the meaning of salvation, election, and ultimately love itself, thus defining what he meant by Church.

In my view, it is precisely here that this dissertation provides its most original contribution. My efforts are neither confined to examining doctrines nor focusing exclusively on the conflict between institutions and dissidents. Instead, they emphasise the significance that religious and philosophical ideas had on the lives of men and women, on what Silvana Seidel Menchi called the ‘*passaggio dalla letteratura alla vita*’, the move from literature to life.¹¹

To accomplish this task, I first examine how Biondo understood ecclesiastical institutions. Church authorities (for instance, clergy, monks, nuns, theologians, and spiritual directors) acted both as the transmitters and the controllers of the content of faith. In the transmission of faith, there was a private moment, usually called *ruminatio*, when theologians studied the Scriptures and collected their thoughts, followed by a phase, typically referred to as *praedicatio*, when scriptural teachings were handed over to their audience (i.e. anonymous readers, members of the convent or monastery, the lay congregation).¹² In Section 1, I explore how these two moments related to each other in the religious orders, namely how God’s inspiration, the personal call, developed into a public institution through the phenomenon of vocation. Then, building on the previous section, Section 2 focuses on the principles that guided Biondo’s spiritual direction. I expand on the principle of *spogliamento* elucidated in Chapter 5.3.2 and demonstrate how it was applied in the ecclesiastical dimension. In Section 3, I examine the objective of Biondo’s direction: the adoption of human beings by the Son of God and how they become children of God. This section complements the discussion in Chapter 5.4 on the divine vision but will also highlight the eschatological and historical realisation of adoption. In Section 4, I explore how the notion of election shaped Biondo’s understanding of

¹¹ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 13.

¹² NARDUCCI 1999, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

the Church. Finally, in Section 5, I illustrate how a pre-temporal distinction between elect and *presciti* profoundly affected the idea that God is love.

6.1 Religious Orders and *renovatio ecclesiae*

The idea of the *renovatio ecclesiae*, present since Christianity's beginnings, shaped Italy's controversial and problematic religious history.¹³ Between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, this topic was routinely discussed amongst writers and ordinary lay people of various backgrounds.¹⁴ According to Jacopone, for example, 'the Church weeps over her disgraceful conditions'.¹⁵ In 1513, the Camaldolese monks Paolo Giustiniani (as we have seen, a fierce critic of Biondo) and Pietro Querini wrote a *Libellus* for Pope Leo X, in which they laid down their own idea of a comprehensive reformation of the Church.¹⁶ Theirs was a grandiose project: they urged the Pope to abandon worldliness and, at the same time, to lead the European states to the conversion of the whole world (corrupt Christians, Native Americans, Jews, and Muslims). As explained by Eugenio Massa, the two authors (but mostly Giustiniani) exhorted Pope Leo not to waste his time with local politics and petty wars (as Julius II had done) but to embrace the role of the shepherd on behalf of Christ. Anything else would have been a betrayal of the Papal office.

The Church's destruction and reformation went hand in hand. While Giustiniani and Querini reaffirmed the role of the Papal *potestas*, others developed the idea of the *renovatio* alongside apocalypticism.¹⁷ According to Savonarola, Florence would be the starting point of a universal reformation: 'Citizens, women, children, flee the land of the Northern Wind, come to Christ; adults, youngsters, and boys, *fugite de terra Aquilonis*: flee from vice and repent'.¹⁸ Biondo, who shared Savonarola's preoccupation, called Florence 'the city of snakes, faeces, and idols'.¹⁹ For Biondo, however, one of the 'snakes' was Savonarola.²⁰ As pointed out by

¹³ See LADNER 1959; MICCOLI 1972–1976; STRAUSS 1995.

¹⁴ NICCOLI 1987; VASOLI 1990; WITT 1995.

¹⁵ *Laude*, p. 119: 'Piange la Ecclesia, piange et dolura: / sente fortura di pessimo stato'. On the spiritual Franciscans' expectations, see PIRON 2003. See also GRUNDMANN 1995, pp. 31–67; THOMPSON 2011.

¹⁶ GIUSTINIANI AND QUERINI 2016. On Querini, see TREBBI 2016. On this work, see MASSA 2005.

¹⁷ On the connection between renovation and apocalypticism, see GARIN 1962; VASOLI 1962; MCGINN 2000; POTESTÀ 2000; POPKIN 2001.

¹⁸ WEINSTEIN 1970. Savonarola quoted in BATTAGLIA 1961–2009, I, p. 604: 'O cittadini, o donne, o fanciulli, fuggite della terra di aquilone, venite a Cristo; o grandi, o mezzani, o piccoli, *fugite de terra Aquilonis*: fuggitevi da' vizi e fate penitenza.' For Savonarola's criticism of both clergy and laity and the need for a thorough renovation, see GARFAGNINI 1997; DALL'AGLIO 2005, pp. 9–10.

¹⁹ Add., fol. 155v: 'cità de li serpenti, città de le merde et de li idoli'. On the side, we also read 'civitas stercorum'.

²⁰ On the critics of Savonarola, see DALL'AGLIO 2005, pp. 21–35.

Lodone, unlike Savonarola, Biondo never spoke of a political renovation or a renewed Church.²¹

Moreover, unlike the humanists, Biondo did not have great faith in human action (although it played a fundamental role in human reformation). He praised human *industria* when it remained within its limits (*in suis terminis*), but he ridiculed those utopian projects that attempted to resolve the problems of the human condition by calling them ‘small paradises’ or ‘imaginary castles in the air’.²² Did he have some particular project or author in mind? We do not know. It seems, however, that even though the humanist project of *urbanitas* and the eulogy of civic values had a Christian foundation, as has been stressed by Charles Trinkaus and Eugenio Garin, Biondo refused to embrace them.²³

What was Biondo’s idea of the Church? Like his contemporaries and the theologians before him, Biondo did not write a treatise entitled *De ecclesia*.²⁴ In their eyes, the nature of the Church was self-evident. Those who were interested in ecclesiastical problems focused on practical aspects and two issues. The first concerned the limits of the Petrine office, and it was answered in the treatises that fell under the rubric of *De potestate papae* or *ecclesiastica*. While the spiritual primacy of the Pope was uncontested, the Papacy’s relationship with the other political and secular powers remained problematic.²⁵ This issue became particularly acute during the Avignon Papacy (1309–1376). While the Augustinian Giles of Rome († 1316) and his disciple Alexander of San Elpidio (1269–1326) strongly advocated the principle of Papal primacy, Dante, Marsilius of Padua (*c.* 1275–*c.* 1342), and William of Ockham (*c.* 1287–1347), amongst others, fiercely wrote against the institutional Church.²⁶ As I mentioned earlier, the role of the Papacy was strongly reaffirmed by the hermits Giustiniani and Querini in 1513 (just a few years before Martin Luther broke with Rome).

²¹ LODONE 2020a, pp. 125–134.

²² Mag., fol. 19v: ‘Isti tamen stant in suis terminis; et vident se naturaliter intelligere quae intelligunt.’ Add., fol. 180r: ‘non bisogna sognare reposi et paradiseti’. See *ibid.*, fol. 185r: ‘Se già volontà non vi trasporta o qualche imaginato castello in aere.’ The expression ‘paradiseti’ is also used by Biondo in a gloss to a verse of a poem written by Giannozzo Sacchetti, Sev., fol. 94r: ‘In te sian le ruine’. “Le ruine”: de li paradiseti designati et somniati de ogni sorte.’

²³ See TRINKAUS 1983, pp. 25–28, 372–385. GARIN 2009, pp. 219–236.

²⁴ See BARTOLI 2016a, pp. 279–281.

²⁵ On the centrality of the problem in European medieval history, see PRODI 1992, pp. 104–225.

²⁶ ALEXANDER OF SAN ELPIDIO 1494; GILES OF ROME 2004. On those who contested the Papacy, see ULLMANN 2003, pp. 283.

The second question concerned the role, the function, and the area of activity of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders.²⁷ Unlike previous monastic institutions, which favoured separation from secular society, the Franciscans and Dominicans were mostly active among lay people.²⁸ These two problems, which highlighted the overlap between religious and secular powers, could be approached from different perspectives. For instance, Peter John Olivi examined them in relation to the notion of vows.²⁹ Olivi, a firm advocate of absolute poverty, argued that his adherence to the Franciscan rule outweighed the Papal injunctions whenever the latter contravened or attempted to relax the tenet of poverty.³⁰ Bonaventure appeared to advocate a similar position when he distinguished between personal and public matters of faith (i.e. between *forum conscientiae* and *forum ecclesiae*).³¹ Biondo also was interested in the Mendicant Orders, particularly the Order of Friars Minor. Unlike Olivi, however, Biondo focused on the tension between inspiration and vocation.

6.1.1 Inspiration

The phenomenon of inspiration is highly problematic. According to Biondo, it was God and not its human founders who drafted the rules (*forma de vivere*) of a religious order.³² For example, Saint Francis claimed that the author of his rule was Christ himself.³³ To better understand Biondo's position, it can be helpful to look at the opposing views of Thomas Aquinas and Peter John Olivi. The first position became the standard view amongst Dominicans; the second found support mainly amongst the spiritual Franciscans.³⁴

Thomas's most extensive account of inspiration can be found in his *Summa theologiae* (II-II, questions 171–178). Inspiration, alongside prophecy, ecstatic raptures, and miracles, was categorised as a general grace. Prophecy (and, therefore, inspiration) was divided into *cognitio*, a moment of personal education and an understanding of the Scriptures, and *locutio*, the proclamation specific to ecclesiastical edification. Thomas's definition of prophecy and

²⁷ On the disputes between the orders and the universities, see CONGAR 1961. For a specific look at the Franciscans, see CHINNICI 2020. For an overview outside the Franciscan area, see ANDREWS 2006.

²⁸ See MERLO 2007, pp. 233–268, who emphasised the liminal role of the Franciscan Order.

²⁹ On the history of the religious vow, see BOUREAU 2014, particularly pp. 151–166.

³⁰ OLIVI 2002, pp. 47–56.

³¹ See PRODI 1992, pp. 164–166.

³² Add., fols 142v–143r: 'una forma de vivere [...] spirata a quelli [li fondatori] da esso Dio et gloriosamente manifestata essere sua de Lui et non de quelli'.

³³ FAED, I, p. 127 (Test., 39): 'dedit mihi Dominus simpliciter et pure dicere et scribere regulam et ista verba'. See also CLARENO 1912, p. 128: 'Tunc audita est vox Christi in aere respondentis: Francisce, nichil est in regula de tuo, sed totum est meum quicquid ibi est'.

³⁴ On these two positions, see FITZGERALD 2017, pp. 108–151.

inspiration was heavily influenced by his fierce rejection of Joachim of Fiore. For Joachim, prophecy allowed access to the future age of the Spirit.³⁵ Just as the Gospel had superseded Mosaic Law, the eternal Gospel would make Christ's Gospel obsolete.³⁶ For Thomas, prophecy had more to do with the correct interpretation of the sacred texts and 'the direction of human acts' than predicting future events.³⁷ Prophecy affirmed and actualised Christ as the eternal truth and the 'living doctrine'.³⁸

Peter John Olivi aligned himself more closely with Joachim.³⁹ Without promoting the eternal Gospel and renouncing his fundamental Christocentric position, the Franciscan regarded history as the progressive unveiling and growth of truth. In his eyes, history culminated with the negation of all temporal 'variability and fluxibility'.⁴⁰ Only when temporality was annihilated, would eternal truth be 'tasted'. Thomas and Olivi's positions led to two opposing ideas of the Church. Thomas emphasised the intellectual aspect. Consequently, educated theologians became central to understanding and implementing Church doctrine. For Olivi, revelation and inspiration remained personal affairs confined to the realm of inward experience.

Biondo oscillated between these two positions, and his activity as a writer will clarify this point. Specifically, Biondo saw himself as 'being forced' to write.⁴¹ He perceived a profound connection between God's designs and his writings. To Alessandra degli Ariosti, he claimed that he could see God's intentions.⁴² Based on these statements – which we should take with a grain of salt – and keeping in mind what was promoted by the principle of *spogliamento*, which fits the dispossession produced by inspiration, and the pre-eminence accorded to grace, by and large, Biondo appeared to agree with Olivi that inspiration was an interior event (*in-spiratio*).

³⁵ On Joachim's ideas on history, see REEVES 1969 and 1976, pp. 1–28; MCGINN 1985, pp. 161–203; LUBAC 1979–1981, I, pp. 43–67; GARFAGNINI 2000.

³⁶ On the *evangelium aeternum* in Joachim and the Papal condemnation, see DENIFLE 1885.

³⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, II-II, q. 171, pr.: 'Nam prophetica revelatio se extendit non solum ad futuros hominum eventus [...] est etiam prophetica revelatio de his quae pertinent ad spirituales substantias, a quibus vel ad bonum vel ad malum inducimur, quod pertinet ad discretionem spirituum; extendit etiam se ad directionem humanorum actuum.'

³⁸ FITZGERALD 2017, p. 117, n. 42.

³⁹ On the Joachimism of Olivi and other spiritual Franciscans, see ACCROCCA 1989. According to Accrocca, the superficial coincidences between the Franciscans and the monk were negated by a more profound and substantial disagreement based on the centrality of Christ. See also SIMONI BALIS-CREMA 1976, who emphasised the aspirations of renewal linked to the Franciscan Order mainly thanks to the pseudo-Joachimite works.

⁴⁰ FITZGERALD 2017, p. 141.

⁴¹ Add., fols 79r: 'questa scriptura a la quale sono forzato'.

⁴² For., fol. 17v: 'Vedo chiaro quello che Lui fa et pò fare, et sento in gran parte et comprendo quello vol fare.'

Biondo, however, also felt the urgency to communicate his inspiration to others (*exspiratio*). He warned Alessandra degli Ariosti that, at the risk of ‘surprising her’, his duty was to continue to speak in God’s name.⁴³ This concern was not unique to Biondo. As Adriana Valerio explained, the Dominican tertiary Domenica da Paradiso (1473–1553), the founder of the nunnery La Crocetta in Florence, who was also a prolific writer and a mystic, who defied the injunction against women preaching in public, took the floor and spoke for ‘several hours, to the great awe and admiration of her pupils’.⁴⁴ The actions of writing and speaking, which originated from the dialogue between God (the actual author) and Biondo (the writer) or Domenica (the preacher), could only be fulfilled when addressing an audience (i.e. Biondo’s readers or Domenica’s pupils).⁴⁵

These introductory remarks show that, for Biondo, the inspired person adopted a Marian disposition (God provided them with everything that qualified them as inspired) and an apostolic tendency, for inspiration became meaningful exclusively in public service and proclamation (*kerygma*).⁴⁶ Inspiration, initially *gratia gratum faciens*, became part of the *gratiae gratis datae*. Biondo complemented Olivi’s inner and hierarchy-free Church with the Thomistic ecclesiastical-public perspective. However, when we move from the individual dimension of the person receiving inspiration to the level of the religious orders, passing from God’s appropriation, resulting from the *gratia gratum faciens*, to communication, which is the domain of the *gratiae gratis datae*, grows highly problematic. The question is no longer confined to the definition of inspiration and how it is exercised (given by God and proclaimed to others) but concerns its reception and how others respond to it. Here, the problem of vocation emerges, which, as McGinn explained, every mystic or prophet must confront.⁴⁷

6.1.2 The Religious Orders and the Issue of Vocation

For Biondo, the history of the Franciscan Order exemplified the distinction between inspiration and vocation. As explained in Chapter 3.3.2, Biondo complemented the more or less

⁴³ Add., fol. 139v: ‘De qual mia certezza et visione se ve maravigliarete’. Marvel was a common topos. See *Laude*, p. 64: ‘Se te volesse dire quel ch’io agio sentito / faria maravigliare.’

⁴⁴ NARDUCCI 1999, p. xl: ‘travagliata dalle sue solite febbri non si reggeva in piedi [...] se ben con gran fatica, si infervori in maniera che riebbe la voce e la lena, e la facondia del dire, e durò parecchie ore: con grande stupore e ammirazione delle sue figliuole’.

⁴⁵ Add., fol. 63v: ‘Dictum autem et expressum est quantum fuit a provido et benigno omnis boni datore concessum.’

⁴⁶ The distinction I draw between Mary and the apostles is merely used to express two stages of the same experience.

⁴⁷ MCGINN 2012a, p. 177.

historically accurate accounts of Angelo Clareno and Ubertino of Casale with James of Massa's prophetic vision.⁴⁸ Biondo referred to this vision in various places. According to the surviving sources, he mentioned it always in texts directed to Clare nun Alessandra degli Ariosti. This coincidence might be explained by the fact that the vision appealed primarily to the members of the Franciscan family.⁴⁹ In his vision, James of Massa compared the Franciscan Order to a 'huge tree', with golden roots and human beings as its fruits. A storm then shattered the tree. Out of its remaining root, a new tree grew. Unlike the previous one, this second tree was made entirely of gold. Despite the apocalyptic undertones, the vision was optimistic with its expectations of renewal. The Franciscan Order was not destroyed but transcended itself and took on a new definite form.

For Biondo, the problem with the religious orders was that God had not directly called many of the people who joined them.⁵⁰ Furthermore, like Savonarola, he also denied the necessity of the rules.⁵¹ Biondo insisted that 'neither Clare nor Giles were ever confined or could be confined by the boundaries of Franciscan rule, although this rule was perfect – indeed, the most perfect – insofar as it was exterior and visible or understandable through the senses or natural intellect'.⁵² He claimed that the 'legitimate sons and daughters of Saint Francis and Saint Clare' were 'the invisible Friars Minor'.⁵³ Lodone stressed the centrality of this statement by using it as the title of his dissertation.⁵⁴ According to Biondo, God's inspiration, like grace, acted in hidden ways *and* produced invisible results. Clareno had already pointed out this aspect in his *Chronicon*.⁵⁵

Biondo's distinction between divine and human rules was also of a pneumatological order. God's rule was deemed life itself, and those who followed it (all living beings, in fact) relied solely on the vivifying force of grace (*grazia vivificatrice*). Those who followed the rules

⁴⁸ On the validity of Ubertino and Clareno as historians, see CLARENO 1999, pp. 32–51; POTESTÀ 1980. See also the reflections in MICCOLI 1983, pp. 17–19 about the ineradicable discrepancy between facts (*res gestae*) and their account (*historia rerum gestarum*). The vision can be read in FAED, III, pp. 646–648 (LFI, 48). It is also reported in CLARENO 1999, pp. 426–435. On James of Massa, see WADDING 1731, IV, pp. 10–11; MOORMAN 1968, p. 110. On role of prophecy and visions in relation to the orders, see HVIDT 2007, pp. 91–98.

⁴⁹ Biondo referred to the vision twice in *De amore proprio* (Add., fols 146v and 154r–155r) and again in a letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti dated 18 December 1501 (Add., fols 199v–203v).

⁵⁰ On the problems related to the expansion of the Franciscan Order, see PÁSZTOR 1983.

⁵¹ SAVONAROLA 1846, p. 538: 'Molti ancora pigliano il cordiglio di san Francesco e l'abito del terz'ordine di san Domenico, e poi pare loro lecito fare ogni peccato sotto tale abito; e qualche volta i religiosi favoriscono simili persone, e dicono: pigliate ques'abito e fate questa orazione, e non dubitate che voi non vi potete dannare.'

⁵² Mag., fol. 93r: 'Perché né Chiara né Egidio furono mai circumscripti né circumscriptibili da questa forma de vita, benché perfecta et perfectissima in quanto extrinseca et visibile o intelligibile al senso o intellecto naturale'.

⁵³ Ibid.: 'li invisibili frati minori et li veri et legiptimi figlioli et figliole de San Francesco et de S. Chiara'.

⁵⁴ LODONE 2016b.

⁵⁵ CLARENO 1999, pp. 18–19.

drafted by human beings, on the other hand, were equated to ‘painted and sculpted human beings deprived of the grace of life’.⁵⁶ Since the ‘Spirit of Jesus Christ’ gave life to the Church as a whole and not only to the friars, an implicit but significant consequence of Biondo’s defence of life over art was that the religious orders, a product of human industriousness (*de facto*, a work of art), had a diminished role when compared to lay people.⁵⁷

By establishing a radical opposition between the ‘first tree’ of ‘extrinsic and accidental religion’ and the ‘other tree’, ‘entirely made of gold’ and ‘full of love and substance’, the militant Church became ‘inauthentic’ with respect to Christ’s seminal idea.⁵⁸ The total devaluation of the religious orders led Biondo to conclude that, in his time, nobody had a true vocation.⁵⁹ Those who joined a religious order had been either ‘forced’ or ‘driven by desperation’.⁶⁰ He was not claiming that no inspired person existed within the religious orders, but its possibility rested entirely on God’s grace. Biondo called the people who were guided unknowingly by God the blind radiating light (*ciechi luminosi*).⁶¹

In conclusion, a fundamental divergence existed between the interior and the exterior *sequela Christi*, between personal inspiration and public vocation. The former was realised by Saint Francis, Saint Dominic, or Saint Clare. Biondo and Domenica da Paradiso exemplified it when, respectively, he wrote under inspiration, and she illustrated the Christian doctrine to her pupils. By contrast, vocation as the public exercise of faith belonged to those who proclaimed to have been inspired by the founders of the religious orders and strove, through their industriousness, to shape their lives according to their rules. In a broader sense, the problem of vocation also interested Biondo’s or Domenica’s followers, who had learned their faith through mediation. While God personally called the founders of the religious orders – we can say that they were attracted by God Himself – in Biondo’s eyes, all the rest were ‘deformers’, ‘disparagers’, and ‘deniers’ of the divine’s will.⁶² While Augustine saw the Church as a ‘mixed’

⁵⁶ Add., fol. 149r: ‘le forme humane sono como li homini depinti et sculpti senza la gratia de vita’.

⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 147r: ‘la sancta chiesa, perché viva non po’ essere senza el Spirito de Iesu Christo quella vivificante’.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fol. 154v: ‘lo arbore primo signante de sua religione la extrinseca et accidentale de tutte le altre forme de vivere perfecto forma [...] un altro [...] che seria tucto de oro in ogni parte sua cioè in tutto substantiale et pieno de amore de Dio’.

⁵⁹ Ibid., fol. 150r: ‘dico et affermo che se pur alcuno in alcun modo è stato fin qui chiamato a tale forme non è al presente sopra la terra, et fu chiamato col lume cieco et cecità luminosa guidato da Dio’.

⁶⁰ Ibid., fol. 149v: ‘da altra violentia spinti, non per amor de Dio conosciuto et amato et cercato et creduto trovare per tal via, sono nella religione intrati, ma solo per vera desperatione’. This aspect had already surfaced in our discussion concerning the fourth rule.

⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 150r: ‘io chiamo ciechi luminosi’.

⁶² Ibid., fol. 43r: ‘exhortor ad considerandum finem intentionis non moderatorum et reformatorum qui rectius et melius dici frequenter possent et appellari deformatores, sed ipsorum antiquorum et verorum ac primorum talis status fundatorum, quorum quidem qui moderatores fuere, visi sunt correctores fuisse, immo fuere etiam non visi’.

entity, Biondo was convinced that a Church that God did not entirely possess was not a Church at all.⁶³

6.1.3 The Appeal to Flight: Between *pro nobis* and *pro se*.

We can verify these conclusions by analysing the idea of flight, which Biondo used frequently. According to Delumeau, the concept of *contemptus mundi* implicitly carried within it the idea of *fuga*.⁶⁴ However, two meanings were associated with it. In the first, *fuga* indicated spiritual detachment; in the second, the world became the dominion of Satan and, therefore, must be utterly rejected. These two meanings of *fuga*, which Biondo expressed with two vernacular terms, *fuga* (escape) and *volo* (flight), illustrate the conflict between neighbourly love and the desire to transcend the material world.

6.1.3.1 *Fuga*

In the *Commentarius*, one of Biondo's remedies defined *fuga* as a way of severing ties with the secular world.⁶⁵ The advice was directed to monks, nuns, and friars. Here, Biondo was most probably influenced by Angelo Clareno's experiences. While Ubertino of Casale attempted to establish the spiritual Franciscans' prominence through public disputations, Clareno moved to Subiaco, a stronghold of Franciscan rigorism in the Lazio region where he wrote his major works, and then to a hermitage in Basilicata, where he died in 1327.⁶⁶ Clareno firmly distinguished between *res* and *nomen* (or *habitus*), obedience to Francis's teachings, and nominal membership in the Franciscan Order.⁶⁷

When talking to lay people, however, *fuga* signified escaping 'every act, word, and sign through which the mind's devotion, the perfection of life, and sanctity are demonstrated'.⁶⁸ Biondo encouraged them to do something good for their neighbour beyond listening to the

sunt tantum. Fuere inquam veri correctores quemadmodum visi sunt laudatores et imitatores in eo in quo fuerunt vituperatores et negatores veri non solum fundatorum suorum, verum etiam divine bonitatis ac sapientie spiratricis magistre et dictatricis formarum earum, quas omni tempore et cuicumque personarum conditioni convenientissimas et sufficientissimas dictavit spiritus Christi'.

⁶³ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, cols 82–83 (*Doc. chr.*, III, 32): 'permixta Ecclesia'.

⁶⁴ DELUMEAU 1990, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Add., fol. 44v: 'fugiat quisque ut potest quantumque potest mundum ipsum et mundanas personas, eorumque consuetudinem et conversationem, intus et fori. Fugiat etiam delectationes omnes, non solum carnis sed etiam sensus, rationis, et spiritus'. See also CLARENO 1980, p. 147 (letter 29): 'non est in carcere mundi huius proprietates et hereditas verorum et perfectorum Christi discipulorum'. See POTESTÀ 1990, pp. 236–245.

⁶⁶ On the differences between Clareno and Ubertino, see POTESTÀ 1989; VIAN 2007. On the Franciscans of Subiaco, see FRUGONI 1953.

⁶⁷ On this issue, see BURR 2007.

⁶⁸ Add., fol. 56v: 'Fugiat autem quisque omni loco et tempore actum omnem et verbum ac signum omne quo demonstratur devotio mentis aut vite perfectio et sanctitas.'

mass, fasting, making night vigils, and praying.⁶⁹ This type of suggestion attracted the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities. For Biondo, accepting one's responsibilities became the path that could lead to God; to dismiss them meant to renounce one's cross. *Fuga* complemented neighbourly love. Biondo's primary example was Saint Francis, who had relinquished his authority and pledged obedience to the 'apostate' Elias of Cortona.⁷⁰

6.1.3.2 *Volo*

In a letter to Alessandra – written very early in 1488, therefore ten years before the *Commentarius* – after lamenting his life in Modigliana, Biondo used the term *volo*, and his vision appeared rather different:

One day, we will take flight (*pigliar volo*). It will be a long, long flight, perhaps early on, before the end of summer. We will leave behind forever the negligence of the superficial false good and the central iniquity of the wicked, including the avarice of the clergy of this country, partly angry and filthy, partly hypocritical. We will take flight once we have recommended it [i.e. the negligence, iniquity, and avarice of the clergy] to God, as Saint Francis did with his order. He saw that the order had devoted itself completely to babble, pomp, and hypocrisy, without the substance of virtue and truth, having relinquished its profession and led to studies, buildings, illicit procurements, and simony, overabundance, and pleasure of the body, appearance and not being, preaching and not doing.⁷¹

This passage, apparently agreeing with what he would later say in the *Commentarius*, shows that Biondo did not see himself and his followers as active members of the earthly Church.

⁶⁹ Add., fols 56r–57r: 'Non festiuis autem diebus quisque potest audiat missam, similiter, et qui non potest quiete agat et non turbetur, sed sequatur obedientiam divini spiritus in ordine caritatis et observatione preceptorum illius, neque sibi constituat idolum neque de auditione misse neque de alio actu spiritali aut virtuoso apparente. [...] Hoc ipsum quod dico de missa dico de ieiuniis indulgentiis oratione vocali ad quam quis non tenetur et de quocunque alio opere, quantumvis sancto et meritorio apparente etiam si pertineret ad subventionem proximi ut obmittatur in casibus non necessariis, hoc est, non importantibus neque scandalum neque damnum notabile proximi.' The same passage in the vernacular *Ricordo* was one of the many contested by the Venetian religious authorities. See TROMBETTA 1504, fol. 110v (now in LODONE 2019, pp. 177–178).

⁷⁰ Add., fol. 146v: 'Per qual casone, como anco de sopra fu tocco, lasciò l'ordine nelle mane del prefato frate Helia, apostata et dannato preveduto, como a degno et conveniente capo, essendo lui desperato del governo secondo Dio et del profetto de la multitudine da frate Helia et suoi sequaci introdotto sedutta et seducendo per immissione diabolica nella religione introducta.'

⁷¹ For., fol. 23r–v: 'pigliaremo un dì el volo, et serà longo longo longo, et forse presto prima che passi la state, et così lasciaremo la negligentia de li apparenti boni superficiali, et la nequitia centrale de li cattivi, con la avaritia arabiata et lorda parte, et parte hypocritale del clero di questo paese per sempre, una volta raccomandata a Dio como fecie San Francesco l'ordine poi che vedde che in tucto era dato a ciancie, fasto, et hypochrisia, senza substantia de virtù et verità, de la sua professione tracto a studii, edificii, procuratione illicite et symoniace, et super abundantia et riposo del corpo, parere et non essere, predicare et non fare'.

Like Saint Francis, who before dying commended the Franciscan Order to God, Biondo, too, accepted God's will, and his only desire was to leave the world. The passage does not describe a horizontal temporal escape but a vertical elevation from the world, deliverance from disappointments, liberation from the shackles of the body, escape from the false appearances of the earthly Church, and entry into the true Church of supramundane bliss.

The same feeling was expressed in the *Second Mystical Hymn*, where Biondo urged his 'dear brothers' to bury themselves together.⁷² 'Happy is the person who soon can go down / to Hell indeed!'⁷³ He pleaded with the Earth to take him in: 'O Earth, open up / and hide me in you'.⁷⁴ The call became personal: 'Oh my sweet, longed-for death, / absorb soon / my wicked life, / which is infernal death / and put an end to my troubles. / When will Thou come, Thou that I long for?'⁷⁵ The dialogue between God and Biondo, who, in the world's eyes, was 'blind, crazy, and ugly', grew incomprehensible to others: 'Under this sky, nobody fully understands / how much I desire, / alas, to be in Thee, / all out of myself'.⁷⁶ Christ was an oxymoron: he was the 'vital poison' that granted eternal life and freedom from earthly existence.⁷⁷ More importantly, the daily burdens, which in the *Commentarius* were said to produce suffering but also the fruit of love, were now just a nuisance.

The same pessimistic feeling seems to be expressed in a passage from a text entitled *What is the Habit in the Soul?*⁷⁸ After discussing the temporal nature of human beings and how they were trapped in time, Biondo wrote:

If the contrary obstacle is removed, like someone who is wearing an armour and runs with it, when he is freed from his usual load, he does not run but flies. I do not know how long we have to endure or be stuck in this race (*perpeti et sisti*); however, I know that the heavier the weight that presses us and the harder it is the obstacle of the powers that stop us, then the faster, indeed, the more powerful is our running, like lightning.

⁷² Sev., fol. 125v: 'o car fratelli [...] Adonca sotterianci'. The poem is edited in LODONE 2017.

⁷³ Ibid., fol. 126r: 'O felice chi po' giù presto andare, / verso l'inferno tutto'.

⁷⁴ Ibid., fol. 126v: 'Aprite adonca o terra, terra, terra, / et in te mi nascondi'.

⁷⁵ Ibid.: 'Et tu morte mia, dolce, desiata, / absorbi presto ormai / questo mio viver mal / che è morte infernal, / et dà fine a mie guai. / O quando verrai tu tanto bramata?'

⁷⁶ Ibid., fol. 126r-v: 'cieco, pazo, et brutto [...] Sotto 'l ciel già non è chi intenda a pieno / quanto sia el mio desire, / omè, d'esser in te / tutto uscito di me'.

⁷⁷ Ibid., fol. 126v: 'o mio vital veneno'.

⁷⁸ See Appendix, 11.

We are capable of smashing and reducing into nothingness any kind of contrary matter, like a river, that storms and rages with its waves.⁷⁹

The passage (undated) resonates with Pauline images (i.e. the race and the amour) and also echoes a pericope from Job, previously quoted in the same text.⁸⁰ In this text, Biondo invited the reader to accept suffering (*graviori onere*) as they would be compensated. In line with the principle of *spogliamento*, which was a defining characteristic of his thought, Biondo heralded abandonment and renunciation.⁸¹ Once everything was left behind, joy would erupt: those who were oppressed would be liberated from their burden and fly.

It is difficult to read these texts without having the impression that Biondo developed a profound rejection of life. The incomprehension that he experienced at Modigliana, the misunderstandings concerning his *Ricordo*, the troubles with the Savonarolians and the local authorities, and the lack of faith in the very Church of which he was a member (which, perhaps, was the most disheartening fact, as he was a deeply religious man) profoundly impacted Biondo's theological views. He confessed to Alessandra degli Ariosti that 'rare flashes of lightning' were illuminating his 'dark and frightening night'.⁸² It seems that Biondo eventually gave in to a nihilistic perspective (*ad nihilum redigere*). The two tendencies that shaped his piety diverged irreconcilably: the idea of the world as Satan's realm had overcome God's good creation. Consequently, the institutional Church consisted of nothing but 'the filthy and hypocritical part of clergy' (*lorda parte, et parte hypocritale del clero*). Finally, the faculties of intellect, will, and memory that defined man were described as a wall (the *obex potentiarum* mentioned above) that had to be torn down.

In fact, we should take this bleak picture cautiously. In my view, what ultimately seems to prevail is the eschatological perspective. In the poem entitled *Al foco*, we read the following lines:

⁷⁹ Mag., fols 47v–48r: 'si amoveatur contrarium, quasi qui assuevit armatus et onustus currere, cum liber sit ab onere solito, non currit sed volat. Perpeti et sisti nescio cursu hinc et quo graviori onere premimur et quo potentiarum obice quasi sistimur, eo etiam post modum, non solum velocius sed et potentius currimus, fulguris similes, et idonei contrarias quasque materias quasi fluvius in undas tollere et capere, frangere et ad nihilum redigere'.

⁸⁰ Ephesians 6:14–18; Galatians 5:7–10; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27. See also Hebrews 12:1–2. Job 38:11. Mag., fols 41v–42r.

⁸¹ On evangelical perseverance, see also 1 Peter 5:8–11; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Timothy 2:3–5.

⁸² For., fol. 17v: 'rari lampi illuminano la mia nocte tenebrosa et horrenda'.

[God] Free your elect / after the many falls. / Have mercy at last / and purge their defects. / Do not let them bloom / in this wintry time. / When it comes to the spiritual government, / let them disappear from the world.⁸³

For Biondo, the possibility of disappearing from the world (*al mondo sparire*) pertained exclusively to the elect, to the extent that Biondo prayed to God not to reveal them (*non li lassar fiorire*) in this ‘winter’. He looked neither for a temporal renovation of the Church nor for a visibly elect Church. Biondo’s hopes rested entirely in the other world, where the Spirit ruled uncontested (*in spirital governo*). At some moment, he might have yielded to frustration; in this case, *volo* indicated a thorough rejection of the world. The vernacular poems are a vivid witnessing of this aspiration.

On the other hand, the *Commentarius* (revised in 1503 but written initially in vernacular and therefore with the aim to reach the widest possible audience) invited lay people to embrace their mundane responsibilities. The best example of this fundamental dichotomy comes from Biondo’s views on Saint Francis: he remained in the Franciscan Order, obediently accepting the authority of Elias of Cortona, until he could, eventually, hand it over to God. In conclusion, just as it surfaced when examining grace and *spogliamento*, and in the previous section, where I investigated the opposition between inspiration and vocation, the dichotomy between *fuga* and *volo* shows that Biondo shifted between two apparently conflicting tendencies: he supported a rejection of the world, inextricable from the idea of *spogliamento*, but felt the duty to act within the world (or at least to act within the closest circle represented by family, village, or congregation).

6.2 The Principles of Biondo’s Spiritual Direction

The phrase ‘spiritual direction’ indicates the relationship between a disciple, who seeks to learn more about their faith, and a director, who possesses a firm grasp of the doctrine and should offer a clear set of regulations to be followed in an advantageous and meritorious way. This relationship can easily become polarised.

According to Alexander of San Elpidio (1269–1326), a staunch supporter of the papacy during the fourteenth-century disputes between royalists and papalists concerning the Pope’s

⁸³ Sev., fol. 46r: ‘Libera li tuoi electi / doppo molte ruine; / miserere nel fine / et purga lor defecti. / Non li lassar fiorire / nel tempo d’inverno. / In spirital governo / falli al mondo sparire’. The poem is now edited in LODONE 2017, pp. 17–33.

power, the clergy was ‘the medium between God and the laity’.⁸⁴ A similar discrepancy was supported by the chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson (1363–1429). Gerson, who was concerned with finding a way to distinguish true from false visions, also known as *discretio spirituum*, concluded that this ability was a priestly prerogative.⁸⁵ He argued that mediation by the clergy played an integral role in matters of faith. This stance can also be found in texts of spiritual advice. In an edifying text written for Dianora and Lucrezia Tornabuoni, respectively the aunt and the mother of Lorenzo il Magnifico, Antoninus of Florence appointed himself the ‘guardian’ (*cameriero*) of their minds.⁸⁶ His task was to ensure that the thought of Christ was not confused with other ideas. Agostino di Portico saw himself as a ‘poor gardener’ who tended and cultivated the garden of nuns’ souls.⁸⁷ Finally, the administration of the sacraments (particularly the confession and the eucharist) betrayed the asymmetrical relationship between clerics and the laity.

In Biondo’s time, however, a different approach was being promoted. We have already noted on various occasions the aspirations of lay people to take religious matters into their own hands. As Trinkaus explained, this also affected the sacramental sphere.⁸⁸ For example, for the humanist Bartolomeo della Fonte, penance was more a virtue than a sacrament. Conversely, Lorenzo Valla was indifferent to the disputes on whether the host was the body of Christ and focused, on the contrary, on the etymology of the word eucharist and the subjective elements of the sacrament. Similarly, Biondo’s radical critique of the religious orders profoundly shaped his ideas about spiritual direction.

In her study on the notion of religious *consilium*, Zarri identified three types of spiritual direction.⁸⁹ In the first, direction coincides with the annihilation of the will of the supervised soul and with the latter’s strict obedience to superior clerical authorities. It mainly developed in monasteries and convents. In the second model, spiritual direction is connected to the ‘discernment of the spirits’ (*discretio spirituum*). In this case, doctrinal aspects are prioritised. The third model, finally, classifies spiritual direction as a spiritual friendship between the

⁸⁴ ALEXANDER OF SAN ELPIDIO 1494, sig. aiii: ‘medius inter Deum et populum’.

⁸⁵ Two works are significant for the discussion here. The *De distinctione verarum revelationum a falsis* and *De probatione spirituum* which can be found in GERSON 1960–1973, II, pp. 36–56 and IX, pp. 177–185. On Gerson’s position, see ZARRI 2004, pp. 99–107; VANNINI 2006–2010.

⁸⁶ PIEROZZI 1858b, pp. 202–203. In his *Summa*, Antoninus of Florence called the confessors ‘the physician of the souls’ (PIEROZZI 1959, IV, col. 213). On Antoninus’s direction, see PAOLI 1999; BRYCE 2009.

⁸⁷ AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, p. 298: ‘povaro ortolano’.

⁸⁸ TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 615–650.

⁸⁹ ZARRI 2004. As a general introduction on friendship, see HYATTE 1994, pp. 1–86, that is, Chapter 1 (on classical views) and Chapter 2 (its Christian interpretation). For its role in spiritual direction, see *Dic. Spir.*, ‘Amitié’, I, cols 500–529.

teacher and their disciples. In this version, the focus is less on abstract speculation and more on the disciple's moral behaviour.

These different kinds of spiritual direction could overlap. For instance, Jean Gerson wrote the texts that became central for the doctrinal definition of the phenomenon of spiritual direction, but he also advised his sisters and was familiar with its practical aspects. Biondo's approach united the three models. The strong emphasis on spiritual disrobing placed him firmly in the first group, while his criticism of private prophetic visions brought him closer to the second group. Biondo's main preoccupation, however, always remained the moral elevation and perfection of his readership. In the following section we are going to examine the principles of Biondo's 'spiritual friendship' with his followers.

6.2.1 Friendship

Friendship played a prominent role for Biondo. Firstly, he possessed an ideal notion of friendship. This friendship, which he called *divina amicitia* (divine friendship), was not the secular, political, and social friendship advocated by philosophers and humanists alike, but it was entirely dependent on God.⁹⁰ As pointed out by Reginald Hyatte, *amicitia spiritualis* (or *divina amistanza*, according to Jacopone) initially connected God to the human soul in a personal and private relationship and then could develop in a collaborative effort.⁹¹ The perfect setting for this sort of friendship was the hermitage or, at most, a monastery where each monk joined the others in praising God. In this environment, the friendship that could develop between two men was frowned upon as it could cause envy, separation, cliques, and rivalries. In line with this interpretation, which established friendship as a monastic ideal, Biondo believed that only a saint could understand divine friendship.

However, Biondo was a secular priest; most of his followers lived in the world. For them, divine friendship remained an elusive concept, which, just as private revelations, was susceptible to deception and misunderstanding.⁹² In a letter concerning the trial of Giovanni Maria Capucci and his own *Ricordo*, Biondo begged his correspondent, Piero Augustino da

⁹⁰ On the notion of friendship in Renaissance and its social-political aspects, see KENT 2009 and the various papers in CLASSEN AND SANDIDGE 2010.

⁹¹ HYATTE 1994, p. 60. *Laude*, p. 222. On *amicitia* according to Christian authors, see also JAEGER 2010, where he examined the role of classical friendship (according to the definitions given by Cicero and Seneca) in Augustine and how Augustine moved away from it.

⁹² On this issue and its development, see PROSPERI 1996, pp. 431–464.

Fabiano, ‘to recommend to him true and not fake friends’.⁹³ To help Piero discern between them, Biondo added:

I will give you a sign so that you can avoid false friends: he who finds the book [Biondo’s *Ricordo*] reprehensible or wrong somewhere [...] is neither a true servant nor a friend of God or of truth. He is a true enemy of Christ and, therefore, not a true but a false friend, a true enemy of the truth that is God and of me, whom God and His revealed truth have made into their truthful minister.⁹⁴

Biondo considered himself and his work the mark of true friendship. He concluded the letter as follows:

According to the news that comes from there [Venice] and relying on God’s inspiration, I will write how and what will be permitted and inspired to me for God’s praise and glory, to which alone, if I am not mistaken, my heart obeys.⁹⁵

The purpose of juxtaposing these two excerpts, which follow each other in the letter, was to show the fragile relationship between faith and truth and how easily Biondo himself switched from firmness (*verace ministro*) to self-doubt (*se ingannato non sono*).

Finally, Biondo referred to his disciples as ‘friends of the truth’.⁹⁶ The phrase, which echoes John 15:15 and Ephesians 2:19, invites us to think of Biondo’s followers as a collection of individuals who agreed upon one definition of the truth. We seem very close to the Aristotelian idea of a group of like-minded individuals (*amicus alter ipse*).⁹⁷ However, what characterised Biondo’s community – and this was an aspect that the Camaldolese general Pietro Dolfino had already noticed when he examined Biondo’s conventicle – was the martyrial demand placed upon the person who connected with Biondo (and, through him, with Christ). Sin had turned humans away from God, but the terms *christiformiter* and *cruciformiter*, which Biondo used to describe his faith, showed that a level of likeness (Genesis 1:26) was possible.

⁹³ Add., fol. 196r: ‘Recomandatime a li amici li quali conoscesti esser veri et non ficti amici’.

⁹⁴ Ibid., fols 196v–197r: ‘Darovene un segno accioché da li ficti ve possiate guardare: a chi pare reprehensibile in alcuna sua parte o erroneo el libro [...] colui non è né vero servo né amico de Dio né de la verità ma vero inimico de Christo, et però como non vero ma ficto amico, così vero inimico de la verità che è Dio [John 14:6] et mio, el quale esso Dio et essa verità manifesta haver facto suo in sé et verace ministro.’

⁹⁵ Ibid., fol. 197r: ‘De poi, secondo li avisi de là et spiratione del Signore, scriverò como et quanto me serà concesso et spirato in laude et gloria de Dio; a la quale sola serve, se ingannato non sono, el centro del cor mio.’

⁹⁶ Ibid., fol. 189v: ‘Confortati anco Piero da Furli et la donna sua et tutti li amici de la verità.’

⁹⁷ On the Aristotelian notion of friendship, see COOPER 1980. On the fortune of the trope *amicus alter ipse*, see GRAYLING 2013, pp. 76–94.

As seen in Chapter 5.3, likeness (Genesis 1:26) was, however, entirely dependent on one's disrobing of passions and prejudices to allow for the entrance of grace.

6.2.2 The Universal Tree

Amicitia and *spogliamento*, both understood primarily as expressions of God's relationship with human beings, coupled with the rejection of the religious orders as an adequate avenue for Christian piety, led Biondo to privilege the direct relationship with God. God became the principle of social and familial bonds and, therefore, of every sort of human institution. In expressing his universalistic vision, Biondo did not refer to the usual biblical loci that promoted the universality of the *kerygmatic* mission (Matthew 28:19; John 20:21; already present in Genesis 9:8, with Noah, and 17:4, with Abraham). Unlike the humanists, he refrained from emphasising the universal image of God in man. On the contrary, as he explained to his nephew Paolo, he resorted to the motif of the universal tree:

Just as branches and offshoots draw the whole energy of the animating sap from the root, and those branches and shoots that are closer to the root carry the energy to the ones that are farther away, it is necessary that the true circle of the divine law – which reconciles itself with human beings through the bond of blood and in turn makes them obedient – goes back to its origin and starts again so as to persevere and last in the law which he once accepted and by which he is moved and brought back to the blood kin by way of the blood. And since this is how things are, this is the truest and most certain, especially in this law of the blood, which surpasses all other laws inherent in nature, not only in this bond of proximity and flesh, but also in any other natural one, because of the divine law which unites human beings and makes them dear to each other, and which is like nature or more than nature itself.⁹⁸

Biondo urged his nephew Paolo to direct his eyes towards God, the principle (*radix* and *principium*) from which creation received all its nourishment (*tota vis*).⁹⁹ The term 'kin'

⁹⁸ Mag., fol. 72bisr: 'Quemadmodum enim de radice vim totam vegetantis humoris rami ac palmites hauriunt, atque ut sunt proximiores illi, in remotiores transfundunt, ita necesse est, ut verus circulus divine legis que homines sanguine vinculo conciliat sibi obnoxiosque invicem statuit, ad suum principium rediens rursus ab illo incipiat, ut perseveret ac duret in ea quam acceperit lege et qua moveatur et feratur per sanguinis rationem in sanguine proximos. Quod cum ita sit, non solum in hac propinquitatis et carnis, sed in quacunquē alia naturali quopiam federe, homines iungente et mutuo ac vicissim caros inter se faciente lege, que divina est, eque aut magis quam nature ipsius, multo maxime in hac ipsa ceteras omnes nature insitas precellente sanguinis lege verissimum atque certissimum est'. On the imagery of the tree, M. KUNTZ AND P. KUNTZ 1987, pp. 319–334; for its use in Christianity, see LAPOSTOLLE 1991.

⁹⁹ Even though Biondo's image invites a comparison with the common biblical imagery of the vine and the vineyard, the stress on the root as the principle suggests that he was more influenced by Massa's prophecy, where the root is indeed given pre-eminence. While the biblical passages express both God's love and judgement towards

(*promixi*) no longer corresponded to social, political, or familial proximity (*propinquitatis et carnis*). All created beings were united in their continuous reference to God (*ad suum principium rediens*). According to Biondo, only when this principle was acknowledged could one marvel at how human beings who shared no apparent relationship found love for each other.¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, blood relations were overcome by hatred and anger.¹⁰¹

One element that is notably absent from this picture of the cosmic tree is the role of Jesus's suffering. Jacopone, who had used the image of the tree in his *Laude*, thought that there was an extrinsic tree, which had to be climbed if one wanted to ascend to God's Heaven, and an intrinsic tree, which God planted inside one's heart.¹⁰² Both trees could be connected to Jesus's cross. While Jacopone used the cross to link the inward movement, related to Jesus's dwelling in one's soul, and the ascending movement, Biondo, despite his recurrent emphasis on suffering, based his cosmic tree on what seems more a cosmic principle rather than the Christian Personal God. In doing so, he was closer to what some humanists were proposing at the time. For example, Aurelio Lippo Brandolini, already mentioned in Chapter 2.1.1, said:

all the branches sprouting from one trunk are neighbours and companions even if they are diffused and spread out in different directions, so all men are propagated from one parent and progenitor; even if they are separated in space, they are nevertheless held to be neighbours and relatives to each other'.¹⁰³

This inclusivist and theistic view, in which being a friend of God is not necessarily defined by accepting the Christian faith, would have to be corrected by an additional element (i.e. election), a topic investigated in Section 4.3 of this chapter.

Israel and the people of the covenant (Isaiah 5:1–7; Psalm 80; Jeremiah 2:21, 8:13; Micah 1:6; Matthew 20:1–16, 21:33–45; Revelation 14:18–20), Biondo aims for an organic structure which unites the creation to a single creative principle (i.e. God). In particular, he did not seem to look at John 15:5, where the identity between the vine and Jesus is asserted. On this image, see RYKEN, WILHOIT, AND LONGMAN 1998, pp. 914–917.

¹⁰⁰ Mag., fol. 72bisv: 'Quot vero econtra, remotissima qualibet nature lege in Deum reducta, vel cives suos vel vicinos et necessarios, vel tantum homines mundi de quolibet climate, constantissime tamen usque ad mortem dilexissent videmus; vel certe audivimus nulla iniuria fractos, nullisque periculis immutatos'.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.: 'Quot enim parentes et fratres quotidie cernimus, contra hanc divinam naturalis amicitie legem, odisse, persequi ac necare quos diligere, fovere atque alere debuerant, quia non essent perfecto circulo eiusdem legis in principium illius reversi mente ac fide, ut propter Deum tantum diligerent non propter se ipsos quos Deus illis dedisset, etiam inamabiles et ingratos, propter ipsum tamen sic se ingratos magis, magisque amari indignos sponte sola ac propria tantum bonitate amantem, amandos'.

¹⁰² *Laude*, pp. 158–162, 204–207.

¹⁰³ In TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 309–310.

6.2.3 Awe and Mystery

The connection between *spogliamento* and friendship resulted in ‘awe for God’ (*timor Dei*), the ‘illuminating discovery’ that God was infinitely superior to any created being. Awe could be linked to the philosophical ‘marvel’ (*thaumazein*), which Plato and Aristotle recognised as the beginning of the philosophical inquiry.¹⁰⁴ An intriguing similarity between *timor* and marvel is that, in both cases, human beings were placed in a condition of collegiality and equality. It was as if, either before God or what is philosophically unknown, contingent differences became secondary. As Socrates pointed out to Meno: ‘I have no idea what virtue is, whilst you, though perhaps you may have known before you came in touch with me, are now as good as ignorant of it also. But none the less I am willing to join you in examining it’.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Biondo maintained that everyone was fundamentally blinded by the disconcerting light of the unknown (see his phrase *ciechi luminosi*).

Although both awe and marvel indicated an analogous surprise before the unknown, a substantial difference should be assumed. While philosophical wonder tried to explain away what was initially surprising, *timor Dei* coexisted with the divine mystery. The consequences, in ecclesiastical terms, were that the Church could be spoken of as the result of wonder and friendship but (1) only if *spogliamento* and total human dependence on God were not forgotten and (2) if dialogue ended with prayers and praises of God, for awe was ascribed to God and not to one’s intellectual capabilities.

6.2.4 Reciprocity

The communality that underpinned *amicitia*, awe, and the universal tree could also be found in Biondo’s views on original sin. In his account of the Fall, vice had been ‘breathed and infused’ by the snake (*ab eo*), and for this reason, ‘Eve and Adam’ were the first (*primum*) to fall. The conjunction ‘and’ connected breathing to infusion and, therefore, Eve to Adam. They shared in the common fall.

Unlike the misogynist views that blamed Eve for the Fall, Biondo was not preoccupied with discovering who was more guilty but with avoiding their mistake.¹⁰⁶ At a fundamental level, Biondo’s words hinted at a state of reciprocity that connected Adam to Eve and vice versa.¹⁰⁷ In other words, Eve was already corrupted by sin before the snake approached her:

¹⁰⁴ PLATO 1921, pp. 54–55 (*Theaetetus*, 155d); ARISTOTLE 1933–1935, p. 12 (*Metaphysics*, I, 982b).

¹⁰⁵ PLATO 1952, pp. 298–299 (*Meno*, 80d).

¹⁰⁶ On the status of Renaissance women, see MACLEAN 1980.

¹⁰⁷ On this reading of Genesis, see also AQUIN O’NEILL 1993.

Adam's absence had already caused her fall from grace. Like Thomas Aquinas's concept of 'social union' based on mutual help and deliverance, Biondo's reading of the Fall indicated that men and women were inextricably intertwined in perdition *and* salvation.¹⁰⁸ If we delve further into this communitarian aspect, we can also interpret God's question (Genesis 3:9: 'Where art thou?') as a question about human shame and companionship: Why are you not with me anymore?

In addition, this dimension of commonality and reciprocity affected the search for divine truth and the study of doctrine. In a letter to Giovan Battista Bartoli, Biondo referred to his female disciples as 'disciples *or* teachers'.¹⁰⁹ This address was not uncommon; spiritual writers used it to signify respect and admiration toward female nuns. Nevertheless, what is important is that Biondo was willing to learn from his disciples not because they possessed some unique insight into the Scriptures but because of their *spogliamento*. The mutual dialogue between Biondo and his friends was not based on the hierarchy associated with knowledge (from this point of view, Biondo could easily assert a position of authority and dominance) but depended on their reciprocal differences and on the mysterious God who nonetheless remained the universal principle (*radix*).¹¹⁰ The centrality of God in Christian mutual *amicitia* must be stressed, for Biondo and his friends were and remained *veri amici* and not *ficti*, as long as they shared an equal passion for the same God.¹¹¹ Unlike Cicero, who defined friendship as 'the accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection', for Biondo, reciprocity and friendship pertained exclusively to the divine.¹¹²

A final aspect must be highlighted. This reciprocal communication between Biondo and his followers happened mostly in the vernacular. From this point of view, Biondo's preference for the vernacular confirms not only that he viewed this language as an adequate means of religious and philosophical communication but also that he wished to be on an equal footing in respect to God.¹¹³ As stressed by Dionisotti and Firpo, the use of the vernacular became increasingly problematic the more it was associated with dissenting ideas and the

¹⁰⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 92, a. 3: 'inter virum et mulierem debet esse socialis coniunctio'.

¹⁰⁹ Add., fol. 185v: 'le mie discipule o maestre'. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ On this last point, see the excellent article by PICKSTOCK (2021), who showed how, for Plato, friendship did not deny differences or hierarchies but, on the contrary, it relied on them, for both sides (the lower and the higher) learnt from each other.

¹¹¹ On this point, see JAEGER 2010.

¹¹² CICERO 1923, p. 130–131 (*De amicitia*, vi, 20–22).

¹¹³ DIONISOTTI 1967, pp. 47–73 and 102–144; FIRPO 2003, p. 8 and the article at pp. 121–140.

suppression of clerical mediation.¹¹⁴ Firpo noted that, while some clerics accepted the challenge implicit in the use of the vernacular, others rejected any interference of lay people in theological disputes.¹¹⁵ In Biondo's time, however (between the end of the Quattrocento up to the first decade of the Cinquecento), the vernacular was not yet outright condemned. This relative freedom allowed Biondo to use the vernacular as the perfect means to respond to the pastoral needs of his followers. The condemnation of the vernacular *Ricordo* and Giovanni Capucci's fervent proselytising might indicate that the situation was rapidly evolving. Zarri connected this change in attitude towards lay piety to the increasing suspicion with which the *sante vive* (and, in general, any form of female devotion) were being treated.¹¹⁶

6.3 The Adoption

For Biondo, the Church was a society of friends, unique and different from each other, founded on the insurmountable difference between God and humankind; its realisation, 'the New Jerusalem', was entirely eschatological.¹¹⁷ The inhabitants of that city would be the adopted children of God (Ephesians 1:5).¹¹⁸

Adoption was routinely discussed in connection with the mystery of the resurrected body.¹¹⁹ Even though it was undeniable that the *novissimi* (death, judgement, Heaven, and Hell) remained beyond human beings' intellectual capabilities, Nicholas of Osimo, who relied on Romans 1:20, claimed that it was possible to urge men and women to yearn for their salvation.¹²⁰ His focus was specifically on the features that characterised the New Jerusalem, the adornments that decorated it, its inhabitants, and finally, the joys they would experience. Even though Biondo wrote a text about the joys of the blessed, he was persuaded that resurrection remained an inexplicable mystery.¹²¹ Adoption, on the other hand, was liable to be experienced in this life and, consequently, was open to investigation. As usual, Biondo did not write a treatise on the topic, but he used his personal experience and biblical imagery to

¹¹⁴ This issue had already surface with the rise of the twelfth century religious movements. See CHENU 1966, pp. 225–273.

¹¹⁵ FIRPO 2003, p. 136.

¹¹⁶ ZARRI 1990, pp. 165–196.

¹¹⁷ Revelation 21:2.

¹¹⁸ See also Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 4:4–7; Ephesians 1:5. See also Romans 9:4 where adoption is referred to Israel.

¹¹⁹ On the different views, see HARRISON 1990; BYNUM 1995, pp. 94–104; COAKLEY 2002, pp. 153–167.

¹²⁰ NICHOLAS OF OSIMO 1494, sig. 189.

¹²¹ Mag., fol. 13r: 'De sua viciorum resurrectione in celum spei attolentis [...] Nolo me super his extendere, quoniam propemodum ineffabilia fient, et vere digna his que secuntur hic proxime pro ultima et felici omnium clausula et periodo totius vie nostre.'

express what he understood by becoming children of God. In the letter to his nephew Paolo, we find the following passage:

Having decided that I was in debt only to God, I persevered; for, what I owed to my brother [Francesco Biondo], I owed it because of the will of God. Because of God's grace, [having decided to be] a father or a mother rather than a brother – a father who is not ordinary but exceptional and singular and a mother of the rarest piety – I am continuously in labour and never give birth to him [Francesco Biondo], all this owing to a way of being pregnant that for the mind and the body is long, harsh, and painful beyond belief and understanding.¹²²

Francesco Biondo was brought into renewed existence primarily because God so wished, but also because Gabriele, like Saint Paul (Galatians 4:19), suffered for him continuously the labour pains (*diuturnum genus parturiendi*, see Romans 8:22). Unlike self-lovers, who were 'pregnant with various winds and children' but never gave birth 'despite the labour pains', Gabriele gave birth to Francesco.¹²³ Significantly, Gabriele did not help Francesco deliver himself – an event that might occur if Gabriele were a master of the Socratic art of midwifery – but he became the spiritual mother and father of Francesco.¹²⁴ Consequently, Francesco's salvation was the spiritual fruit of Gabriele's brotherly love, and in entering into a new life in Christ, Francesco was also entering a new family, which significantly had nothing to do with being a cleric or a member of a religious order.

For Biondo, adoption was both an eschatological and historical event. The image of the adoption, therefore, shared similarities with the idea of God's kingdom, which was generally understood both as a present and future reality.¹²⁵ Biondo said his brother Francesco was never fully born (*parturiens eum nec dum pariens*). However, in the Sevillian manuscript, a different view was proposed. Here we find a poem by Giannozzo Sacchetti, who said: 'love is what

¹²² Mag., fols 85v–86r: 'Perseveravi tamen soli deo debere me arbitratus, quod in eo fratri debebam cuius voluntate debebam, ipsius etiam solius gratia prefati fratris patrem potius aut matrem, quam fratrem, patremque, non vulgaris sed precipui et singularis affectus, matremque pietatis rarissime, parturiens eum nec dum pariens, diuturno ac duro atque afflictivo supra fidem atque intellectum, parturiendi mentis et corporis genere.'

¹²³ Add., fols 72v–73r: 'gonfiono et ingravidano de varii venti et figlioli, de li quali li venti mai lasciano quietare da varii desiderii, li figlioli mai finiscono de essere con dolore parturiendo non parturiti'.

¹²⁴ On Socratic midwifery, see BURNYEAT 2012; FALLER 2015.

¹²⁵ Luke 17:21; Matthew 12:28; Mark 2:19. On the dual nature of the kingdom, see KÜMMEL 1957.

gives life'.¹²⁶ Earlier, he asked: 'who would go back to death / if they could stay alive?'¹²⁷ Biondo commented:

He who savours Christ's divine person becomes God's child. The reason is that Christ is the joy and the beloved by the Father, who is love. The Holy Spirit is the love between Father and Son and proceeds from both the Father and the Son. If the Father did not love to have the joy of the Son, he would not have the corresponding joy of the Holy Spirit. The Father would be without his beloved and love. He would be miserable and no longer God. He who has savoured Christ does not go back, but he is constantly helped and generated to savour this momentary or continuous grace. 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee'.¹²⁸

In his note, Biondo connected the Trinitarian love to the unfathomable mystery of adoption. Adoption coincided with knowledge of Christ, but it was not an abstract achievement. Indeed, the Psalmist's words quoted at the end must be taken as seriously as the *Abba* Jesus used when addressing God as his Father, for they expressed God's love.¹²⁹

Biondo's letter to Paolo is illuminating for connecting adoption and love. When Biondo said to Paolo that 'all whom the Father loves are found in the Son, they live with Him as His lovers and true friends, and they have their existence in Him', he spoke of adoption in the present tense.¹³⁰ God's friends were both the elect of the afterlife and the living saints who 'by antonomasia are the children and the fruit of the womb, that is, of the man Christ'.¹³¹

At the end of *De amore proprio*, we find Biondo's final word on love. Biondo saw that God had become his substance, justice, truth, and love, yet he also felt compelled to share his experience.¹³² When Biondo fulfilled the *kerygmatic* mission, he lived 'as God likes'; he was

¹²⁶ Sev., fol. 96v: 'L'amor è quel che viva'.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 'Chi tornerebe a morte / in vita star possendo?'

¹²⁸ Ibid.: "'I'amore è quel che viva": a chi è dato el gusto de la divina persona de Christo, è facto figliolo de Dio. Et perché Christo è el dilecto et amato del Padre, che è amore, et lo Spirito Sancto è lo amore del Padre et del Figliolo, et procede dal Figliolo como dal Padre, se el Padre non havesse el dilecto che è el Figliolo, non haveria el condilecto che è lo Spirito sancto, et seria senza el suo amato et amore, et cossi misero et non Dio. Cossi non torna più indrieto chi viene a questo gusto, ma aiutato sempre et generato per lo gusto de la momentanea gratia o de continuo. "Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te" (Psalm 2:7)'.
¹²⁹ JEREMIAS 1965, pp. 9–30. See also D'ANGELO 2005, for a more critical reading of the *Abba*. We could obtain a clearer view of Biondo's understanding of Jesus's *Abba* if we had his commentary on the Lord's Prayer mentioned in For., fol. 24r.

¹³⁰ Mag., fol. 85r: 'omnes ita a Patre dilecti reperiuntur in Filio ut eque illius amantes et amici veri et cum ipso existant et in ipso subsistant'.

¹³¹ Ibid., fol. 75v: 'sancti [...] quia sunt antonomasice filii et merces fructus ventris, hoc est Christi hominis'.

¹³² Add., fol. 156r–v: 'lui è sentito esser la mia substantia [...] lui è sentito essere la mia iustitia voluntaria [...] ello è inteso esser la mia verità activa [...] ello è sentito essere la mia carità activa.'

brought with God ‘towards all the created beings’; he saw himself as ‘filled by God and the creation’, ‘not as a future thing, but as a present one, no longer a desire, but a joy’.¹³³

For Biondo, spiritual direction and adoption existed when the centripetal movement that compressed God’s love within the individual (*spogliamento* and suffering occurred here) was tied to the centrifugal movement that propelled the individual into the world. These two phases defined the Church as an entity born out of God’s love. Exegesis, spiritual direction, and love oriented the disciples and the director, the learned and the *idiota*, towards each other in the mutual embrace of thankfulness (*eucharistia*), which pertained to God’s equal yet distinct children.

For this reason, the Church envisaged by Biondo was a place characterised by singing and dancing. God was the player whose art was ‘incomprehensible and invaluable’ and could not be subsumed ‘under any human wisdom, of any measure or proportion’.¹³⁴ God’s symphony united what was ‘near and consonant’ with what was ‘dissonant and disproportionate’.¹³⁵ In Biondo’s eyes, everyone was included in God’s plan.¹³⁶ Church members were ‘true psalms, through the intelligible harmony of the Spirit, resonating in its sense and body’ as they listened ‘with the ecstatic attention of their faithful, elevated, and deified hearing’.¹³⁷ Men and women became living Scripture: ‘The fleeting touch of the divine Voice causes a unique motion in the good’.¹³⁸ This *voce* (Word, *verbum*, *logos*) was ‘Jesus who is the true melody, symphony, harmony, art, and divine wisdom’.¹³⁹ Biondo’s proclamation and spiritual direction can be summed up in this simple injunction: ‘let yourselves be guided’ by God’s music.¹⁴⁰

In this section, I analysed the principles guiding Biondo’s spiritual direction. From a doctrinal point of view, nothing extremely original surfaced. This search for originality, however, would be misleading. What makes Biondo’s proposition interesting is how the

¹³³ Ibid.: ‘così come a lui piace senza me per lui portato in lui et con lui a tutte le creature, le quale in sé ha congiunte a me, vivo sicuro de ogni mio da lui formato solo da me amato et voluto desiderio, già veduto impito in lui et in loro, non como cosa futura ma presente, et così non desiderio ma dilecto’.

¹³⁴ Ibid., fol. 193r: ‘el nostro sonatore ha arte incomprendibile et inextimabile et però non cade sotto alcuna de qualunque grandezza et proportione, sapientia humana’.

¹³⁵ Ibid.: ‘la sua simphonia ha concerto et armonia non solo da le voce propinque et consone ma etiam da le sommamente dissoni et disproportionate’.

¹³⁶ Ibid.: ‘la proportione de le voce congiungendo l’uno extremo con l’altro nelli suoi meggi centrici cioè consoni et dissoni, diversi et alteri in molti modi’.

¹³⁷ Ibid.: ‘como veri psalmi, per intelligibile de Spirito nel senso et corpo redundante armonia [...] nella attentione extatica del fidele, sublimato et deificato audito.’

¹³⁸ Ibid.: ‘Il tocco del quale momentaneo de la divina voce causa moto unico nel bene’.

¹³⁹ Ibid., fol. 193v: ‘Christo vera melodia, symphonia, armonie, et arte, et sapientia divina.’

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.: ‘lasciatevi guidare’. See *Laude*, p. 219: ‘te lassa trare’.

affective language and familiar imagery were used to communicate, in a passionate attempt, the interior experience of faith. Biondo did not write a treatise on the Church nor on poverty or a commentary on the Song of Songs. To shape his idea of the Church, he preferred letters and poems in which he spoke about his own suffering and attempted to voice his private concerns. To do so, he used notions such as friendship, divine awe, mystery, cosmic communion, mutual embrace, prayer, music, Fatherhood, and Sonship. Everyone could relate to and understand these themes.

6.4 God's Election

According to Biondo, mutual friendship was needed to ward off the catastrophic solitude inherent in self-love. The result was their adoption through Christ and his cross (*christiformiter* and *cruciformiter*). Furthermore, despite all its faults and misgivings, the Church and its members were, like the cross, eschatologically oriented towards God's kingdom while becoming the present realisation of Christ's love. Here, we have a comforting picture of Biondo's community (at least in ideal terms). Is this the full picture? Not at all. As I indicated in the beginning of this chapter, I aim to show Biondo's *due chiese*, one that was interior and where friendship, reciprocity, and love ruled, and the exterior that connected election, separation, and justice. We now have to look at the *extra ecclesiam* – understood as what lay beyond the confines of Biondo's conventicle – and assess how willing he was to embrace those who did not necessarily agree with him. In Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter, we saw the presence of some disturbing elements: the criticism of vocation, the idea of *volo* (i.e. a total rejection of the world), and the idea that some discernment was needed to distinguish between true and false friends. What underpinned these three elements was election: election (in the form of inspiration) made vocation null; election (as complete obedience to God's will) apparently demanded vertical elevation (*volo*); and election, finally, was the only means of distinguishing true from false friends, that is, the elect from the *presciti*.

Let us look at the following passage:

Why can nobody, relying on the ordinary law, know whether they are worthy of love or hatred? My answer is that nobody perfectly knows whether they love God or themselves. *If one could surely know if they love God, they also would know that God loves them* because God said, 'I love those who love Me', and those whom God loves,

He makes them worthy of His love. After all, God's love is nothing but His dignifying election.¹⁴¹

Biondo's argument was built on a simple equation: man's love for God corresponded to God's love for man and since one could never know if one truly loved God, it followed that God's love became an unknown quantity. In Biondo's eyes, faith in God's love became entangled with human knowledge; given the apophatic principles that ruled Biondo's epistemology, the superabundance of God's love shown in Christ's sacrifice on the cross was *de facto* curtailed. As Biondo clearly said, God's love was nothing but his *dignativa electio*. A series of questions instantly arise: How did God decide? Whom would He elect? Who would be excluded? More importantly, for the purpose of this examination of God's love, did Biondo not impose a limit on God's self-diffusive love and, involuntarily, on Jesus as the *mysterium salutis*?¹⁴²

Answering these questions requires a review of the *extra ecclesiam* and what it meant for Biondo. I will start by examining whom Biondo considered to be the audience of a prophet. I then examine the biblical idea of the remnant and how Biondo applied it. Next, I investigate the connection between the idea of the remnant and the notion of predestination. Finally, I explore how these concepts – remnant and predestination – influenced Biondo's understanding of the Church and answer the essential questions of this study: How did Biondo combine the idea that God is love with God's will? Was the explosive nature of love pre-emptively withheld from some whom God did not elect? Did divine self-communication speak only to some while it remained mute to others?

6.4.1 Universal *Kerygma* and the 'Gracious Exception'

To whom did Biondo speak? A partial answer to this question was already given in Chapter 2, where I provided an account of Biondo's life and his movements and highlighted how he tried to reach his audience in different ways. In Section 2 of this chapter, I also examined the principles of Biondo's spiritual direction, which directly shaped his communication. We need now to see how Biondo selected his public. To do so, I will look at two exegetical pieces.

¹⁴¹ Mag., fols 39v–40r: 'Que est ratio quod nemo scire potest ex comuni lege utrum odio dignus sit an amore? Respondeo quia nemo scire potest perfecte an Deum diligat vel se ipsum. Si enim quis posset scire certe an diligeret Deum vere, hic profecto etiam sciret quod a Deo diligeretur, quia "ipse dixit ego diligentes me diligo" [Proverbs 8:17], et ipse quos diligat dignos facit sua dilectione, nam ipsius dilectio non est aliud quam dignativa electio.' Emphasis added.

¹⁴² MARIUS VICTORINUS 1844–1865, col. 1076C: 'hic enim mysterium salutis nostrae egit, hic nos liberos fecit, redemit: in istum credimus secundum crucem, et juxta resurrectionem a mortuis Salvatorem nostrum'.

Before continuing, the tacit implication is that Biondo's position was supported by the unassailable authority of the Scriptures; that is, his discussion of prophets and biblical events indicated how he understood his role as an inspired and charismatic speaker on God's behalf.

6.4.1.1 *Two Exegetical Pieces*

The first piece comes from Biondo's commentary on 2 Maccabees 1:19–36 and 2:1–18.¹⁴³ The biblical author narrated how the Jews were deported to Persia and forced to leave behind the holy fire. After their return, they discovered that a flammable liquid had replaced the fire: Nehemiah, the Jewish leader, thanked God with a prayer and a sacrifice. Finally, the Persian king allowed the Jews to build a second temple. Like many medieval exegetes who based their methodology on 1 Corinthians 10:11, Biondo appropriated the passage from the OT and applied it allegorically to the Church. For Biondo, the events narrated the journey of one's mind from tribulations to salvation: the Jews represented one's thoughts; deportation equalled suffering; the fire was false and exterior piety; the flammable liquid resembled divine grace; the sacrifice echoed purification; and the temple's reconstruction resembled reformation in Christ. What interests us is Biondo's words about 2 Maccabees 1:27 and 29. These lines were part of Nehemiah's prayers.

In the first line, Nehemiah asked God to gather the dispersed people of Israel.¹⁴⁴ According to Biondo's interpretation, dispersion referred to the multitude of thoughts that occupied one's mind; therefore, collection meant focusing on God, the 'highest good and intelligible' being (as indicated in Chapter 5.3, this was a common injunction for those who wanted to practice meditation).¹⁴⁵ In the second line, Nehemiah asked God to collect His people in His sacred place.¹⁴⁶ According to Biondo's staurological piety, the people of God symbolised the thoughts of Christ's cross, the symbolic place where 'the upright people of God' could be 'united'.¹⁴⁷

The second text is a short commentary on Isaiah 6:5–8.¹⁴⁸ In these lines, it was said that Isaiah had become mute. The reason was threefold: impurity, living with sinful people, and

¹⁴³ Mag., fols 1r–17v. This commentary is Biondo's best example of exegesis. It perfectly unites his theological views with the biblical sources. It is my intention to prepare a critical edition of it.

¹⁴⁴ 2 Maccabees 1:27: 'Congrega dispersionem nostram'.

¹⁴⁵ Mag., fol. 10r–v: 'Petit enim unionem potentiarum, collectionem phantasmatum, privationem multipliciter affectuum intelligibilium et diligibilium, et fixationem in unum summum intelligibile ac diligibile.'

¹⁴⁶ 2 Maccabees 1:29: 'Constituere populum tuum in loco sancto tuo, sicut dixit Moyses.'

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., fol. 13v: 'In centro igitur cordis Iesu pro nobis morientis locari voluit unitum simul hunc Dei populum rectum.'

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix, 12.

because his actions did not match his preaching.¹⁴⁹ What matters here is that Isaiah was ‘unclean’ because he lived amongst sinners:

*He dwelled in the midst of a people of unclean lips [...] and yet he should have not, because his eyes had seen the Lord of Israel, and as the uncleanliness of his life and words grew, it became appropriate for him not only to be separated from dangerous intercourse with other human beings but also to gradually rise above all creatures with the highest purity and also with compassion.*¹⁵⁰

Like the previous text, Biondo also suggested a close connection amongst election (belonging to God), separation, and elevation. However, it also suggests that the prophets were affected by the quality of the audience. If the latter were not of a certain standard, then the prophets or the preachers could lose their ability to speak. Instead of converting them, the prophets acquired the features of their audience. In order to preserve his purity, Isaiah had to elevate himself above the sinful rabble.

These two commentaries show that giving moral advice was a major theme throughout Biondo’s writing (specifically, promoting personal ascent). However, these injunctions were valid both for the public *and* for the prophet (i.e. the preacher). Now, since the prophet also had to follow the way of solitude and meditation, elements meant to function primarily in the public domain (i.e. the prophet) lost their ecclesiastical aspect and came to signify the antinomy between the elect and the ‘mass of sin’ (*massa peccati*).¹⁵¹ While the first movement (i.e. collection into the self through a kenotic process) was preserved, outward expansion was absent or fiercely shunned.

These two opposing processes reflected the hermeneutical approaches to the Scriptures that, according to Henri de Lubac, characterised medieval exegesis: in the first model, one started from the literal level, moved to allegory, and ended with moral meaning; in the second, the last two meanings were inverted. Furthermore, in this second type of scriptural interpretation, special emphasis was given to the anagogical ascent. Leaving aside de Lubac’s

¹⁴⁹ Mag., fols 48v–49r: ‘de propria immundicia, de participatione aliene, et de silentio, quisquis enim male vivit facto tacet virtutes contrarias peccatis que agit, et loquitur vicia in quibus vivit, etiam si verbo aliud faciat’.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., fol. 49v: ‘*Habitavit autem iste in medio populi polluta labia habentis* [...] cum tamen esse non debuerat, quia *Dominum Israel viderit oculis suis*, quia eo damnabilior eius impuritas vite et sermonis fuit, quo magis eum decuit non solum esse a ceteris vite conversatione lubrica segregatum, sed summa puritate lenem superferri omnibus creatis etiam affectu oportuit’.

¹⁵¹ *Massa peccati* is a recurring Augustinian phrase. See, for instance, AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XL, col. 71 (*Div. quaest.*, LXVIII, 3): ‘in paradiso natura nostra peccavit [...] et omnes una massa luti facti sumus, quod est massa peccati’.

apologetic considerations concerning which of these two approaches better reflected the Christian faith, it is worth noting that, according to de Lubac, the second approach (which placed spiritual and interior ascent above ethics) characterised the religious experience of mystics. In this context, the evangelising mission towards the other (especially the sinner) was denied (or, at least, entirely subsidiary) because divine election aimed, primarily, to separate the elect from the mass and lead him or her to mystical ascent. The elect's self-preservation superseded the expansion movement.

To understand the core of the issue, let us look at the methodology Biondo adopted for his *Sermo de igne sacro*. According to the standard hermeneutics, medieval exegetes interpreted the biblical events to deduce the principles applicable to the Church as a whole (*ecclesia universalis*). Biondo, however, focused solely on the *ecclesia particularis*, that is, on the single individuals who were 'called (*vocati*) to their ascent'.¹⁵² We must now inquire into the consequences of Biondo's premise (a Church analysis focused exclusively on the singular perspective).

Saint Paul regarded his efforts as entirely directed toward the salvation of others.¹⁵³ The Church Fathers expressed a similar universal approach by using the opposing categories of perfection and imperfection. Since they assumed different levels and gradations of imperfection, nobody was entitled to be called perfect, but everybody was *in via*, on their way towards the Kingdom of God. Delumeau stressed how the notion of the *contemptus mundi* did not necessarily give rise to complacency. In fact, *contemptus* was often expressed in terms of personal shame.¹⁵⁴ This approach preserved cosmic beauty and placed responsibility on the individual. As seen in Chapter 6.2, this kind of position survived in the domain of spiritual direction in the form of 'spiritual friendship' and was adopted by Biondo.¹⁵⁵ The directors invited the disciples to assess their sinful condition and surrender, but significantly, they talked from within this existence of shame: before accusing the world, they lamented, first and foremost, their own shameful sinfulness.

Two points need to be considered. For the Fathers, the Church's limits were nebulous. Biondo and other Christian writers agreed, as their constant criticism of exterior piety and the widespread hypocrisy of the clergy shows.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Fathers' preoccupation with a

¹⁵² Mag., fol. 2r: 'cuiusque ad hanc elevationem vocati correspondentem'.

¹⁵³ Colossians 1:28–29.

¹⁵⁴ DELUMEAU 1990, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ ZARRI 2004, p. 78.

¹⁵⁶ See, for instance, *Laude* pp. 30–31, 59–60, 64.

clear Church was superseded by the conviction that the Church was expanding. The Church's history was nothing but the temporal realisation of God's will for universal salvation (1 Timothy 2:4). The second point is that, because of the Church's uninterrupted expansion, it was not clear who would be classified as a beginner. Were sinners, pagans, apostates, heresiarchs, and agnostics beginners, or were they excluded? If the Church were growing, would it not reach them eventually? Unless one purposefully refuted the Apostle's argument, Chapter 8 of Romans, concerning predestination, could not be separated from Chapter 11, which spoke of the eventual inclusion of Israel so that God could rightfully be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28).

While Augustine wrote fiercely against the Donatists' idea of a 'pure Church' and emphasised its mixed nature, Biondo took refuge in the individuals who had been called and taken out of the mass of perdition. He maintained that what happened in the Church at large also occurred within the individual. Suppose we accept this nominalistic approach (which stresses the importance of the existing individual as the only possibility of existence). In that case, however, it is not immediately evident how one can separate the individual from the Church and still maintain that one is speaking of the Church while focusing on a single individual.

To put it differently, can we still refer to a single individual as an *anima ecclesiastica* – a man or a woman who preserves both his or her inward and outward tendencies – once they have been severed from the *ecclesia universalis*?¹⁵⁷

The position Biondo adopted in these commentaries can be summarised by the term *volo* (see Section 1.3 above), which, according to Delumeau, reflected 'a woeful vision of life' and stemmed from a radical interpretation of the *contemptus mundi*.¹⁵⁸ Biondo's decision not to move from the singular to the universal perspective was not inconsequential for the sense of the Church. If Jesus said: 'for if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them' (Luke 6:32), and if Saint Francis accepted this commandment and went amongst the lepers, Biondo, on the other hand, identified himself with a purified prophet who lived in a higher place of a sort (the 'upper room' of Acts 1:13).

¹⁵⁷ *Anima ecclesiastica* (ecclesiastical human being) is a phrase by Origen (*Cant. Canticorum*, I homily). I borrow it as it succinctly expresses what characterised Biondo's proposition, not to suggest that he read Origen.

¹⁵⁸ DELUMEAU 1990, p. 17.

Further, he no longer spoke in a plurality of tongues (Acts 2:4), as he had tried to with the use of different genres and with the vernacular in order to convey the salvation brought by Christ to the largest possible audience. Instead, he advised leaving the *people with unclean lips* behind. Significantly, this elitist position (marked by the use of Latin) reached Biondo through his beloved authors, Jacopone and Clareno, for both, to different degrees, advocated a radical separation from the world. This *volo* (to use a term dear to Biondo) would have saved them from the dangers, the excessive suffering, the mundane, and the lacklustre but also isolated them from the sinners and the despised they were meant to protect.

6.4.1.2 *The Biblical Remnant*

Following the restriction of the *kerygma* to an audience ready to welcome Biondo's message, the idea of the remnant, that is, of a closely knit community that expressed God's will, grew central.¹⁵⁹ The idea of the remnant is present throughout the Bible. As Adriano Prosperi noted, the idea of the remnant also characterised the activities of the congregations. Some congregations developed an internal division between members who aimed to spiritual perfection and others who devoted themselves to charitable works.¹⁶⁰ In doing so, the lay movements resuscitated the division of roles and *ordines* they first tried to demolish.

Biondo used the idea of the remnant to criticise the visible Church and exterior piety. He affirmed that the elect were 'very few' and represented a 'gracious exception'.¹⁶¹ Even though they were gifted with grace, the elect were not immune from sinning.¹⁶² Unlike the Pelagians (to use the label devised by Prosperi and Ginzburg), Biondo recognised the primacy of God's forgiveness but also denied impeccability.¹⁶³ Significantly, while Lucifer was eternally excluded from God's leniency, those 'similar to him' were free to dissociate themselves from his influence thanks to God's grace.¹⁶⁴ The majority of human beings belonged to an 'erring crowd', which ran 'towards the abyss' and the 'land of forgetfulness',

¹⁵⁹ On the notion of the remnant, see VOGELS 2018.

¹⁶⁰ PROSPERI 1996, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ Mag., fol. 94r: 'pochissimi [...] un piccolo numero de electi'; Add., fol. 66v: 'gratioza [...] exceptione'.

¹⁶² Add., fol. 73r: 'cader lasciati sono a fine de essere ricolti'.

¹⁶³ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 57.

¹⁶⁴ Add., fols 132v–133r: 'lui pazzamente maligno pentire non se po', né pentirà mai perché non harà da Dio tale gratia, cosi questi tali a lui simili non se pentiranno mai, se per divina extraordinaria, cioè sopra ogni comune lege usata, in loro misericordia Dio non li mutarà con la sua assoluta potentia'.

affected by ‘universal blindness’.¹⁶⁵ This multitude was ‘holy in the world’s eyes but actually reprobate’.¹⁶⁶

The idea of the remnant re-emerged in connection with James of Massa’s prophecy, and here Biondo developed the second meaning associated with the remnant, its fecundity. As seen in Chapter 6.1.2, Biondo understood the prophecy as an allegory for the Franciscan Order’s history. The prophecy spoke of two trees: the present tree, which would eventually be torn down, and the future golden tree. On the first tree (the present Church), one could witness the presence of a ‘few leaves’; they were ‘little and hidden’.¹⁶⁷ These leaves indicated the remnant. Owing to the secret nature of grace, they were unknown both to the world and themselves. On the second tree, however, the leaves would emerge. Since ‘God wants the salvation of all’, the tree would include the whole of creation, even the obstinate Israel (see Romans 11).¹⁶⁸ Biondo indicated the same universal hope in another text. Here he said that God’s ‘act of mercy, although possible in all, will take place only in a few people’. He also added that, while the majority of human beings were a ‘miserable lot’, which ‘as a group (*in genere*) must rightfully be considered to be almost completely incapable of salvation’, nonetheless, ‘as individuals (*in particolare*), salvation for each of them must be hoped, at least at the end’.¹⁶⁹ Significantly, Biondo did not speak of the certitude of salvation as advocated by Benedetto da Mantova in the *Beneficio di Cristo*, by Tullio Crispoldi in *Alcune ragioni del perdonare*, or by the many mentioned by Seidel Menchi, whose names are only preserved in Inquisitorial records.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, to preserve God’s preeminent freedom, Biondo maintained that one had to hope for the salvation of all.

Following Massa’s prophecy, Biondo placed an unbridgeable gap between the first and the second tree that could not be covered historically without the second tree (the reformed Church) falling back inevitably into false piety. The dormant green buds (Christ’s remnant) would sprout on the golden tree exclusively after history. The militant Church could never be identified with the golden tree. For Biondo, the Church corresponded to the heavenly city (Revelation 21:2). Here, it is also possible to note a point of departure between Biondo and the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., fol. 103r: ‘la multitude de li erranti’. See also ibid., fol. 140r: ‘corre nel profondo de l’abyssso’; Mag., fol. 94r: ‘cecità universale’. Psalm 87 (88):13: ‘terra oblivionis’.

¹⁶⁶ Add., fol. 137r: ‘santa agli occhi del mondo ma reprobata’.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., fol. 203r: ‘poche et piccoline et occulte foglie’.

¹⁶⁸ For., fol. 27r: ‘Dio, che vole la salute de tucti’.

¹⁶⁹ Add., fol. 66r: ‘per tanto in pochi et da pochi serà nel suo acto tale misericordia benché in tutti sia in potentia. [...] questa misera sorte de homini è da essere in genere tenuta meritatamente quasi in tutto incapace de salute, benché in particolare la salute de ciascuno de loro è da essere saltem nel suo fine sperata.’

¹⁷⁰ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, pp. 143–167.

spiritual Franciscans whose influence can be ascertained throughout all of Biondo's works. While Olivi, Clareno, Ubertino, and Jacopone found refuge in the idea of poverty (both material and spiritual) and saw themselves as martyrs of Saint Francis, Biondo embraced the idea of suffering but, in his eyes, poverty could never signify belonging to the true Church. For Biondo, poverty remained a *habitus*, despite its merits (I use here the distinction between *res* and *habitus* postulated by Clareno). The only positive *res* was sanctifying grace, which was invisible and entirely in the hands of God.

6.4.2 Predestination: An Excursus

To speak of God's will means to confront the problem of predestination and how it relates to the will of human beings.¹⁷¹ Let me begin with a quick historical excursus. Then, I can return to Biondo.

In Paul's Epistles, we find two sets of ideas. On the one hand, some passages emphasised God's desire for universal salvation.¹⁷² In particular, Ephesians 1:3–14 told of how God predestined human beings to a purpose that He would realise most assuredly. On the other hand, we have Romans 8:28–30, which says that, in God's plan, predestination precedes divine call, justification, and glorification, and so God seemingly divided human beings between those who had been predestined and those who were not. Romans 9:9–26, which 'was mined for its doctrine of predestination', appears to confirm this reading: some human beings were approved ('vessels of mercy'), and others, 'the vessels of wrath', were rejected before their birth (for instance, the Pharaoh and Esau). It is not important here to define Paul's understanding of predestination (or if it was a problem for him at all). What matters is that the attempt to reconcile these two lines of thought shaped the Western development of this idea.

Given the impact exercised by Augustine on Western development, we also need to examine his position on the topic.¹⁷³ Augustine elaborated his take on predestination in his *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, where he commented on Romans 9:9–26 in order to answer two fundamentally related questions: why Esau was hated before his birth and how Esau's rejection can be reconciled with the idea that God loves all of creation.

¹⁷¹ For an introduction to the problem and its development up to the period of our interest, see FARRELLY 1964, pp. 71–151; LÖHRER AND PESCH 1967–1978; LEVERING 2011, pp. 1–97.

¹⁷² See Timothy 2:4, 4:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; and Romans 11:25–26.

¹⁷³ On Augustine's position, see WESTERHOLM 2004, pp. 3–21.

Augustine crucially said that not everyone would be called.¹⁷⁴ While the notion of the remnant was enlarged to the point that it surpassed the limits imposed by its identification with Israel, it was also restricted and used in an exclusivist sense. In other words, God always dealt only with a minority; the majority was always ‘excluded from happiness’.¹⁷⁵ Augustine concluded his examination by affirming the impotence of human free will: ‘to those who were “sold under sin” (Romans 7:14), what is free will worth?’¹⁷⁶ The helplessness of free will and the partiality of the divine call were interdependent: if God’s call was universal, then human free will meant something because God’s word demanded a free human reply; if, on the other hand, God’s call was not universal, the role of human free will was questioned and eventually made redundant.

According to Augustine, the choice (election) God made before everything else existed concerned only the justified.¹⁷⁷ In so doing, Augustine reversed the chain of events: the justified were so before the election, and the election was God’s seal of approval. The idea that God created and elected simultaneously was replaced by the idea that God created everything good, but only some were elected.

A crucial element was that, while Paul referred to Christ as the ultimate revelation of God’s love and judgement, Augustine referred to God’s ‘occult justice’. Now, even though this approach was justified from a scriptural perspective (1 Timothy 6:16), Augustine did not stress that Christ’s Incarnation, death, and resurrection happened explicitly for those who were cast out and abhorred, that is, the non-elect par excellence. In Romans 11, Paul, on the other hand, turned the Gentiles and obstinate Israel into the *extra* that God intended to rescue from perdition. In Paul’s mind, salvation rested entirely on God’s will, but because the call was now universal, it followed that everybody was responsible for their sin, and yet, everyone could still hope for the ‘miracle’ of gracious redemption.

Augustine developed his ideas further in his later works, but the essence remained the same. In *De correptione and gratia*, he elaborated on the distinction between the *vocati* and the elect and stressed how perseverance belonged only to the elect.¹⁷⁸ In *De dono*

¹⁷⁴ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XL, col. 124 (*Ad. Simp.*, II, 19): ‘Non enim omnes Judaeos, sed ex Judaeis: nec omnes omnino homines Gentium, sed ex Gentibus’.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 125 (II, 20): ‘a beatitudine paradisi’.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 126 (II, 21): ‘Liberum voluntatis arbitrium plurimum valet; imo vero est quidem, sed in venundatis sub peccato quid valet.’

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 127 (II, 22): ‘Quod si electio hic fit aliqua [...] non ut justificatorum electio fiat ad vitam aeternam, sed ut eligantur qui justificentur.’

¹⁷⁸ AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XLIV, cols 925 (*De cor.*, VII, 16) and 928–929 (IX, 20–21).

perseverantiae, he defined predestination as ‘the preparation for God’s gifts’: the ‘predestination of grace’ was divided (*sunt discreti*) between, on the one side, those who were ‘liberated’ (*liberantur*) from the ‘mass of perdition’ (*massa perditionis*) and those given the means to believe (*munus intelligentiae*) and, on the other side, those who were ‘abandoned’ (*relinquuntur*) and to whom believing itself ‘is denied’ (*negatum est*).¹⁷⁹

Augustine’s ideas became the frame of reference in which the theological debate on predestination developed.¹⁸⁰ In 473, at the Synod of Arles, the presbyter Lucidus was forced to renounce his idea that ‘some are destined to death, others are predestined to life’.¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, in the attempt to explain God’s desire for universal salvation and the truth that many would not reach salvation, further distinctions were introduced.¹⁸² Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–455), for instance, differentiated between universal and particular grace. Only those who had a particular grace reached salvation. In 529, at Orange, the bishop Cesarius of Arles (468/470–542) clarified the Church’s position on the matter.¹⁸³ He confirmed the pre-eminence of grace, the idea that it was a gift given through ‘Christ’s liberality’ (*largitate Christi*), and condemned peremptorily the idea that some were predestined to evil (*ad malum praedestinos*).

Isidore of Seville († 636) introduced the idea of the *gemina praedestinatio* (double predestination) and stressed that ‘in such great obscurity, no one can see through the divine arrangement or examine the obscure order of predestination’.¹⁸⁴ Isidore’s two-fold predestination was embraced by the monk Gottschalk of Orbais (c. 808–868), who affirmed that God predestinated some to damnation.¹⁸⁵ A fierce debate erupted between the monk and the bishop Hincmar of Reims, who wrote *De praedestinatione Dei et libero arbitrio*, a fierce and lengthy rebuttal of Gottschalk’s confession.¹⁸⁶ Eventually, Gottschalk and his supporters,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., XLV, col. 1014 (*De dono pers.*, XIV, 35): ‘Haec est praedestinatio sanctorum, nihil aliud: praescientia scilicet, et praeparatio beneficiorum Dei, quibus certissime liberantur, quicumque liberantur. Caeteri autem ubi nisi in massa perditionis justo divino iudicio relinquuntur? Ubi Tyrii relictus sunt et Sidonii, qui etiam credere potuerunt, si mira illa Christi signa vidissent. Sed quoniam ut crederent, non erat eis datum, etiam unde crederent est negatum. Ex quo apparet habere quosdam in ipso ingenio divinum naturaliter munus intelligentiae, quo moveantur ad fidem, si congrua suis mentibus, vel audiant verba, vel signa conspiciant: et tamen si Dei altiore iudicio, a perditionis massa non sunt gratiae praedestinatione discreti, nec ipsa eis adhibentur vel dicta divina vel facta, per quae possent credere, si audirent utique talia vel viderent.’

¹⁸⁰ The following summary is based on GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE 1939, pp. 55–122; FRANSEN 1967–1978; RONDET 1975; LEVERING 2011, pp. 36–97; M. GAGLIARDI 2017, pp. 805–809.

¹⁸¹ DS 335: ‘alios deputatos ad mortem, alios ad vitam praedestinator’.

¹⁸² How evident is this truth remains to be established.

¹⁸³ DS 396–397. The documents drafted during the synod went lost for centuries and they disappeared from the canonical collections till their rediscovery in 1538. See FRANSEN 1967–1978, p. 91.

¹⁸⁴ ISIDORE OF SEVILLE 1844–1865, LXXXII, col. 606 (*Sent.*, II, 6): ‘in hac tanta obscuritate non valet homo divinam perscrutari dispositionem, et occultum praedestinationis pendere ordinem’.

¹⁸⁵ GOTTSCHALK OF ORBAIS 1844–1865.

¹⁸⁶ HINCMAR OF REIMS 1844–1865.

the *praedestinatiani* Florus of Lyon, Prudentius of Troyes, and the bishop Remigius of Lyon, were defeated and, at the synods of Quiercy (853) and Valence (855), the doctrine of double predestination was declared heretical.¹⁸⁷

The ideas that have been discussed so far remained central during the High Middle Ages amongst Dominicans and Franciscans. For instance, in his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas differentiated between providence and predestination.¹⁸⁸ Providence was a web of relations existing amongst the created beings that led them to their end; without it, creation would disappear. Unlike providence, which was universal, predestination concerned only some; there were ‘some whom God reprobates’, and to them, ‘God has not given the good of the eternal life’.¹⁸⁹ Predestination was seen as an act of God’s mercy.¹⁹⁰ In article four, Thomas explained that predestination was not assigned through universal love but through preferential love. Thomas said that ‘predestination presupposes election, which in turn presupposes love’.¹⁹¹ While humans elected and then loved, God loved some with the gift of predestination, so He elected and predestinated them.

A similar distinction between predestination and foreknowledge can be found in the treatises written by the Franciscan Ugo Panziera, who directly influenced Biondo. Panziera clearly distinguished between elect and *presciti*.¹⁹² Predestined was the person ‘chosen for eternal salvation’; *prescito* was the individual assigned to ‘eternal damnation’.¹⁹³ In one of his treatises, Panziera explained: ‘when a man knows that God loves him in such a loving way, then he, with firm certainty, knows that, by an extraordinary privilege, he has been called and sees himself as *a companion of God*’.¹⁹⁴ According to Panziera, friendship with God depended on the knowledge of God’s election. This knowledge was understood as a display of God’s love. As highlighted in the introduction to Chapter 6, Biondo also connected divine friendship with knowledge.

¹⁸⁷ DS 621–33.

¹⁸⁸ See *Sth*, I, q. 22 and 23.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, q. 23, a. 3, *contra*: ‘Deus aliquos reprobat. Dictum enim est supra quod praedestinatio est pars providentiae’; ad. 1: ‘quibusdam non vult hoc bonum quod est vita aeterna’.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 2, *contra*: ‘praedestinatio est quaedam ratio ordinis aliquorum in salutem aeternam, in mente divina existens’; a. 1, *contra*: ‘excedit proportionem naturae creatae et facultatem, et hic finis est vita aeterna, quae in divina visione consistit, quae est supra naturam cuiuslibet creaturae, ut supra habitum est’.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, a. 4, *contra*: ‘dilectio praesupponit electioni, secundum rationem; et electio praedestinationi’.

¹⁹² PANZIERA 1492, fol. 33r (III, lib. 2): ‘Gli sentimenti si danno alla creatura a salute predestinata et alla presciti a dannatione.’

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 34v: ‘Nel vocabulo nel quale scrivo predestinato, o suo simile, sia sempre inteso electione ad etternale salute. Nel vocabulo nel quale scrivo prescito, o suo simile, sia sempre inteso dannation ad etternale pena.’

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 79r–v (XII, cap. 3): ‘Quando l’huomo si conosce da Dio così innamoratamente amare, ferma certezza quasi possiede che Idio l’ha per singulare privilegio vocato, vedendosi di Lui compagno.’ Emphasis added.

We can conclude this brief excursus with some summary observations. Firstly, all authors (except those who supported *gemina praedestinatio*) attempted both to preserve human free will and to safeguard God's desire for universal salvation. As a result, they stressed that God did not create evil nor predestined *ad malum* while, at the same time, He gave 'permission to fall'.¹⁹⁵ Secondly, despite the emphasis on the primacy of grace, the basic presupposition was that salvation and perdition were equivalent and divergent. In this equivalence, it was precisely the superabundance of God's mercy accomplished in Jesus that either was lost or heavily restricted. In Augustine, the gift of perseverance was a specific grace accorded only to some. Thomas Aquinas considered God's love the communication of being; however, selective love was introduced. Prosper of Aquitaine differentiated between universal and particular grace, claiming that the latter explained the separation between reprobate and elect. Scholastic theologians spoke of sufficient grace, given to all, and efficacious grace, allowing human beings to adhere to God's will.

Finally, the cross of the redemption (the concrete inclusion of the lost within Jesus's salvific act) was replaced by an abstract discussion on some hypothetical and obscure plan (predestination itself). The idea that Christ was the revelation and Word of God was maintained only in theoretical terms. God's will, by contrast, was understood as some form of epistemological and apophatic darkness or impenetrable arbitrariness, yet the manifestation of God's love depended entirely on it. Even though the intention was to defend God from the intrusions of a curious intellect, the consequence was that Christ's light no longer dispelled the obscurity.

6.4.3 Biondo's Attempt to Preserve the Balance between Mercy and Justice

Like most of his predecessors, Biondo also strove to balance God's universal salvific will and the tragic possibility of eternal perdition. Biondo's *due chiese* exemplified his wavering between the elect Church that resulted from love and the *extra ecclesiam* that received God's justice. As explained in Chapter 3.5.1, Biondo divided the faculty of the will into the *electrix*, which chose its objective, and the *amans*, which loved and pursued the chosen object. The same division and temporal succession were applied to Lucifer's (see Chapter 4.2) and God's will: God first elected and then loved whom He elected. Even though the distinction between

¹⁹⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 23, a. 3, *contra*: 'pertinet etiam ad divinam providentiam, ut permittat aliquos ab isto fine deficere'.

election and love was purely logical, an imperceptible gap was inserted between mere existence and those who were elected and loved. Election and love pertained to a select group of human beings (i.e. the remnant). What emerges is that this historical and contingent division was founded primarily in God's election 'from eternity'.¹⁹⁶

Biondo grounded the idea of universal salvation in Christ. In line with the classical idea of cosmic harmony and hierarchy, each being had its *loco naturale* assigned by God's 'eternal election in Christ'.¹⁹⁷ Christ was the vanishing point to which all the lines pointed. When in the *Second Mystical Hymn*, Biondo spoke of 'God's eternal children', he referred to those human beings – each of them with a specific history – who secured adoption (and their fulfilment) through and in Christ.¹⁹⁸

As seen in Section 3, adoption meant eternal election and historical actualisation. For Biondo, these two positions were complementary. God's children were God's 'elect and eternal friends', but they also formed the mystical body of Christ, which 'consists only of Christ's friends'.¹⁹⁹ The adopted elect were 'the splendour of the saints, children of God like the Son of the Father, generated from the womb of the Father, of the same substance as the Son and eternal like Him', but they were also, and this is a key affirmation, Christ's fruit 'in time'.²⁰⁰ By pointing to the temporal aspect, Biondo hinted at an idea of predestination, which went beyond its mere identification with the idea of God's initial choice. In Chapter 5.1.1, we saw how Biondo understood Christ as *dirictura*, which is both the way and the finishing point; in Section 3 above, I insisted on the dual nature of adoption. In Section 2, I stressed how friendship with God was both a monastic ideal and a secular reality. When Biondo focused on Christ's hypostatic union, predestination materialised itself into the elect, who were no longer abstract entities but unique and historical human beings connected to Christ.

Significantly, Biondo was here extremely close to the comforting views of those who highlighted the relevance of God's forgiveness. As noted by Ginzburg and Prosperi, the emphasis on God's superabundant mercy eliminated from predestination any disquieting element. The Dominican Ambrogio Catarino, for example, arguing fiercely against Augustine and those who followed him in providing a radically negative reading of predestination,

¹⁹⁶ For., fol. 27r: 'ab eterno'.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., fol. 18v: 'secondo la sua eterna in Christo electione'. Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁸ Sev., fol. 126r: 'li soi eternali / figlioli'.

¹⁹⁹ Mag., fol. 75r–v: 'electos atque amicos eternos [...] in Christo dilecti, ut membra de membris illius et partes corporis eius. Ex quibus totus consistit et in quibus omnibus solus subsistit'.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., fol. 76r: 'hi sanctorum splendores cum Filio confilii ex paterno utero consubstantiales illi scilicet ac coeterni eterno geniti sunt [...] Gustantque speciali dono in tempore'.

promoted the comforting view of God's mercy and therefore the thesis that predestination was a fruit available to all.²⁰¹ The example of Catarino is important for one specific reason. As Giorgio Caravale has shown, Catarino was an educated and refined theologian: the line of mercy and the attempts to resolve the problems arising from the tension between justice and love, therefore, cannot be ascribed exclusively to the fear of the supposedly uneducated and easily impressionable members of the low classes. Nor can they be interpreted as a social revolt against the oppressive system of clerical mediation. Instead, as I stressed earlier regarding the use of the vernacular (Chapter 6.2.4), they were needs that cut across social and cultural boundaries.

6.4.4 The Rejection of the Common Graces

Did Biondo manage to balance mercy and justice? As seen in the previous section, he succeeded when he assumed that Christ communicated personally with the elect. It is possible to speak of a *communio sanctorum*, but in fact what we have is a personal communication in which each elect is chosen and placed in a one-to-one relationship with Christ. This connection is clear from the fact that the elect were not 'a means (*media*) for others' but the 'end' (*finis*) of the creation, planned 'in eternity'.²⁰² To explore the implications of this statement, I want to examine the role that general grace (specifically, neighbourly love and affection) had for Biondo.

6.4.4.1 *Impassibilitas and the Middle Way*

At the beginning of a letter to Alessandra degli Ariosti, Biondo wrote:

I praise your good affection because it is a natural gift and a *gratia gratis data*. However, I would praise more the virtue of total abnegation, much more the gift of fortitude, but most of all the blessed impassibility.²⁰³

At the end of this section, I will discuss the final part of this letter. For the time being, it is important to note that this passage concisely delineated a progressive disrobing. One moved into self-annihilation from the initial natural disposition; through fortitude, one aspired to the blessing of impassibility. Although valuable, natural passions and desires (*affectione*) did not

²⁰¹ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, pp. 155–158. On Catarino, see CARAVALE 2007 and 2015.

²⁰² Mag., fol. 76r: 'non sunt ut media ad aliorum finem [...] verum ut finis atque in eternitate'.

²⁰³ For., fol. 19r: 'Laudo la vostra bona affectione peroche è dono naturale et gratia gratisdata. Laudaria più la virtù de abnegatione totale, molto più el dono de la fortezza, molto ancora assai più la beata impassibilità.'

offer a conclusive break from the entanglement of self-love. Feelings and desires hindered the actualisation of *passio*, that is, the quality of being acted upon by God. Consequently, they had to be replaced by *abnegatione* and *impassibilità*.

Let us be clear. Impassibility, too, could be problematic, for it could lead to the destruction of good habits and, therefore, to *insensibilitas* and *stupor*.²⁰⁴ Impassibility could be mistaken for an end in itself. Precisely to avoid the delusion of sanctity, Biondo urged the relinquishing of all acts of exterior devotion (at this point, we may speak of a correct form of impassibility).²⁰⁵

Both Jacopone da Todi and Giovanni Dominici invited their readers to opt for a ‘middle way’.²⁰⁶ Jacopone, though, also made clear that neighbourly love and charitable works were *de facto* Lucifer’s deception, to which he preferred quietness in God.²⁰⁷ Biondo’s suggestion to adopt impassibility, but only to a certain extent, seemed to concur. From the ambivalence of impassibility, two opposing approaches emerged: from a personal point of view, *spogliamento* dictated that Isaiah flee the world and its corruption to avoid God’s judgement; from an ecclesiastical point of view, Isaiah had to renounce himself and be sent into the world to fulfil the commandment of neighbourly love. The tension originating from the pull of *spogliamento*, which demanded isolation, and the evangelising mission, which urged the individual to become ecclesiastical (*anima ecclesiastica*), allows us to speak of Biondo’s *due chiese*. Like Jacopone, Biondo also was attracted to the quietness brought about by *spogliamento*. What interests us now is what happened when total impassibility was no longer balanced by affection.

6.4.4.2 *Dynamic Grace*

As seen in Chapter 5.2, Biondo distinguished between *gratia gratum faciens* and *gratiae gratis datae*. One of the differences between the two was that the former was more valuable than the latter. If ‘misused [gratuitous] graces’ potentially undermined sanctifying grace, Biondo was willing to sacrifice them to preserve self-surrender, which alone fulfilled grace’s mission.²⁰⁸

Biondo was not alone in considering grace chiefly from the individual perspective at the cost of the ecclesiastical dimension. For instance, Peter Lombard defined the Spirit as

²⁰⁴ Mag., fol. 39v: ‘Viciis autem extinctis sequitur impassibilitas virtuosus in anima habitibus; virtuosus [habitibus] extinctis sequitur insensibilitas anime et stupor.’

²⁰⁵ Ibid., fol. 32v: ‘deve intermettere et interlasciare tali acti cautamente et studiosamente’.

²⁰⁶ *Laude*, p. 70: ‘O meglio virtuoso’; DOMINICI 1957, p. 75: ‘la via del mezzo’.

²⁰⁷ *Laude*, p. 108. The devil says: ‘Un defetto par che agi che è contra caritate: / degli pover vergognosi non par ch’agi pietate.’ The friar replies: ‘S’io pigliasse questa cura per far loro acattaria, / perderia la mia quiete pr loro mercantaria.’

²⁰⁸ Add., fol. 126v: ‘grazie male usate’.

love.²⁰⁹ He drew no firm distinction between the Spirit and the gifts: the Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, was also ‘sent and given to the faithful’.²¹⁰ Quoting Ambrose (c. 340–397), Peter Lombard saw no difference between the Spirit and the variety of gifts.²¹¹ Notably, for our investigation, the ecclesiastical mission went unmentioned. The Franciscan Alexander of Hales (c. 1185–1245) recognised that, even though all graces came from the Spirit (*‘a spiritu’*), only those in which the Spirit (*‘cum spiritu’*) remained could be considered sanctifying grace.²¹² Leaving aside how one could ascertain the Spirit’s presence, what is significant is that, even in this case, no attention was given to how grace became operative in the ecclesiastical dimension.

If what Ambrose and Peter Lombard supported – that every gift had to ultimately be identified with the actions of the Holy Ghost – could be maintained exclusively with the help of faith, then Alexander’s distinction muddled faith itself. The Franciscan intended to steer the believer away from Pelagianism – the Spirit had to be left free to act as it wished, only then could one say that the Spirit was still present – and to give all merit to God’s grace. However, Alexander introduced the disconcerting possibility that, behind all these gifts and *eccellentie*, God might be absent.

The same doubt was latent in the approach of the various theologians mentioned in my excursus on predestination. In order to keep at bay any form of insurgent Pelagianism, grace was rightfully and uncontestedly assigned to God. The result was, however, the creation of a two-tiered grace. Peter Lombard, for instance, distinguished between *gratia operans* and *gratia cooperans*.²¹³ This division was done to maintain both God’s desire for universal salvation and the truth that only some would eventually be saved. The gift of perseverance (in all its forms and variations) resulted in an additional feature: while general grace was always present, perseverance was not.

²⁰⁹ PETER LOMBARD 1916, I, p. 73 (I, 10, 1): ‘Spiritus sanctus amore est sive caritas sive dilectio Patris et Filii.’

²¹⁰ Ibid., I, p. 106 (I, dist. XVII, cap. 1): ‘Nam ipse Spiritus sanctus, qui Deus est ac tertia in Trinitate persona, ut supra ostensum est, a Patre et Filio ac se ipso temporaliter procedit, id est, mittitur ac donatur fidelibus’.

²¹¹ Ibid., II, p. 699 (III, dist. XXXIV, cap. 2): ‘Quamvis ergo multi dicantur spiritus, ut spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, etc., unus tamen est Dei Spiritus, suae libertatis arbiter, omnia pro auctoritate voluntatis dividens singulis’.

²¹² ALEXANDER OF HALES 1924–1979, 4.2, P3, In1, Tr2, Q1, C1 (n. 646), contra, p. 1024: ‘Ex quo relinquitur quod non ex quocumque dono gratisdato dicetur spiritus sanctus haberi, cum ipsum habere sit spiritus sanctus in nobis inhabitare, et ipsum nobis dari. Propterea dicendum quod quedam dona sunt a spiritu sed non cum spiritu, quedam vero a spiritu et cum spiritu. A spiritu sed non cum spiritu dantur dona que non faciunt nos dignos deo, ut que dicta sunt fides informis et prophetia et huiusmodi. Et hec sunt dona gratisdata. A spiritu vero et cum spiritu dantur dona que faciunt nos dignos deo, cum quibus gratia deiformitatis infunditur que est gratia gratum faciens.’

²¹³ PETER LOMBARD 1916, I, pp. 436–437 (II, 26, 1): ‘operans enim gratia praeprae parat hominis voluntatem, ut velit bonum; gratia cooperans adiuvat, ne frustra velit. [...] Illis testimoniis aperte insinuat, quia voluntas hominis gratia Dei praevenitur atque praeprae paratur ut fiat bona, non ut fiat voluntas, quia et ante gratiam voluntas erat, sed non erat bona et recta voluntas’.

Furthermore, perseverance became a sort of possession of the created being. Unknowingly and unaware of it, the elect were the people who had this gift. Predestination – understood here as the prize and the aim of creation – confirmed that the person who persevered had the gift of perseverance.²¹⁴ If we return to Biondo, we see that a similar structure underscored his religious views. On the one hand, we have the gifts that God bestowed on all created beings according to His will and plan; on the other, we have sanctifying grace: election comes separately.

At this point, two possibilities emerge: either we divide human beings into those who had perseverance (particular grace, *gratia cooperans*, *gratia efficax*) and those who did not, or we balance the catastrophic thought of double predestination with the idea of the mission. In the first scenario, grace becomes a static object despite its permanent dependence on God. In retrospect, human beings could be separated between those who had perseverance and those who lacked it. In the second hypothesis, grace became a dynamic event, the ever-evolving dialogical ground between God's and creaturely freedom. What mattered was no longer who did or did not possess the gift but, since everybody had it, how one used it. The *mass of damnation* was still present in all its tragic evidence. Nevertheless, God's salvific proposition – the fundamental Christian axiom that God sent His Son for salvation and not for reprobation – was superabundantly more real. Grace no longer certified who was in the Church (*intra*) but, as a mission, concerned the Church's expanding nature (*ad extra*).

Biondo recognised this fundamental aspect: the idea of the gift, the principle of *bonum diffusivum sui*, the efforts to communicate on various levels with his audience, the image of the cosmic tree, the principle of reciprocal love founded on Christ as the dimension where men and women were finally adopted as God's children. These were all ways to lead the Church over the border that constrained it. However, his dependency on the unbridgeable duality between outside-inside, appearance-substance, and false piety-true faith led him to consider love for the other as a grace to be dismissed in favour of personal amelioration, purity, and impassibility.

²¹⁴ On this point, compare the position of Ockham. For Ockham (OCKHAM 1983, pp. 34–79), predestination is understood as a future contingent: something that is not a reality yet but that will happen most assuredly. God foreknows what it will happen, but to infer from God's foreknowledge the necessity of the future is a fallacy. In other words, repentance or perdition will happen – from the Christian point of view, creation is predestined either to Heaven or Hell – but, to human eyes, they are both a real possibility (a future contingency) (see *ibid.*, p. 45 Assumption 1). See also KLOCKER 1992.

6.4.4.3 *The Frigidity of Rational Love*

Biondo considered love for the neighbour and every other form of affection a *gratia gratis data* that could be subject to misuse and, consequently, had to be ultimately rejected. Unlike Thomas Aquinas, who characterised love primarily as *propter Deum* (based on God) – if human beings did not love, they could not be connected to God – for Biondo, love and affection were exposed to corruption and, therefore, he advised eliminating them.²¹⁵ Biondo found support for this view of love in Revelation 3:14–22, which he explained to the nun Cecilia Gozzadini.

Ordinarily, this pericope was read as an injunction to reject lukewarmness and embrace the fervour of faith.²¹⁶ In his *Lectura*, Peter John Olivi explained that frigidity was experienced by ‘those who are saddened by their sins’ and warmth by those who ‘rejoice in God’.²¹⁷ Tepidity was, therefore, the absence of both ‘fervid devotion’ and ‘affliction for one own’s misery’.²¹⁸ With the support of Richard of Saint Victor and John Cassian, Olivi claimed that, although ‘tepidity seemed to be a lesser evil than coldness’ (it was closer to the source of warmth), lukewarmness was, in fact, ‘apostasy that retained the exterior appearance’ of faith, to which frigidity was openly opposed.²¹⁹ Biondo agreed with Olivi, and when he labelled Cecilia’s shortcomings frigidity, he preferred to call them tepidity, that is, an expression of false piety.²²⁰ He used the same distinction when he distinguished between the *Austro* and the *Affrico*, the former symbolising hatred for God, the second ostentatious piety.

Biondo, however, went one step further than Olivi. His criticism of external piety and the possibility that any expression of faith could be undermined by falsehood and self-love led him to stress one particular aspect of the biblical passage. For Biondo, the angel spoke first of coldness and then fervour because the former was valued more than any kind of warmth.²²¹ For

²¹⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I-II, q. 111, a. 4, ad 2: ‘Spes autem et caritas pertinent ad vim appetitivam, secundum quod per eam homo in Deum ordinatur’.

²¹⁶ See ODEN 1998–2015, XII, p. 50–52.

²¹⁷ OLIVI 2009, p. 360: ‘quidam vero sumunt frigidum pro contristato de suis peccatis, calidum vero pro exaltatione in Deo’. On Olivi’s *Lectura*, see MANSELLI 1955.

²¹⁸ OLIVI 2009, p. 360: ‘nec scis de Deo per fervidam devotionem gaudere, nec de tuis peccatis et de tua miseria penitentialiter contristari’.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 362: ‘Videtur quod minus malum sit esse tepidum quam esse frigidum, quia frigidum plus distat a calido [...] Sicut enim apostatare statu alto retinendo exteriorem speciem illius status plus opponitur illi statui quam ex sola frigiditate numquam fuisse in tali statu.’

²²⁰ For., fol. 33r–v: ‘El vostro stato presente nel principio de la lettera descripto da voi portati patientemente, dolendovi de la malignità, superbia, infedilità, et negligencia vostra, chiamata da voi frigidità, quale è più presto tepidità degna de essere chiamata da voi.’

²²¹ Ibid., fol. 33v: ‘Et però desydera nel Apochalipse el Signore che lo angelo de Laodicea sia frigido overo caldo, peroché più è amato da Lui tal freddo che ogni caldo, etiam seraphico, nel quale è l’ultimo grado del caldo et de l’ardore. Et però tal freddo è prima da Lui nominato che questo caldo.’

Olivi, this element was irrelevant, so much so that he quoted them in reverse order.²²² For Biondo, this aspect was central because it showed that, before experiencing the celestial warmth of the ‘crucified love’, one had to go through ‘destruction, true death, and total annihilation’ through the ‘coldness of the great penance’.²²³ What was the reality of this ‘great penance’? What did it entail?

To answer these questions, I return to the letter I quoted at the beginning of this section. Unlike Agostino di Portico, who had told a nun called Angelica to ‘follow love, abound in love, seek love in everything, trade only in love, let this be the way of your salvation’, Biondo informed Alessandra degli Ariosti that ‘this affection from nature should become rational, that she be overwhelmed so much by reason that she would only love in the way and the amount helpful to our profession and salvation’.²²⁴ Biondo’s position could also be found in Sebastian Franck, who started by promoting fervent mysticism and neighbourly love and ended up urging Christians to become ‘immovable, invincible, unchangeable, and impassible, without any passion whatever, so that no chance has room in them any longer’.²²⁵ This statement appeared to connect closely with the passage I highlighted at the beginning of this section. Did Biondo possess this sort of ‘rational love’? Biondo confessed that he aspired to this love, but at the same time, he was torn. In his *Laude*, Jacopone made Jesus say: ‘I teach love, this is my art’.²²⁶ Did Biondo’s rational love coincide with the love Jesus taught?

Biondo noted a double tendency inside himself: one made his heart ‘hardened and indisposed’ so as to prevent it from loving ‘any external object’; the other made it ‘ready, tender, and pliable when it comes to internal objects’.²²⁷ The distinction was based on the ever-present dichotomy that undergirded Biondo’s religious views. A positive aspect of this division

²²² OLIVI 2009, p. 360: “‘Scio opera tua”, id est scientia iudiciali et improbativa, “quia neque calidus es”, scilicet per caritatem, “neque frigidus”, per infidelitatem vel per omnimodam vite secularitatem’.

²²³ For., fol. 33v–34r: ‘questo freddo è el freddo de la gran pena da Lui [Christ] et da la sua madre et da li participi de loro stati homini del terzo stato, al passivo, negativo, et assimilativo amore chiamati, portato secondo la proportione et misura del gusto, a loro dato nel crucifixo amore. Del quale ve dovete reputare indegna et così non partecipe per fino che non sentiate quello in voi formato, stabile, et fixo, patiente de tucti li suoi de ogni sorte contrarii vostri universali et particolari vitii in voi regnanti et dominanti, recti però et dominati et signoreggiate, et verso el fine de la sua destructione et morte vera, cioè anichilatione totale nel suo regnare et dominare’.

²²⁴ AGOSTINO DI PORTICO 2019, p. 324: ‘Seguita l’amore, abonda in amore, cerca in ogni cosa l’amore e d’amor solo fa mercantia, e questa sia la via della tua salute’. For., fol. 19v: ‘Più me piaceria che questo affecto de naturale solo se facesse ancora rationale, che se lasciasse sumergere tanto a la rasona, che amasse solo como et quanto è utile a la nostra professione et salute.’

²²⁵ See ERDOZAIN 2016, p. 47.

²²⁶ *Laude*, p. 84: ‘Io ensegno amare, e questa è l’arte mia’.

²²⁷ For., fol. 20r: ‘el mio core ad amare è molto duro, indisposito, et difficillimo da obiecti extrinseci de ogni sorte. Ad obietti intrinseci è mobile, tenero, et penetrabile’.

was that he no longer feared death or other mortal dangers.²²⁸ Like a martyr, nothing could shake his faith. However, since amongst the ‘external objects’ one must also count other human beings, in his attempt to acquire ‘rational love’, Biondo could no longer be moved by the ‘suffering and pain of others; nothing moved him’.²²⁹ Biondo strove so much to acquire this ‘rational love’ that he felt emotions only when reason commanded, and ‘if reason commanded to let a thousand people die’, he would do so ‘happily and with no spark of passion’.²³⁰ One could almost hear his voice when he whispered: ‘At times I feel no love’, and feel the pangs of pain when he admitted to Alessandra: ‘much more laudable is your nature, at least in part’.²³¹ What was laudable was the very nature Alessandra was encouraged to dismiss for the highly esteemed impassibility.

When Biondo was unable to balance the two tendencies that characterised his faith, he began to associate the Church with an elitist group. As noted by de Lubac, this tendency characterised monastic groups, which saw themselves as the elect people of God and the biblical remnant.²³² Prosperi noted that this tendency also infiltrated some lay confraternities.²³³ Here we should remember that Pietro Dolfín praised Biondo’s enclosed community, which strove to emulate the lifestyle of regular monks.²³⁴ Now, it is true that Biondo thought of the true Church as invisible – no sign existed for the detection of the elect, and therefore, his conventicle could never be taken for the remnant – however, his insistence on election and separation between sanctifying grace and general graces led necessarily to the foundation of a closed conventicle. Since outsiders were not helpful to salvation, the members of the conventicle had no interest in outsiders.

One is tempted to question even the love that supposedly held the conventicle together: How long would it last before it broke down? One could feign love and even act courteously and appropriately; however, as Biondo tragically pointed out, nothing would stop a member of a conventicle from letting other human beings go to their eternal death. Despite all its tragic

²²⁸ Ibid.: ‘ne li pericoli de la morte presenti conosciuti, né nelle pene sensitive, non perdo né lo intellecto né le forze corporale, né le mentale’.

²²⁹ For., fol. 20r: ‘el male altrui, la pena, el dolore, non mi move da sé niente, più che se non fusse’.

²³⁰ Ibid., fol. 20r–v: ‘Et se la rason me dictasse che io dovesse far morir mille homini, voluto questo et deliberato el poria fare, alegramente et senza scintilla de passione.’

²³¹ Ibid., fol. 20v: ‘Et non sento alcuno amore qualche volta [...] Più laudabile è in parte la vostra natura.’

²³² LUBAC 1959–1964, III, p. 552: ‘Il s’agit de la tendance de certains milieux monastiques à présenter leur “religion” come réalisant un âge nouveau, supérieur à ce que fut le christianisme commun.’ The discussion concerns Joachim of Fiore.

²³³ PROSPERI 1996, p. 19.

²³⁴ See LODONE 2020a, p. 81.

aspects, we have not reached the end. We now move on to the final point: the God connected to a divided Church could no longer be the God of universal truth and love.

6.5 Three Consequences

The criticism against the *gratiae gratis datae* and the absolute centrality assigned to God's hidden election affected the Johannine definition of God as love in three fundamental aspects: (1) the act of God was seen as a deception, which in turn affected the doctrine of the sacraments; (2) Jesus's witnessing was no longer universal; (3) the diffusive nature of divine love was denied. In the following sections I especially insist on Biondo's use of images and metaphors. In my view, the recurring use of these images is an indication that we are addressing a significant part of Biondo's poetic theology.

6.5.1 The Leviathan Deceived

Let us begin with a crucial passage from the *Commentarius*:

Just as divine justice and electing goodness calls its elect in time and in eternity through manifest signs which those who have been called and therefore sanctified understand, and first calls them not only *in genere* but also *in specie* according to conditions that conform and fit the elect [...], in the same way, divine justice and electing goodness calls and elects those only *in genere* and not *in specie*. The reason is that God neither called nor elected them. He allows them to call themselves, moved by themselves, to their own beatification and glory.²³⁵

This passage shows that, as a race (*in genere*), God called all human beings, but, at a particular level (*in specie*), only the elect were called. Biondo clarified that nobody knew whether they were elect or not, and therefore, everyone was urged to continue praying until the end of their life for those graces that were necessary for the fulfilment of God's will.²³⁶ As he lucidly explained, 'even though [...] one can doubt and fear that God has not elected them, they must

²³⁵ Add., fols 38v–39r: 'Divina enim iustitia et electrix bonitas, quemadmodum suos electos in tempore et in eternitate vocat per signa manifesta vocatis ipsis et sibi gratificatis intelligibilia, primumque vocat non in genere solum, verum in specie ad status ipsis conformes et oportunos. [...] ita eos quos tantum in genere et non in specie vocat et eligit quoniam in specie non elegit illos neque vocavit, permittit eos vocare se ipsos a semetipsis motos in beatificationem et gloriam suimetipsorum'. On the meaning of *genus* and *specie* in Scholastic philosophy, see WUELLNER 1966, pp. 115–116 and 288–289.

²³⁶ Add., fol. 39r: 'sperabitque gratias illas [...] Quas cum obtinuerit reperiet se in numero eorum qui electi sunt in eternitate fuisse, quod unusquisque de se credere usque ad extremum vite ac sperare constanter debet'.

not linger in this thought, but raise themselves from faith into hope'.²³⁷ Despite these words, Biondo believed that election prevented the *presciti* from ever accessing God's grace. Put differently, God's choice and, consequently, God's love were pre-emptively spent regardless of human actions and merits. This approach had the merit of preserving grace's primacy. Grace, however, was no longer conceived as love. It became a reward for the elect or, in its absence, a punishment for the *presciti*. Furthermore, God did not stop at allowing self-deception and self-glorification of the non-elect, but *actively* deceiving them (*includere*). Active divine deception is our first point of interest.

One consideration is needed. As shown by Tullio Gregory and Bruno Nardi, the discussion of God's deception originated in the idea of God's omnipotence; according to Ockham and Duns Scotus, it pertained to his *potentia absoluta* (absolute power).²³⁸ For them, the underlying assumption was that God could have acted differently. Other thinkers followed them in distinguishing between absolute and ordained potency: 'According to his ordained potency, God cannot deceive; however, according to his absolute potency, God can by causing human beings to assent to falsehood in their mind'.²³⁹ The Dominican Robert Holkot († 1349) affirmed that 'God can deceive and mislead'.²⁴⁰ Even though this distinction underpinned Biondo's idea of *odium Dei* towards the *presciti*, I will focus on the literary images he used, for it was through them and not as a scholarly discussion on divine omnipotence that he reached out to his readership.

Biondo's primary approach to portraying deception and illusion was through the biblical symbol of the Leviathan. For Biondo, the Leviathan symbolised self-glorification and ambition.²⁴¹ It attempted to ascend Heaven as it saw itself 'like a bird' and 'a celestial citizen'; likewise, human beings, whom Biondo identified with the Leviathan, were never 'content with the divine gifts' but incessantly aimed to reach the sky.²⁴² An indication of this was their attachment to spiritual exercises – 'fasting, vigils, meditation' – which he found widespread in

²³⁷ Ibid., fol. 39r-v: 'quamvis [...] ab illo [Deo] electum non esse se vereri ac dubitare merito posset. Verum in eo cogitatu sistere non debet, sed seipsum ex fide in spem erigere'.

²³⁸ On the notion of God's deception, see NARDI 1952, pp. 60–67; GREGORY 1992, pp. 399–440. On the development of the distinction between *potentia ordinata* and *absoluta*, see COURTENAY 1985.

²³⁹ Adam de Wodeham in GREGORY 1992, p. 396: 'Deus non potest de potentia ordinata fallere; de absoluta tamen posset causando in mente alicuius falsum assensum.'

²⁴⁰ Ibid.: 'Deus potest fallere et decipere.'

²⁴¹ Add., fol. 116v: 'se dice de questo stato, in Leviathan segnato, che ello vede ogni cosa sublime et poi è sogionto che ello è Re sopra tutti li figlioli de la superbia [...] le cose sublime concesse a sé vedere le ha desyderate non per divino honore et amore, ma per suo amore de sé et in sua gloria et beatificatione iniquamente et pazzamente'.

²⁴² Ibid., fol. 122v: 'non sono mai de li divini doni et gratie contenti, ma sempre in alto tendono, la divinità appetendo, nelli centri de li suoi cori occultamente et ciecamente'.

Florence.²⁴³ The Leviathan was also a symbol of the corrupt Church. Unsurprisingly, Biondo connected it to Savonarola and his followers, and to the Franciscans, whose attempts to reform the Church and their respective orders were also identified by Biondo with the Leviathan.²⁴⁴ In addition, the opposition between the elect and the reprobates was signified by another meaning associated with the Leviathan. According to its etymology, derived from Saint Jerome, Leviathan meant persecution of the elect.²⁴⁵ When this other meaning was acknowledged, Biondo could also identify both the Leviathan and the Behemoth (the other animal mentioned in Job) with the second and the first beast of Revelation, respectively.²⁴⁶

In its aspiration to reach Heaven, the Leviathan appeared to deceive itself. On a closer inspection, though, it was God Himself who deceived it:

Not only does God allow anyone of this kind to come to Him in an imaginary way and believe that they can fly like birds [...] This whole multitude is the one true most poisonous snake, which is called Leviathan, created by God, as we are told in the Psalm and Job, with one purpose: so that God may deceive them. God, however, is also close to them, while giving them many natural and acquired graces, perfections, and excellences.²⁴⁷

From this point of view, grace was used to advance deception:

²⁴³ Sev., fol. 109r–v: ‘li fervori, et miracoli de antichristo mystico regnante oggidì nel mondo et specialmente in quella vostra città’.

²⁴⁴ Add., fol. 58r–v: ‘gratiarum quarundam quas eis Deus concedit in laqueum et premium in premium et laqueum, retributionem et occasionem ruine ac ruine eterne quoniam advertent tandem se non aves id est spiritales sed serpentem et diabolos pro tua infidelitate, impatientia, negatione Dei, et omnis generis vicio fuisse, quemadmodum accidet quottidie magis omnibus discipulis et devotis filii mendacii apostoli antichristi et veri antichristi mistici Hieronimi Savonarole apostate Iesum Christi religionis christiane et ordinis sancti Dominici’, See also *ibid.*, fol. 154r: ‘nella seconda bestia de lo Apocalipsi sono signate le religione deformando reformato o reformando deformate, cosi sono anco non meno in esso Leviathan figurate’.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87r: ‘secondo el significato del nome suo ello è dicto additamento loro overo perseguitante loro’. See JEROME 1844–1865, col. 839: ‘Leviathan, additamentum eorum’.

²⁴⁶ Add., fols 86v–87r: ‘questa bestia seconda contene in sé lo effecto del nome da Dio in Job per Leviathan signata, como Beemoth contene in sé lo effecto de la prima bestia’. On this identification, see VAN DE KAMP 2017.

²⁴⁷ Add., fol. 30r–v: ‘non solum permittat Deus huius generis quemque venire versus se imaginarie et credere quod volet tanquam avis, [...] sit hec omnis multitudo unus verus et venosissimus serpens qui vocetur Leviathan, formatus a Deo, ut dicitur in Psalmo et etiam in Job, ad eum solum finem: ut illudat ei Deus; verum ipse quoque adhereat ei, dum donet et tribuat illi aut multas naturales et acquisitas [...] gratias gratis datas et perfectiones atque excellentias’. It should be noted that, unlike the Latin *includere*, the original Hebrew does not seem to have a ‘malicious ring’. See KWAKKEL 2017, p. 83.

Job will mock and destroy the Leviathan, as God will do by playing with it in order to deceive it and show that the Leviathan believes to be a bird, that is, a contemplative, by giving gifts and graces to it.²⁴⁸

While the elect were chosen and saved by God's active intervention, deception was the divine act that resulted in the abandonment of the reprobate.²⁴⁹ God's deception was the direct opposite of God's love, and both depended on God's election. One could not say that Biondo had double predestination in mind. For Biondo, God neither created evil nor was responsible for it. In this respect, human free will remained intact. What Biondo wished to preserve at all costs was God's freedom of choice. However, the consequence was that mercy and judgement were no longer two sides of the same coin, where the former miraculously, continually, and superabundantly overcame the latter. Mercy was now given only to the predestined elect, and judgement and deception were given to the abandoned *presciti*. In *Third Mystical Hymn*, Biondo quoted Jesus as saying:

In two ways, I give myself / to my creation / which is all my work, / it is always me. / Those to whom I give myself entirely, / I keep them in me by having attracted them [...] But those to whom I give myself only in part, / because in part I let them go, / make only noise in themselves: / they are excluded from my plans (*carte*).²⁵⁰

For those to whom Christ offered himself partially, grace was 'apparent' as it was 'mixed' with the will and instincts.²⁵¹ For them, the ritual of mass no longer worked.²⁵² Concerning the meaning of the eucharist, a profound difference can be found between Biondo and Thomas Aquinas.²⁵³ The latter argued that the priest's consecration was what turned the host into the body of Christ, which the believer then received. For Biondo, consecration happened, but the body of Christ could be either a physician or a judge, depending on the believer. The communion was no longer redemptive (i.e. efficacious) in itself. In the balance between the sacrament and the believer's disposition, priority was given to the latter: the fruition of the sacrament (and of the grace that it contained) depended on whether the believer was right (in

²⁴⁸ Add., fol. 87r-v: 'Job porà delegiare et straciare Leviathan, como farà esso Dio giocando con lui a fine de ingannarlo et demostrando de credere che sia ucello, cioè contemplativo, dandoli doni et gratie.'

²⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 30r: 'a Deo relinquatur'.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., fol. 164r-v: 'In dui modi mi dono / a la mie creatura, / qual tutta è mia factura, / sempre io medesimo sono. / A chi mi dono tutto, / tracto in me lo ritengo [...] Ma chi sol tengo in parte / perché in parte lo lascio, / fa in sé solo fracasso, / escluso da mie carte'.

²⁵¹ Ibid., fol. 71r: 'apparente gratia, parte per sua volontà, la quale consente a la gratia, overo ad altro impulso simili a quello de la gratia, creduto da lei che gratia sia, quale impulso po' essere naturale puro et mixato'.

²⁵² Ibid., fol. 102v: 'Le prediche de veri fideli predicatori da li presciti a dannatione eterna sono udite.'

²⁵³ On the doctrine of the eucharist, see ADAMS 2010; M. GAGLIARDI 2017, pp. 746–799.

this case, the sacrament rewarded the believer) or wrong (in this case, the sacrament condemned them).

Biondo was not unique in this regard. As noted by Trinkaus, a redefinition of the sacraments with a particular emphasis on the believer's interior attitude was also conceptualised by the humanists.²⁵⁴ This approach allowed Biondo to stress one's will: it was no longer Satan but God Himself who led one into temptation by giving the *presciti* false food, which was 'not substantial and wholesome'.²⁵⁵ It is also worth noting that the deceptive nature of the eucharist was also stressed by Marcantonio Flaminio in the *Beneficio di Cristo*, thus emphasising the profound connection amongst grace, sacraments, and justice.²⁵⁶ What emerged in Biondo and Flaminio was a radical separation between elect and *presciti* with the primary aim of denying any value the human will might claim to have, but which also touched on the role of the sacraments for the realisation of faith. In Biondo's view, the sacraments (not only the eucharist but also the ordination which separated the clergy and the laity) had value only when they confirmed God's will. Significantly, the sacraments did not reveal it.

6.5.2 Jesus's Deception

The second point of interest concerns Jesus's identity. In a short text, Biondo asked why Jesus ordered his disciples and demons to be silent about his identity.²⁵⁷ Biondo answered that Jesus's identity (i.e. being the Son of God and the Messiah) would be revealed only after his death and resurrection.²⁵⁸ Significantly for our study of Biondo's ecclesiological views, the Messiah would not bring an end to political oppression and create a political kingdom. For Biondo, God's kingdom belonged to Heaven and was entirely eschatological.

Biondo's answer to the so-called 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel preserved the 'stumbling block' of the cross and highlighted the hermeneutical role of the Spirit, which would

²⁵⁴ TRINKAUS 1995, pp. 615–650.

²⁵⁵ Add., fol. 205r: 'sono stati in essa tentatione inducti da Dio, nel colmo de suoi inscrutabili et horrendi iudicii'. Sev., fols 110r–111r: 'però li ciba de li cibi de li veri amatori de essa vita [...] li ciba del grasso del frumento de la divinità de Iesu Christo, cioè del gusto de le cose spirituale da lui procedente, et de lo mystico intellecto de la Scriptura, et satiali de la pietra mele, cioè del acto virtuoso delectevole [...] però sempre sono inquieti, usati sempre ad havere et fare ciò che vogliono. Et non mai ripieni una volta de alcuno cibo substantiale et sano.'

²⁵⁶ See GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, pp. 79 and 84.

²⁵⁷ Mag., fol. 64r: 'Mirari dicuntur quidam quod Salvator noster, pietatis et gratie fons, non solum demones verum etiam apostolos, prohibuerit dicere quod ipse esset Christus, hoc est rex, messias, et Salvator in lege promissus'. It is my intention to investigate Biondo's interpretation of the so-called Markan or Messianic secret in a future article.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., fols 65v–66r: 'Priusquam resurrexisset a mortuis, inconsultum arbitratus iis palam facere gloriam maiestatis, quod paulo post eum visuri erant vili et opprobiosa morte tanquam a Deo, et hominibus derelictum'.

be poured out only after Jesus's death.²⁵⁹ Jesus's secret was subsumed under the theology of the cross: 'the kingdom does not precede but follows death, which is the salvation for those who believe in Jesus'.²⁶⁰ However, because of the dualistic structure underpinning Biondo's theology and his reluctance to identify the Church as a temporal phenomenon, God's revelation in Jesus could be either revelatory or deceptive. The change depended on whom Jesus was addressing. Here we can see again the distinction between false and true friends highlighted earlier in Section 2.1 of this chapter. To the reprobate, the Pharisees, and the scribes, Jesus announced himself as the Messiah not to reveal the truth and bring them to faith but to deceive and tempt them because they were '*presciti* and not predestined'.²⁶¹ The problem was no longer that the world failed to understand the light (John 1:10) but that Jesus gave a false light.

Jesus's deception affected the notion of the *sequela*. If Christ spoke only for some, then Christians also must speak only to a specific audience. This consideration confirms Biondo's reading of Isaiah 6 discussed in Section 4.1. It was not accidental that, for Biondo, the mass and sermons had no validity for the sinners.²⁶² Biondo's position could be defended because the cross, which was the Church's foundation, always remained 'a stumbling block and foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:23). However, when we consider the NT notion of *parrhesia*, we see that a different approach was suggested. *Parrhesia* was connected to freedom and boldness. In the NT, *parrhesia* indicated the freedom experienced by those liberated from the yoke and the world's 'principalities and powers'.²⁶³

Besides its political aspect, *parrhesia* indicated honesty, frankness, and openness. When one acted frankly, their actions and words reflected what their intention, and no second motive was implied. The actions and words were public and on display in the most profound sense. No esoteric meaning was attached to the proclamation, let alone deceit. The truth came to the fore, like 'faith cometh by hearing' (Romans 10:17). If, however, the premise (i.e. proclamation) was false, the conclusion, too, was false. As Christ was the icon of the hidden Father, and the Father could be seen only through His Son because the Son acted in perfect

²⁵⁹ On the so-called Messianic secret in the Markan gospel, see at least the seminal work by WREDE 1971, who started the discussion; and RÄISÄNEN 1990, especially pp. 38–75, where the various interpretations of the Markan secret are evaluated.

²⁶⁰ Mag., fol. 67r: 'regnum non precedit sed sequitur mortem ipsam que in fide illius est salus'.

²⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 68r–v: 'Qui, quoniam voluerat Iudeis completa eorum nequicia scandalum fieri ut stultitie gentium a Iudeis reiectus ultro se ingereret, voluit non omnibus pariter, sed quibusdam neque iis, ante tempus meriti eorum, sed post illud, scandalum fieri, quia non omnes reprobaverat, sed praescitos tantum, quoniam ex ipsis quosdam non praescitos sed praedestinos elegerat, quibus laqueo et scandalo esse noluit in maturam sui nominis phamam.'

²⁶² Add., fol. 102v: 'Le prediche de veri fideli predicatori da li presciti a dannatione eterna sono udite o presente danno o con danno de poi'.

²⁶³ The experiences of the martyrs, of every religion and in every period, prove this point abundantly.

unison with the Father's will (their Spirit was the same and connected them), so the Christian's actions and words should wholly reflect their intentions.

In the ecclesiastical context, *parrhesia* came to signify the honesty and the dedication with which the Church addresses and spent itself for the *extra*. Therefore, *parrhesia* did not suggest that the signs (including the Church itself as *sacramentum salutis*) be dismissed in favour of hypothetical hidden and eternal *res* and truth, which the phenomenal and temporal sign was unable to comprehend and signify. Instead, the sign (i.e. Christ, the *mysterium salutis*, and, consequently, the Church and the Christian) would correspond entirely to the *res*: between the sign and the *res* there was a perfect equation. Only when the Church no longer spoke and attempted to preserve itself could the *extra* come to accept Christ's *kerygma* through the 'disappointing reality' of the present Church.

Was the rejection of *parrhesia* associated with the Nicodemite tendencies discussed in Chapter 1.5? The answer is not straightforward. Surely Biondo did not promote simulation in the way the Nicodemites did in the sixteenth century following the radicalisation of the conflict with the ecclesiastical institutions of Rome. However, the various disagreements that characterised Biondo's pastoral activities suggest that *parrhesia* (understood as a public debate about faith) was not practical. At the doctrinal level, we can also note another point of departure from Angelo Clareno, one of Biondo's spiritual guides. While Clareno sharply distinguished between *res* and *signum* to separate Saint Francis's faithful followers from those attached to habits and convents, Biondo's emphasis on interiorisation and deception to protect the faith against all forms of external piety had the effect of rendering *parrhesia* useless. In Biondo's eyes, the legitimate doubt of self-love drastically undermined every public and social expression of faith. The result was radical scepticism, based on *spogliamento* and self-criticism, which ran the risk of corroding every form of dialogue and trust.

6.5.3 The Wall

The image of the wall connected the biblical remnant, predestination, deception, and falsehood. A text Biondo highly favoured was Ezekiel 43:5–8.²⁶⁴ In Chapters 40–42, the biblical author described the creation of the temple of God. In Chapter 43, he narrated how God's glory entered the temple. We also find the altar's description and how sacrifices must be performed. With

²⁶⁴ Add., fols 42v, 90r–91v, 153r; Sev., fol. 46r.

God in His temple, Israel could no longer err towards apostasy. Within the context of our investigation of Biondo's Church, it is worth keeping in mind the possible ecclesiastical allusion of this text, especially considering that the Church was understood as a place of universal (catholic) union and togetherness.

Biondo referenced this pericope in four different places. He thought that the key elements in this image were the doors (*liminale*) and the dividing wall. In the poem *Al foco*, he spoke of these two elements, but not much was said other than the fact that one of the doors was built by God's enemies, who were fed unhealthy food (*el grasso del frumento*).²⁶⁵ Once again, Biondo reaffirmed the ambivalence of the eucharist. Two references can be found in both the *Commentarius* and *De amore proprio*. In the first passage, Biondo said that, because of the wall, God did not 'live' with those who were excluded.²⁶⁶ For them, Christ was no longer 'Emmanuel' (Matthew 1:23). In the second place, the idea of communication was emphasised: 'The wall of division and separation exists between God and them. This signifies that they do not communicate with God in anything that is substantial and truthful, even though they seem to do so'.²⁶⁷ In both cases, the context was the deception connected to the false rules (*formae vivendi*) that were drafted by human beings and not inspired by God. In both cases, however, we can also detect a rethinking of the eucharist: the sacrament was either redundant or counterproductive.

The most significant passage on the Ezekiel pericope is, in my view, found in the treatise *De meditatione*. Biondo began by talking about Psalm 23 and Matthew 16:18, which allowed him to distinguish between two different doors. On the one hand, we have the eternal doors, which symbolised those who were predestined, and, on the other, the 'wicked doors' or 'doors of death' indicating the *presciti*, the 'reprobate body'; they were 'the face of the Leviathan'.²⁶⁸ Biondo then introduced the passage from Ezekiel and focused on the two doors and the nature of the wall. 'To those who understand the mystical sense well', the eternal doors were modelled on 'Christ, the true door' (John 10:1–2).²⁶⁹ Christ led to the room of

²⁶⁵ Sev., fol. 45v–46r: 'Li quali fabricaria / l'uscio suo et liminale / appresso el divinale / muro fra loro saria [...] quei ch'a Dio mento / et son suo ver nimici / cibaria como amici / del grasso del frumento.'

²⁶⁶ Add., fol. 42v–43r: 'Tamquam si diceret: Videtur quidem forma vivendi eis data a suis fundatoribus similis esse fundamentis forme vivendi date a me ac spirate veris amicis meis, sed murus dividens est inter me et eos, hoc est, ego non habito cum ipsis per gratiam in eorum statibus ruinosis sicut habito in statibus a me spiratis.'

²⁶⁷ Ibid., fol. 153r: 'Ma intra lui et loro è el muro de divisione et separatione. Significando che non comunicano con Lui in cosa alcuna substantiale et vera, benché paran comunicare in molte apparente.'

²⁶⁸ Ibid., fol. 88r–v: 'male porte [...] porte vere de la morte [...] Volto de esso Leviathan [...] corpo reprobato.'

²⁶⁹ Ibid., fols 89v–90r: 'a chi bene intende el mistico intelletto [...] signate sono cosi per la grande loro similitudine de ciascuna et tutte quante a Jesu Christo, unico et vera porta, per Ezechiele, nel numero singulare signati sono in una sola porta propinqua et simile a la vera et divina porta.'

‘contemplation, the perfection of the mental act that will be given to the final Church’.²⁷⁰ Those who followed the idolatry of self-love took the other door, which did not lead to Christ but ‘elsewhere’.²⁷¹ The ‘dividing wall’ indicated the distinction between the two ‘buildings’.²⁷² The self-lovers ‘have no door’ to communicate with God ‘because they are without Christ’.²⁷³

Between these people, who enter through different doors, between these two completely different and opposing groups, there is no participation, no possible communion because the wall separates absolutely one side from the other, because of the frightening judgement and their inexplicable (*obscura*) obduracy.²⁷⁴

Some of the bricks that formed this wall were laid flat and followed ‘God’s immutable direction’; others were ‘oblique’ (*per traverso*) and ‘desire to justify themselves as they wish’.²⁷⁵ God allowed the erection of this wall with the ‘divine lime of his permission’.²⁷⁶ He let human beings build their wall as they pleased; more importantly, Christ no longer tore down the wall.²⁷⁷ Christ’s salvation had become irrelevant.

God no longer communicated Himself in His unconditional offer of love; He no longer demolished ‘the middle wall of partition between us’, that is, the ‘hostility’ (Ephesians 2:14). Biondo maintained that ‘God’s grace does not lead those who forget God; consequently, God miserably despises them’.²⁷⁸ Given this context, one might ask: Did it still make sense to speak of Christ as ‘a friend of publicans and sinners’ (Luke 7:34) if Jesus did not reach out towards the enemy, the excluded, the sinners, and the marginalised? One might also ask: If grace were God’s free and superabundant act of love, when did God stop loving the sinners and start to despise them?

Once this wall was built, the bride could no longer call her bridegroom (Revelation 21:17; 1 Corinthians 16:20: ‘Maranatha’). The bridegroom I reference here is the Christ who,

²⁷⁰ Ibid., fol. 90r: ‘lo acto mentale, el quale po’ esser chiamato contemplatione [...] la perfectione del acto mentale che dato serà al ultima chiesa’.

²⁷¹ Ibid., fol. 90v: ‘pervengono ad altro loco et non a quello che loro estimano, cioè non pervengono a Iesu Christo’.

²⁷² Ibid., fol. 91r: ‘ce è el muro separante et dividente, realmente et totalmente, uno edificio da l’altro’.

²⁷³ Ibid.: ‘non hanno porta alcuna perché sono senza Christo’.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.: ‘Tra queste loro parte, dico, quale entrano per diversi usci, et fra queste compagnie al tutto diverse et contrarie, non è altro participio, ne’ altra comunione possibile per el muro che separa totalmente una parte dal altra, per el divino horrendo iudicio, et la loro occulta obstinatione.’

²⁷⁵ Ibid.: ‘alcune pietre in diritto poste et alcune per traverso, cioè per la divina immutabile directione nelli loro particolari acti et per la loro opposta a quella volonta, de iustificarsi et delectarsi a suo modo’.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.: ‘la calcina de la divina permissione che piglino la obliquata loro et del diavolo per divina directione’.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.: ‘questo loro volere, contrario a quello de Dio, impossibile fa, secondo la divina ordinaria iustitia, la loro illuminatione et emendatione’.

²⁷⁸ Mag., fol. 12r: ‘Si autem tales negligentis a gratia non ducuntur, tunc isti a Deo sunt abominati miserabiliter’.

according to Matthew 25:31–46, came to the bride as the poor and despised. Obviously, she could focus on the interior vision of Christ: the purpose of *spogliamento* and interior ascent was to foster an intimate *intrinsecarsi* with *one's own* God. In this case, the wall would even be considered a welcome addition. However, as Biondo realised, to become intimate with one's own God (*intrinsecarsi con el suo Dio*) could easily be confused with becoming engaged with one's own *phantasmata* of God. In a different, but related context, Sebastian Franck saw the risks that a closed Church (a bride enamoured with herself) entailed. Franck told his friend John Campanus: 'Outside the Church, no salvation [...] Where, my friend, is this Church? Perhaps in India, Greece, Germany, Armenia, at Rome, in Saxony, on the mountains. But I believe nowhere. Instead, *they all run uncalled* and enter into the sheep[fold] unsent'.²⁷⁹

Unlike Biondo, who focused on those who were called and their personal ascent (see his *Sermo de igne sacro*, above in Section 4.1), for Franck, the Church was defined by the *extra ecclesiam*, the contradictory other who was always utterly alien and incomprehensible. For Franck, in a cataphatic sense, the Church had to love its members, but in a more profound-apophatic sense, the Church had to love what lay beyond itself, since only when the ecclesiastical dimension was stretched beyond its limits would the Church reach its defining ground. Being 'near God' (*propter Deum*) meant approaching those who were farther away from God. For Franck, the bride would find her bridegroom only outside of herself, in someone totally different from her. With the image of the cosmic tree and thanks to the idea of self-communication, Biondo perceived the ever-expanding meaning of divine love; yet, it was unclear if the poor of the world (i.e. the sinner and the unclean) still coincided with Christ – as indicated in Matthew 25:31–46 – or were to be rejected in the name of spiritual ascent and eschatological perfection.

As I have shown in many places, Biondo tried to explain how the quest for love, which was tantamount to the very history of the Church history, was both entirely historical and eschatological. This tension characterised almost every aspect of Biondo's religious proposition. However, by placing election before love, Biondo focused on God's unfathomability. Biondo pointed out that, 'just as the true and sole form of the human act is God's act of accepting us, unlimited and incapable of being limited, and therefore invisible and unmeasurable, so our actual deformity is equally true and infinite'.²⁸⁰ Some found the idea of

²⁷⁹ WILLIAMS AND MERGAL 1957, p. 154. Emphasis added.

²⁸⁰ Add., fol. 35v: 'vera et sola forma humani actus est incircumscripita et incircumscripibilis, et sic invisibilis et immensurabilis nobis divina acceptio eius, quemadmodum etiam vera deformitas incircumscripibilis est'.

eternal punishment disturbing. One of them was Marsilio Ficino.²⁸¹ Another was Ambrogio Catarino, a Dominican who certainly had nothing in common with Ficino. Against Augustine and all those who abused it, Catarino stated that predestination did not mean punishment but eternal life. He overturned the meaning of *prescito*: ‘Here I take the term *prescito*, as it should be taken, not confining it to only those who are damned, but, in general, as also is the meaning of the word itself, to include those who are saved’.²⁸² Saint Paul emphasised how God’s love was ‘incalculable’ not because it compensated for our equally infinite sinfulness, but because it was a Thou who, from infinity and eternity, came down towards the useless, the lost, the minute and superfluous I that is a human being – ‘where sin abounded, grace abounded much more’ (Romans 5:20). Biondo, on the contrary, emphasised – and this is crucial – how *the deformity of human beings was as infinite as God’s love*.

Biondo stressed the alleged obscurity of predestination, the meaning beyond the Word, the secrecy of the substance, the hidden form, and the invisible remnant at the expense of the visibility and superabundance of love, God’s frankness, and the tangible neighbour. Once the wall was up, it was no longer self-love that cast human beings into isolation, but God’s own election, which broke us apart. As such, God was no longer love.

²⁸¹ See TRINKAUS 1995, p. 748.

²⁸² As quoted in GINBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 157: ‘capio autem hic praescitum, ut capi oporteret, non restringendo ad eum qui damnatur tantum, sed communiter, ut vox ipsa non minus significat, etiam ad eos qui salvantur.’

CHAPTER 7: Conclusions

In the early chapters of *The Secular Age*, Charles Taylor showed how people living in the year 1500 were porous beings who enjoyed a direct connection with God.¹ In many respects, God was the pivotal element of human existence. As Ficino said in his *Della cristiana religione*, dedicated to the Florentine Bernardo del Nero: ‘The human mind is constantly agitated about God, the heart daily burns with God, the breast sighs over God, the tongue sings Him, head, hand and knee adore Him, the works of man refer to Him’.² For Ficino, God loved humankind so intensely that an adequate response was demanded from human beings. In this situation, the human mind was inevitably restless, for failing to reciprocate could reveal God as a terrifying judge. As Jacopone wrote: ‘Flee from the merciful hand, and go towards the vengeful hand: / that strict verdict will be very painful’.³ As indicated by Philippe Nemo referring to Job’s tragic situation: ‘What characterises the subjective situation here [Job’s tragic situation] is the impossibility of *forgetting* a truth [...] The impossibility of forgetting the truth is the first characteristic of anxiety’.⁴ For fifteenth-century Italians, this truth was God’s judgement.

7.1 The Historical Crisis: The Excess of Evil

This problematic tension was examined throughout this dissertation. Where did it originate? According to Ginzburg and Prospero, this tension began in the political and social crisis that overwhelmed the Italian states.⁵ In *Tribunali della coscienza* (Courts of Conscience), Prospero highlighted how the Italian wars had shaken the confidence and trust Italians had placed in God and eroded the material riches accumulated in the course of many centuries, through which people had managed to quantify their hope in God’s salvation.⁶ Their faith, which attempted to balance merciful love with irrefutable justice, was constantly tested by the tragic reality of

¹ TAYLOR 2007, p. 35.

² FICINO 1476, cap. 2: ‘La mente humane di et nocte in se rivolta idio, d’iddio arde el cuore. Ad iddio sospira el pecto. Costui canta la lingua, questo adorano el capo, le mani, elle ginocchia, questo gli artificii degli huomini rapresentono.’ The translation is from TRINKAUS 1995, p. 737, who however used the Latin version: ‘Deum agitat mens humana, quotidie Deo ardet cor. Deum suspirat pectus, eundem cantat lingua, manusque adorant et genua, eundem referunt hominum artificia.’

³ *Laude*, p. 55: ‘Fuggi da la man pietosa e vai verso la man de vendetta: / molto serà dolorosa quella sentenza stretta’.

⁴ NEMO 1998, p. 23. Emphasis in original.

⁵ GINZBURG AND PROSPERI 1975, p. 186.

⁶ PROSPERI 1996, p. 24.

suffering, war, persecution, poverty, famine, and death. This ‘excess of evil’, which was so much more real as it touched ordinary people personally, could strangle hope, faith, and love.

How did one respond to this overwhelming crisis? Even though Eugenio Garin noted that for Biondo’s contemporaries God was in general ‘a person who loves another person, who is celebrated in love’, Giovanni Miccoli and Grado Giovanni Merlo have stressed that many interpretations of Christianity developed at the time, and therefore there were many answers.⁷ It seemed that the idea of God’s love was lost in the plurality of positions. As the humanists lamented, the university debates between *magistri* and friars and the theological disputes between Dominicans and Franciscans damaged the experience of faith. The treatises on love by Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint Thierry, Aelred of Rievaulx, Ivo of Chartres, and Richard of Saint Victor, but also, to be closer to our period, the intense works of the Camaldolese Paolo Giustiniani, show that the theme of love never actually died.⁸

The question then becomes: How many people outside of the cloisters read these writings? According to Giuseppe Cuomo, the works of William of Saint Thierry were practically unknown outside the monastery.⁹ One might argue that question of reaching external audiences is a problem that we have created anachronistically for monastic writers; this is possibly true given that medieval society was based on distinct *ordines*, and it was the responsibility of monks and nuns to pray for all others. However, this problem represented itself, and in a more acute form, during the Quattrocento and affected monks and mendicants. As shown by Cécile Caby, the Camaldolese monks, led by Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439), tried to balance monasticism and urbanism by releasing works that had to be consumed within the monastery and others intended for an external audience (i.e. *volgarizzamenti*, *florilegia*, and new editions of old works).¹⁰ In his lectures on the Song of Songs held in Venice at the *studium* of San Zanipolo, Giovanni Dominici quoted Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, and many other recognised *auctoritates*.¹¹ His lectures achieved popular success, attracting a considerable crowd. And yet we should ask: How many amongst the audience were familiar with these names?

⁷ GARIN 2009, p. 88: ‘È persona che ama un’altra persona, che si celebra nell’amore.’ MICCOLI 1972–1976, p. 445; MERLO 1991, p. 7

⁸ See ZAMBON 2008. For Giustiniani’s works on love, see volume 3 of GIUSTINIANI 1967–2012.

⁹ CUOMO 2001, p. 3.

¹⁰ On the role of the Camaldolese monks, see CABY 1999, particularly pp. 599–664. On Ambrogio Traversari, see STINGER 1977; PONTONE 2010; SACCENTI 2019.

¹¹ A copy of his lectures is in Madrid, Biblioteca nacional, MS 296. I hope to continue my research and explore this very interesting author and his Venetian works in my future studies.

The theme of love and the God of love were, therefore, taken out of the books and monasteries by force, as it were. The religious and penitential movements, the rise of lay confraternities, the continuous sprouting of religious orders, the practice of pilgrimages (both local and overseas to the *Terra Santa*), the search for indulgences, the editorial fortune of religious printed books, especially *volgarizzamenti* and *florilegia*, the organization of processions, which marked the establishment of new holidays, the production of devotional art (which, although meant to support a patron, did it so through the representation of saints, martyrs, and the Virgin Mary): all these events testify to a profound need to express faith in personal terms, to give evidence of the human experience of God, and to participate in God's self-revelation.

As demonstrated by Garin and Trinkaus, the humanists also took part in this process: their call to return to the sources (*ad fontes*) was not embracing of paganism but a desire to reaffirm the image of God and the dignity of man: the removal of all obstacles that could stand between truth and the individual coincided with a return to the incarnated God-man.¹² Very often, the philological work of the fifteenth-century humanists meant a rediscovery of the Christian faith, which did not remain an abstract endeavour but was used to stress civic duties and social responsibilities. Giovanni Dominici's and Coluccio Salutati's views on the *studia humanitatis* differed enormously; however, they both believed that faith had to be realised in the world.¹³ Salvatore Camporeale stressed how Lorenzo Valla took dead words and cleansed them of age-old accretions to give them new life.¹⁴

The *sistema della carità* (in all its most disparate instantiations, and not necessarily in negative terms, as Prospero suggested) was a direct consequence of the foundational idea of God's love.¹⁵ Charitable works and devotional art were indeed used for self-aggrandising, pragmatic, and utilitarian purposes, but if it was true that 'faith without works is dead' and 'the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life', then these works, however selfish they might have been, also carried a salvific meaning.¹⁶ The union of faith and life did not take place exclusively in the works of exegetes (as, for example, Cuomo has so clearly shown with William of Saint

¹² TRINKAUS 1995; GARIN 2009, p. 115.

¹³ On the diatribe between Dominici and Salutati, see DENLEY 1981, who toned down Dominici's anti-humanism.

¹⁴ CAMPOREALE 1972.

¹⁵ PROSPERI 1996, pp. 16–34.

¹⁶ James 2:26; 2 Corinthians 3:6

Thierry) but also in the ordinary occurrences of daily life: Martha and Maria, *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, were intimately related.¹⁷

Yet, something did not sit well. Despite all the sermons and the charitable works, evil did not disappear, and the God of justice was still there: Did men and women do enough? Could they have done more? These questions were and are unsettling. As Henri-Irénée Marrou asked: ‘If salvation was assured, at once, on the cross of Calvary, if the decisive event is acquired, why does history continue?’¹⁸ As Karl Löwith noted, ‘the interpretation of history is, in the last analysis, an attempt to understand the meaning of history as the meaning of suffering by historical action’.¹⁹ In his *De immensa Dei misericordia*, Erasmus of Rotterdam assured his readers that there was no difference between the God of the OT, reputedly merciless and vengeful, and the God of the NT, the God who embraced humanity’s sins and died on the cross. As emphasised by Seidel Menchi, Erasmus wanted to reaffirm mercy even in the moment of justice.²⁰ Similarly, Bernardino Ochino attempted to comfort his Venetian audience by quoting Psalm 41(42):8: ‘David said: “The Abyss calls the Abyss.” The abyss of your sins searches and calls for a greater abyss, which is that of God’s goodness and mercy, love and charity, which are infinite and greater than the abyss of our sins, which are infinite’.²¹ Ochino seemed to say something similar to Biondo: man’s abyss was infinite. However, this is not the case. For Ochino, man’s abyss of infinite sin was inferior to God’s abyss of infinite love. Anticipating the mathematician Georg Cantor (1845–1918), Ochino saw that not all infinities were equal.

As shown by Seidel Menchi, between 1535 and 1555, the Lutheran idea of justification by faith had spread in Italy like wildfire, and many (from all echelons of society) embraced it.²² The fear, which had appeared to be the basis of religious piety, dissipated, and turned into the *teologia del cielo aperto*, the theology of ‘open Heaven’. The ‘narrow path’ (*via stretta*) had been replaced by the ‘broad way’ (*largo modo*).²³ Purgatory and Hell receded; they either disappeared or were emptied. Space was occupied by Heaven. According to the priest Aloise del Preto (just one name amongst many who promoted the same point), it did not matter

¹⁷ CUOMO 2001, p. 15.

¹⁸ MARROU 1950, p. 21: ‘Si le salut a été assuré, en une fois, sur la Croix du Calvaire, si l’événement décisif est acquis, pourquoi l’histoire continue-t-elle encore?’

¹⁹ LÖWITH 1949, p. 3.

²⁰ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 157.

²¹ In SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 406 n. 98: ‘Diceva David: “Abissus invocat abissum.” L’abbisso de gli peccati tuoi ricerca e chiama un altro maggiore abbisso, che è quello della bontà della misericordia de Dio, dell’amor e charità sua, che è infinito e maggior abbisso che non è quello delli peccati nostri, che sono infiniti.’

²² SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, pp. 142–167.

²³ Ibid. p. 150.

whether one did good or evil; everybody was saved.²⁴ Baptism was superseded and so were all the other sacraments. Muslims, Jews, and all those who never heard of Jesus (in the Americas and China, but also figures from the past, for example, the emperor Trajan whom Dante had placed in Paradise), were all saved as long they lived a good life. It should be noted that all the sources Seidel Menchi used to detail the phenomenon of the *cielo aperto* came from Inquisitorial records: the answer of the ecclesiastical institutions was swift and strong, and many recanted.

7.2 Biondo's Response: A Summary

How did Biondo respond to this crisis? How did he, a secular priest, intend to lead his congregation to salvation? Biondo did not look at Heaven as if it were open: people had to work for their salvation. In this dissertation, I articulated my answer according to Biondo's conflicting positions concerning salvation, perdition, and the ideas of love and justice that he adopted and that, in his view, were necessary to lead one down the path toward reformation.

Let me summarise my findings. After an introduction, in which I contextualised Biondo and introduced the main questions, in Chapter 2, I gave an account of Biondo's life and examined his literary works. More specifically, I stressed the range of his production. We could divide it into academic and pastoral, but this division would not be appropriate. As I demonstrated with various examples, whenever Biondo wrote, his intention was didactic and hortatory. The injunction to respond to the divine call with words and action was constantly repeated. His continuous attack against the falsehood and pretentiousness of exterior piety, visions, prophecies, and rituals was not mere anti-clericalism but an attempt to lead his followers to the core of the Christian faith, the God-man.

The duality underscoring his writings was mirrored in the languages he used. Like many of his contemporaries, Biondo wrote both in Latin and the vernacular and was aware that in some cases Latin was preferable while in others the Italian vernacular worked better. We should not draw hasty conclusions from this fact, but we should not underestimate the significance of his vernacular writings.²⁵ As a matter of fact, on account of his hortatory and edifying intentions, Biondo's Latin production was indeed secondary. The texts 5–14 I collected in the Appendix are significant, but they illustrate a doctrinal approach that is constantly superseded

²⁴ Ibid. p. 149: 'State sicuro che o ad una via o al'altra siamo tutti salvi'.

²⁵ See LINES AND REFINI 2014.

by pastoral urgencies. If we exclude the important commentary entitled *De igne sacro*, Biondo wrote only three important texts in Latin, and for each of them, the use of Latin can be explained by external exigencies.

The first text is the letter to his nephew Paolo. The letter is written in Latin, and it is evident that Paolo received a humanist education both in Latin and Greek. At the beginning of the letter, Biondo acknowledged the value of these studies, but he wanted his nephew to move beyond them and realise that a practising faith was more important than any proficiency in literature. At the end of the letter, to prove his point again, Biondo went as far as to downplay the value of his own Latin *versiculi*. Like Dante in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Biondo used Latin to argue against any empty use of literary languages. The second text is the apologetic letter to an anonymous priest. The use of Latin can be ascribed to the official nature of the text. Here Biondo was trying to defend himself against various accusations and prove his orthodoxy. Finally, we have the *Commentarius*. It is important to realise that the text was originally written in vernacular and that his primary audience consisted of people who were probably not familiar with Latin. Although one might say that its Latin rendition helped preserve the text, nevertheless, it had the inconvenience of missing its target: it could no longer reach the audience for which it had been originally written. In its Latin translation, the *Ricordo* lost part of its subversive power.

In discussing Biondo's sources, I also emphasised how Biondo was well-versed in philosophy and theology. Even though we do not have names of specific sources and authors, from the intellectual categories, the range of themes he investigated, and the approach he adopted it is evident that Biondo had a comprehensive education and a curious mind. He was interested in vernacular poets, dabbled in encomiastic poetry, and ventured into religious poetry. The results were mixed and certainly did not suit everyone's taste, but we can appreciate the passion with which Biondo wrote. In addition, I pointed out that Biondo did not accept passively what he read. On the contrary, as indicated at various points, he was highly critical and selective. I emphasised how he highly praised some specific Franciscan authors while developing his own approach. More importantly, I underlined how he always tried to support his arguments by connecting to his own life the abstract ideas he developed. We have seen

multiple times how the personal sphere was the central hermeneutical lens through which he read history and understood its meaning.²⁶

The fundamental dichotomy of the irremediable clash between interior piety and Biondo's need to transmit his ideas to his audience has shaped the structure of the dissertation. Chapter 4, where I investigated how man lost God, was followed by Chapters 5 and 6, where I examined how God regained and perfected humankind. However, the salvation occurring in the individual sphere (Chapter 5) and the redemption actualised in the ecclesiastical dimension (Chapter 6) did not align. While personal salvation pushed Biondo toward self-reflection, ecclesiastical duties pulled Biondo towards the world. This conflict has come to the fore in many circumstances. The most evident is perhaps the conflict between Savonarola and Biondo. For Biondo, the Church was never allowed to get caught up in the affairs of the world. Unlike Savonarola, Biondo did not envisage a Church that could be mixed with the world. The differences between Savonarola and Biondo were not unique to them. An almost contemporary example comes from the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists of Münster took control of the city and established a millenarist theocracy. They regarded themselves as the elect. On the other hand, Conrad Grebel of Zurich (1497–1526), who was close to the Swiss Brethren, encouraged his audience to be like sheep amongst wolves; for him, baptism meant embracing suffering and tribulations.²⁷

Another example of Biondo's profound polarity comes from his views on *spogliamento*, which worked more or less smoothly in the sphere of individual devotion, and yet seemed to contradict the expansive and diffusive nature of the evangelising mission. When I investigated grace, I highlighted how grace was divided into sanctifying grace and common graces and how neighbourly love fell into the second kind of grace, jeopardising the very meaning of divine love. This duality shaped Biondo's distinction between inspiration and vocation, which *de facto* emptied the religious orders of their significance. It also shaped how the prophet and the preacher were supposed to approach their audience.

Finally, I examined the notions of the remnant and predestination and how they contradicted the concept of self-diffusive love. Leaving aside the implications of Biondo's radical interpretation of predestination, Chapters 6.2, 6.3, and 6.5 (respectively on spiritual direction, adoption, and the consequences of predestination) showed, once again, that Biondo

²⁶ On the pre-eminence of the personal experience, see CAPITANI 1991, p. 460: 'Francesco svolge sempre un'autobiografia'.

²⁷ For the Anabaptists of Münster, see COHN 1970, pp. 261–271. On Grebel, see CAMERON 2012, pp. 327–328.

did not write theological treatises but always resorted to poetic and visual imagery, in addition to drawing on his own experiences. The joy and the suffering that salvation and perdition meant for Biondo could not be enclosed within a *quaestio* debating issues *de salvatione* or *de perditione eterna*. Joy and suffering took the form of monsters and apocalyptic beasts, led Biondo to associate deception and anger with God, took the visual form of a wall, and, finally, were based on his inability to connect with other human beings. The passion with which Biondo spoke of adoption and tried to conflate eschatological and historical levels is an example. If there is one place where Biondo's voice can surely be detected, it is in the letter to Cecilia, where he confessed the coldness of his heart and equated coldness and suffering. There, most probably, was Biondo's excess of evil, which he could no longer bear, leading him to cry for death.

7.3 Why Is Biondo's Answer Important?

This summary of my findings shows how complex Biondo's answer was when he addressed the issue of salvation. An equally important question that must finally be asked and answered is: Why was it significant for us to know Biondo's answer? Let me reiterate the purposes underlying my research which I listed in Chapter 1.5: (1) the need to clarify the historical and religious context in Italy before the Reformation; (2) the importance of examining the interactions between doctrine and practice, clergy and laity, and teachers and disciples (all elements that generally fall under the label of spiritual direction); and (3) an investigation into the confluence of Pelagianism and Augustinianism that Ginzburg and Prosperi detected in the *Beneficio di Cristo* and that I wanted to examine in Biondo's works to show that the particular confluence of the two currents of thought and faith was not just accidental but had in Biondo a living example, and consequently that the idea God's love was inseparable from the idea of God's justice.

I hope to have answered points 1 and 2 by unfolding and corroborating my argument, but I would like to add one final consideration. In my view, an analysis of the historical and cultural context before the Reformation cannot ignore the examination of the conflicts that occurred between individuals and communities, believers and the Church, the centripetal force of inner faith drawing on God's *caritas* and the centrifugal force of expanding *caritas* fulfilling itself into neighbourly love. Likewise, an analysis of such notions as love, predestination,

grace, Lucifer, personhood, and *spogliamento* goes hand in hand with the investigation of the effects that these ideas had on individuals and society.

One might argue that Biondo did not suffer persecutions like the *fraticelli* and his preferred authors (Clareno, Olivi, Ubertino, Jacopone, or John of Parma), nor was he silenced by the Inquisition or religious authorities. It also seems that the conflicts with Savonarola eventually ended in his favour (even though Biondo disappeared from history while Savonarola has become a celebrated martyr). The Dominican was burnt, but his memory endured owing to both the tireless works of the *Piagnoni* and the merits of his thought; Biondo, on the other hand, continued his pastoral activities in the secluded town of Modigliana. I would like to correct this evaluation by suggesting that suffering does not necessarily take the form of bodily punishment. As noted by Philippe Nemo, the Book of Job speaks a great deal about physical and moral suffering, but there is ‘a very particular kind of suffering, one which is not reducible to any other kind and is the progenitor of them all: anxiety’.²⁸

A more subtle, but no less harmful form of suffering originates from self-censure. Think of his translation of the *Ricordo*, the *Commentarius*. For someone like Biondo, who devoted his life to spreading the message of Christ, was it not painful to have to resort to Latin when most of his audience, whose salvation was at risk, could not comprehend it? Was it not frustrating for Biondo to always look for trustworthy messengers to deliver his writings? These remain speculations on my part, and so I cannot provide a univocal answer. In the *Third Mystical Hymn*, Biondo asked Christ why evil people ruled in this world. The question might be rhetorical and commonplace if we look at it against the background of the universal history of literature and if we compare Biondo to the great names that certainly surpass him. However, the question was not meaningless for Biondo. As Löwith stressed, interrogating history means finding an answer to suffering. To those who think that Biondo’s answer is unimportant, I can only reply by repeating, with Chenu and Seidel Menchi, that we should not stop at some ‘renowned thinkers’, for, only if we steer away from the lures of canonical authors, we can pass ‘from literature to life’.²⁹

Let me now move on to the third point, the one concerning Pelagianism and Augustinianism – in other words, the tension between the *sistema della carità* and the pre-eminence of faith. In this dissertation, I have constantly argued that Biondo downplayed the

²⁸ NEMO 1998, p. 17.

²⁹ CHENU 1966, p. 225; SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 13.

value of human action and works, undermined the role of the intellect, refused to condone those who attempted to ascend along the mystical path, and harshly condemned self-lovers. Biondo held that, by undermining one's capabilities, God's grace was affirmed. However, I also showed the limits of his notion of *spogliamento*. Biondo was compelled to speak for Christ, he suffered for others, and he regarded his followers as friends in God. Ginzburg and Prosperi found the nexus that could unite Benedetto da Mantova (the Pelagian) and Marcantonio Flaminio (the Augustinian) in God's forgiveness. It seems to me that unless we polarise these two positions (something that undoubtedly happened in later years when Protestants and Catholics cemented their respective dogmatic fronts), these two lines of thought (the usefulness of works and the principle of *sola fide*) coexisted and were fluidly meshed in Biondo.

Importantly, the seemingly insuppressible need to conflate works and faith did not disappear with the rise of the Reformation. Seidel Menchi has pointed out that those who adopted the abstract principle of *sola fide* began to translate it into a more tangible and sensuous idea of *sola misericordia*.³⁰ In this passage from *sola fide* to *sola misericordia*, I think we can detect a fundamental feature that characterised so much of the religious piety in early modern Italy and that Biondo also exemplified: the pressing need to participate actively and personally in God's revelation and to understand this revelation in terms of love.

7.4 What Was Biondo's Legacy?

Relying therefore on everything I have argued so far, I can conclude that Biondo was a divided self: a secular priest and an advocate of personal piety, oblivious to rituals and ecclesiastical mediation, yet unable or unwilling to break with the Church of Rome. Biondo did not reach the open dissent that developed among the adherents of the *teologia del cielo aperto* nor did he entirely approve of the Roman position on works, *perdonanze*, and the predominance of exterior piety. In many ways, he can be regarded as a link between the spiritual Franciscans of the fourteenth century and the pious devotees of the Cinquecento (*spirituali*, as Firpo defined Reginald Pole, Gasparo Contarini, Giovanni Morone, and Pietro Carnesecchi), whose experience of the faith rested on a painful conflict between the desire to fully live their faith in

³⁰ SEIDEL MENCHI 1987, p. 153.

Christ and not to leave the Church.³¹ In this respect, Biondo is a perfect example of those people who, according to Prosperi, had two churches (*due chiese*).³²

In his own way, Biondo went back to the sources. It is indeed ironic that someone who always overtly criticised those who refused to obey also stressed the importance of acting according to his own way. After all, was not Clareno similar to Biondo in this case? Clareno was an obstinate promoter of obedience, poverty, and humility who yet could never submit during his entire life. Biondo's sources were the spiritual Franciscans, and from them, he learned the value of obedience and poverty, but he also identified himself with their martyrial tribulations. How long could one patiently suffer without crying for help? His *Second Mystical Hymn* opens with a cry to flee, escape suffering, and seek refuge beneath the Earth. The poem *Al foco* invokes self-annihilation and destruction to reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

Regarding the reception of Biondo's message and how his contemporaries responded to his religious propositions, three documents are relevant to us: Antonino Trombetta's *Quaestio*, the letter of Paolo Giustiniani to the three Florentine women, and the letter of the copyist found in the Seville codex. There is no need to dwell extensively on the first two sources as they have been edited and examined by Lodone.³³ Trombetta argued that the members of the commission who had been given the task to judge the *Ricordo* and the role of the zealous physician Giovanni Maria Capucci considered Biondo to be a follower of Vigilantius, an obscure heretic of the fourth century.³⁴ This evaluation indicates how detached the ecclesiastical authorities were from the reality of their time. Much more interesting is what Paolo Giustiniani had to say about Biondo. As Lodone pointed out, Biondo's doctrine challenged the idea of a hierarchial Church requiring the intervention of clerical mediation to make the experience of the divine accessible. I would like to stress that Giustiniani, Trombetta, and the friars of the ecclesiastical commission spoke of faith in terms of doctrine, dogmas, Papal bulls, and magisterial declarations. As I pointed out numerous times, Biondo did not produce a systematic theology but a *theologia poetica* that relied on a set of images to strike several chords within his readers.

³¹ FIRPO 2003, p. 9.

³² PROSPERI 2007.

³³ LODONE 2016a; LODONE 2019.

³⁴ See TROMBETTA 1504, fol. 108r: 'iste discipulus Vigilantii'. The main source on Vigilantius is Saint Jerome's *Contra Vigilantium*.

Something different is underscored by the letter of the copyist.³⁵ The copyist declared his complete obedience to his teachers: don Filippo (his master), the physician Capucci, Diambra, the mystic who had visions of Barbarina, and finally, Gabriele Biondo, *uomo vere divino*, a truly divine man.³⁶ The letter is undated; yet, Agapito Porcari, a friend of Biondo during the latter's Roman youth, already expressed his admiration for Biondo in similar terms in the 1470s. In addition to Biondo, the copyist mentioned a community of friends centred around Biondo and united in their mutual piety. Unlike the two previous documents, here, there was no theology, only a tragic existential call for salvation. The copyist had learned his lesson: recognition of one's sins, self-annihilation, and fear of God's eternal judgement were the principles of his faith. However, can we say that it was only a matter of fear? The images he used are terrifying, but there is not only a feeling of dread. His love for his friends surpassed fear abundantly: indeed, it allowed him to overcome his tribulations. He reached a position very close to that of Erasmus: there was mercy in judgement, and merciful love was actualised in support of friends, in an *ecclesia* of friends. This community did not seek fame.

As in the case of Bernardus Primus and the community he founded, both studied by German historian Herbert Grundmann, Biondo and his friends wanted to bring their faith to fruition, experience God in the quietness of their ordinary lives, and attempt to cross the gap separating words from acts. They wanted to close the gap – *iato* as Ovidio Capitani called it – between theology and anthropology, between the mystical experience of a charismatic person and the communal life of a Church that tried to learn from their charismatic leaders.³⁷ By all means, this was easier said than done. As noted by Capitani, the entire history of the Franciscan Order was the attempt to translate the untranslatable experience of Saint Francis into historical terms.³⁸ Jacopone summed it up in one line, which Biondo made his own: 'for many people it is checkmate when they have to turn virtue into action' (*Fra la virtute et l'atto multi hanno scacco matto*).³⁹ According to Grundmann, the community of Bernardus Primus disappeared from history: 'the silence of charters and other sources leads to the assumption that it never achieved great importance'.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, their aspiration was not to achieve 'great

³⁵ See Appendix, 4.

³⁶ Sev., fol. 135r.

³⁷ See CAPITANI 1991, who acknowledged his enormous debt to Giovanni Miccoli and his studies on Saint Francis's religious proposition (MICCOLI 1983 and 1992).

³⁸ CAPITANI 1991, p. 451: 'Un francescanesimo, quindi, che cerca la traducibilità storica dell'intraducibile significanza di Francesco.'

³⁹ Mag., fol. 37r. See *Laude*, p. 133: 'Entra la vertute e l'atto molti ci ode al ioco "matto"'.

⁴⁰ GRUNDMANN 1995, pp. 52–55.

importance' but only, as in Biondo's case, to be a 'living psalm' accompanying God's 'concert'.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 54. Add., fol. 193r-v.

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Appendix

This appendix is a collection of short texts, which, unlike Biondo's three major treatises (*De meditatione et deceptionibus*; *De amore proprio*; and the *Commentarius*), are either unfinished, in a poor state, or to be considered as works-in-progress. Some of them appear to be connected; they could be integrated into a future larger project (see documents 5, 11, 12, and 13). They all deal with doctrinal, theological, and philosophical problems (for instance, grace, the faculties of the will and intellect, divine will). Biondo alludes to a possible readership only once (see document 11 § 22). Each text has been given a title. Some of these titles correspond to those found in the manuscript (see documents 8–10). In the absence of a clear title, I used the first words of the corresponding text as the title. Each text is preceded by a short introduction, which summarises the main points of the text. For the transcription, I adopted a conservative approach and preserved the spelling. For example, while the Latin adverb *communiter* is spelt by Biondo always with a single m, the verb *communicare* and the noun *communio* are always spelt with a double m (with one exception in fol. 57r). The Italian *comunicare* and relative cognates, on the other hand, are always spelt with a single m. For easier reading, I resolved the abbreviations, modernised the punctuation, and divided each text into numbered paragraphs. In some rare cases, I added some words for clarification to make sense of the text. These additions are indicated by < >. Since the texts are dealt with during the dissertation's main body, I kept the notes minimum. Literal scriptural references are in italics; the locus can be found in the footnotes.

1. *Transitus beate Barberine per D. Gabr. Bl.* (Sev., fols 98v–100v)

I have divided the text in paragraphs to ease the reading.

1. /98v/ *Transitus beate Barberine per D. Gabr. Bl.*

Venerabilis pater salutem in Domino.¹ Perché credo che da magistro Aloisi sereti a pieno avisato de quanto accade de qua, pare che a me solo resti darve aviso del felice transito de la nostra Barbarina quale, a dì 18 del presente che so el quarto de la Assumptione de la Madonna, se ne andò in cielo, lassato de sé molto desiderio de consolatione mixto per la sua virtù et chiari segni de sua gloria.² So<no> però stato dubio se al presente dovea far questo, parendomi haver breve tempo a ciò. Da l'altro canto non posso contenermi che io non manifesti la gloria del Signore, et communici le casone de la letitia a chi è commune la pena. Tenerò adonca el mezo et dirò parte et parte lasserò per altro tempo.³

2. Finì doi anni el dì prefato de la Madonna overo la sua viglia che ella entrò in lecto dove è stata, como a voi è noto, fin a la morte, excepti doi o tre dì de quali non voglio parlare qui. Et questi tre dì furno in diversi tempi. De⁴ tutto questo spatio non intendo scrivere niente qui, peroché ineffabile è el suo acto intrinseco più assai che non è mirabile lo acto extrinseco. Accompagnarò spero in breve tempo con la Magdalena et la Lucretia la narratione per quanto porrò de quello che io senta de soi meriti, como anco spero fra pochi dì in un loco proprio in una medesima cassa accompagnare li corpi l'uno da l'altro distincti.

3. Voglio adonca solo dire qualche cosa del transito quanto specta a le parte extrinseche. Perché era stata li proximi precedenti a quella gloriosa solennità dì et settimane in un stato inaudito, morta dentro et fuora, como qualche volta se chiarirà piacendo a Dio, la mattina de la festa forno intermessi alquanto li soi più che infernali cruciati, et fo restituta a sé medesima per minima proportione de luce data a la sua rationale parte. Per quale li fu data notitia de la sua extrema povertà et miseria nel dì de tanta solennità, nella quale soleva per molti doni et gratie ineffabile triumphare con Christo /99r/ et con la madre.

¹ The recipient's identity is unknown.

² This the unique mention of this person in the whole of Biondo's writings. Barbarina died on 18 August 1494. See below, Appendix, 2.

³ Biondo's intention to be brief and to be more thorough in his examination of Barbarina's case is reasserted at the end of the letter. It is not clear if Biondo kept his promise as no other text which deals with Barbarina's death survives.

⁴ De] *follows questo cancelled from the Ms.*

4. Et perché haveva un continuo lume che li mostrava quello che secondo sé meritava, et da sé era, et per questo tale lume se vedeva esclusa et separata da Dio, como sua vera inimica eternalmente, et gustava, secondo la sua inferiore, gusto de desperatione et odio de la divina maiestà, et de tutte le sue creature con indicibile cruciato de varii sentimenti et gradi, secondo li variati mezi et obiecti, fo in quel tempo, per quel lume, sopra el senso portata, et gagliardamente facta contenta de sue pene per nova oblatione a quelle, et a qualunche a Dio grate, in sé ponere, et in quello instante medesimo li fo concesso quello che gran tempo prima li era stato negato: pregar Dio, et domandarli perdonanza de soi peccati, et finale misericordia, et folli immesso che ad impetrar questo troppo eccessivo dono a sé era insufficiente, et per tanto li fo data gratia de invocare a ciò el suffragio de le sue sorelle, Magdalena et Lucretia, che pregasseno per lei la Madonna, et insieme con quella domandasseno al Signore la predicta gratia nel qual concepto in una intellectuale visione, senza segni de accidenti, solo in virtuosa substantia, senza spatio de tempo, tutto insieme vidde, udì, et intese quanto se dirà.

5. Fulli presente la Vergine gloriosa, leta como familiare et intrinseca et amantissima, cum molta domesticheza et mostroli che era venuta in suo novo favore et aiuto, per non si partir mai più da sua compagnia, et come non voleva quella volta né mai più usassi altri suffragi che li soi, mostrandoli como era matre de Dio et advocata et protectrice de peccatori, et che li altri sancti per sé stessi non impetravano alcuna cosa, ma lei impetrava ogni cosa per loro. Et cossì la confortava, replicandoli che era matre de Dio, et sua speciale protectrice sempre stata, come lei medesima sapeva, et però stesse forte, et non dubitasse. Poi vedde la benignità del Signore, ineffabile verso sé. Et in questo mancò.

6. Et fo tornata al naturale intendere, incerta però se haveva per alhora a morire o a campare. Et però parata a l'uno et l'altro, et subito fu de novo immersa in sé medesima. Non però hebbe più el gusto de la desperatione, né anco⁵ /99v/ la actuale speranza de sua salute secondo el senso, ma altre indicibile pene nelle quale visse morta quanto al corpo, che se sentiva esser giacciato como la neve, benché continuo sudasse rabiando et spasmando, como ella diceva, de rabia et spasmo ineffabile fin al lunedì sera che poi passò.

7. Fra questo tempo molti sancti conforti dette a più persone con molta luce et sapientia, benché ella dicesse essere fora de sé et havere perso lo intellecto et la memoria, et in molte cose, imo

⁵ Anco] *follows* hebbe *cancelled from the Ms.*

quasi tutte, de ciò facesse segno. Fu domandata da me in questo tempo el suo sentire de sé medesima, et dir non si po' la sua profunda humilità et intima luce.

8. Hebbe tutti li sacramenti in questi dì et recevette quelli con grande humilità examinata da mi sempre al suo proposito minutissimamente. El lunedì anco, essendo lei de sano intellecto como che mai, io li ricomandai l'anima exprimendo in vulgare tutte le oratione. Et de poi li lessi el parlare del Signore facto da poi la cena, etiam in vulgare.⁶ Poiché con pena et fatica grande el suo intellecto, quasi in un profundo de pene immerso, era da lei levato a l'intendere commune, et maxime de le cose alte et molto spirituale, fu forza che io la lassasse posare alquanto. Et dissi tutto lo offitio de quel dì, cioè el matutino e le hore, perché la nocte havea vegliato expectando el suo transito. Et de tempo in tempo la haveva del suo profundo a cose a lei grate aiutata elevare. Et de poi l'hore, dubitando avesse a far el simile la nocte sequente, dissi matutino inclusive fino alla antiphona del Benedictus a la quale fui costretto a farli croce havendo già lei comenzato a far li tracti.

9. Havendo pronunciato solo questo, 'que est ista que ascendit,'⁷ signaila adonca et de poi un'altra volta li recomandai l'anima con tutte le ultime oratione, quale finite credendosi fosse morta cominzò a respirare. Et guardandomi con gesto de voler parlare et io la domandai /100r/ se mi conosceva et rispose che sì chiaramente. Tal cosa vista io li domandai se ella haveva paura de morire. Ella me rispose che no. Et domandandola io se ella se sentiva morire, ella mi rispose che sì, et che era molto contenta de la volontà del Signore. Alhora io li disse: 'Figliola mia adonca perché tu sei a la porta, senza fictione dimme el vero, hai tu alcuna minima speranza in cosa alcuna che tu habbi mai facta in questa vita?' Et ella me rispose chiaramente:⁸ 'Padre no,' con un certo affecto et elevatione de voce, segni manifesti che de core parlava. De novo la domandai et dissi: 'In che cosa adonca te fidi tu, et hai speranza in questo puncto?' Et ella rispose: 'Solo nella divina bontà et misericordia.'

10. Poco stette cossì et non facendo lei altri segni de passare, recordandome io che finito non haveva matutino, non me partendo del loco, recomenzai dal capitulo con Francesco⁹ che era meco et pervenuto alla antiphona et pronunciate le parole de sopra, 'que est ista que ascendit,'

⁶ If Biondo read from the Synoptics, i.e. Matthew (26:20–46), Mark (14:26–42), or Luke (22:14–46), Barbarina heard about the story of the betrayal and the events that happened at Getsemani. If he read from John 13–17, then, he told Barbarina of the foot-washing and then he passed to Jesus's farewell discourses. Notably, he read both the Vulgate and a vernacular translation.

⁷ Song of Songs 8:5.

⁸ Chiaramente] *follows* che no *cancelled from the Ms.*

⁹ Most probably Francesco da Savignano, one of Biondo's dearest friend. He was directly connected with the trial of the physician Giovanni Maria Capucci.

ella fece un gran tracto, et io continuando la antiphona, con immissione che de lei veramente se posseva dire tale parole, li feci un segno de croce con la candela che haveva in mano. Poi lassai le altre persone el simile fare, et finita la oratione, quella benedecta anima ascese in celo, como a la nostra Margarita de poi ha mostro el Signore, che senza gusto de pena de purgatorio, ella fu coniuncta al suo fine.

11. Poco de poi furono sentiti suavissimi canti in quel loco. Et de quello corpo comenzò a spirare odore suavissimo, maxime de la sua bocca. Remase la nocte in casa et fo vegliata da più persone devote fra le quale era una che haveva patito gran tempo, et alhora actualmente pateva gran dolore de zenochii, et stando a li piedi soi, non so se a casu overo studiosamente, con le sue zinocchie toccò li piedi de la Barbarina, quali erano prima che ella morisse quattro dì gelati, et dice che de quelli sentì uscire un caldo confortativo che durò per alquanto spatio /100v/ siché se sentì sanare et è rimasta sana.

12. La mattina poi ser Francesco nostro, accostandosi per provare se era vero quello che haveva udito del prefato odore, dice che lo sentì suavissimo, siché rimase molto edificato et consolato, essendo prima tribulato assai da certa tentatione.

13. La sor Diambra¹⁰ poi, essendo per la sua morte molto afflicta, dice per una intellectuale come quella de la Barbarina visione, — ne la quale non cade inganno, peroché è substantiale, et a solo Dio possibile nel intellecto fare penetrando la substantia de l'anima, et a quella novo modo de intendere dando — vidde la Magdalena, et Lucretitia, et Barbarina, insieme gloriose confortarla, et odì dirse alquante parole, per quale rimase molto consolata, et certa de quello che prima credeva.

14. Como fo un'altra volta nel dì della visitatione de la Madonna, preparandose a la communion, per una simile visione certificata de la gloria de la Magdalena et de la Lucretia, quale vidde con la Madonna pregar per lei el Signore. Essendo però molto distante la Lucretia da la Magdalena, quale era non molto dreto alla Madonna, et alhora intese che la Barbarina presto le havea a seguire, et più altre cose quale taccio. Et non vi maravigliate se in queste visione, quale io dico essere state substantiale, se nominano parlari et altri segni con ordine de cose, et successione de l'una a l'altra, il che richiede tempo, peroché non si possono dire simile cose altramente benché altramente si vedano che non si dicano, et basti per questa volta. L'altre

¹⁰ One of the most important followers of Biondo.

cose se servano ad altro loco et tempo. Dissi non volere scrivere altro. A voi me recomando et a tutti li amici.

Ex Mutillana die 29 Aug. 1494.

2. Epitaphs for the secular women Barbarina, Magdalena, Lucretia, and Margarita
(Sev., fols 81v and 101v)

1. /81v/ D. Gabrielis Blondi Epithaphium sanctissimis Magdalенаe, Lucretiae, Barbarinae
et Margaritae virginibus¹¹

Hoc ego peccator Gabriel pia Virgo dicavi

Magdalena,¹² aeternae Lucis alumna, tibi.

Mox tamen adiuncta est Lucretia,¹³ virgo sororque,

Longe impar meritis, maxima luce tamen.

Dehinc brevi apposita maior virtute secunda 5

Te tamen inferior, nomine Barbarina.¹⁴

Quartum infra hae mensem, post te ad sua regna vocatae

Clarescunt signa, Virgo beata, tecum.

Tertia sed post has ternos differitur in annos

Margarita, itidem virgo sororque, tibi. 10

Surda quidem mundo a primis puerilibus annis,

Aeternae verbi non tamen illa voci

Lucidus et frequens purgato in pectore sermo

Tantum uni hanc docilem fecerat esse Deo.

Suffusae luteo aurorae primoque rubore, 15

Virgineis agni gloria rara choris.

Qui iubar aeterni factum est habitabile solis

¹¹ The same text is Sev. fols 81v and 101r. The latter is written more clearly and polished; however, the former has the dates of the deaths of Lucretia, Magdalena, Barbarina, and Biondo himself added as *marginalia*.

¹² In the margin: 'Die 25 Aprilis in die sancti Marci migravit ad Dominum.'

¹³ In the margin: 'Die 24 Iunii in die sancti Ioannis baptistae ad Dominum migravit.'

¹⁴ In the margin: 'Die 18 Augustii in die sancti agapiti migravit ad Dominum. D. Gabriel die 14 Maii in die sancti Bonifatii 1511 volavit ad Dominum.'

Illiusque ardor pervius ac suavis,

Venturum qui vos misit se nunciat. At vos

Num veniet cito sol? Dicite num veniet?

20

2. /101v/ Benedictis Domino¹⁵

Magdalena ac Lucretiae saecularibus virginibus Mutillianensibus, consanguineis e Vico violano, ac Barbarinae earum consociae loci eiusdem accolae, Gabriel Blondi Flavii filius Flavius forliviensis, sacerdos loci, genitis in Christo filiabus incomparabilibus pater ac Christi sponsis gratiosissimis servus et divini in eis actus, grandi Dei munere, verus quamquam indignus testis, e propriis tumulis signorum ob claritatem hoc in monumentum translatis posuit.

Magdalena vixit annos 22, menses quinque, dies et cetera in die S. Marci obiit anno salutis 1494, 7 kalende Maii

Lucretia vixit annos 31, menses et dies et cetera, obiit 3 kalende Iulii eodem anno.

Barbarina vixit annos 29 menses et dies 8 obiit 15 kalende Septembris eodem anno.

Nova et singularis virtute Christo domino militavere proprio quaeque dono praedictae

Lucretia constans, Barbarina fortis, Magdalena victrix inaudito genere fuere

Miraris pie lector, crede, et virtutem senties.

Vale

¹⁵ The same text is also in Add., fol. 212r with some minor differences.

3. *Epistola excusatoria* (Add., fols 25r–28v)

The identity of the friar is unknown; however, we can say he was a Franciscan. Since Biondo pleads the innocence of the physician, who had been jailed by the Venetian authorities, we can date the letter to the early 1500s.

1. /25r/ Pater in Christo dilecte ac frater in eodem venerabilis, mutuam caritatem. Ego presentiam tuam non recolo, memoriam autem nominis tui odoremque fame tue ac sancti desiderii imitationis Christi et beati Francisci similibusque illi verorum dei cultorum et legitimorum ipsius filiorum, quoniam multa de te mihi Sancte Me comunis pater frater Andreas Perusinus retulit, tam recentem teneo ut si audiam ipsum mecum hac hora loquentem. Quam ob causam visis iis quas ad comunem et patrem et fratrem D. Johannem De Arimino nuper misisti, vehementer dolui mihi, nec minus vero condolui tibi.

2. Mihi inquam dolui quoniam multis et magnis peccatis meis factum est ut quod ego rerum omnium visibilium et intelligibilium maxime odi summopere detestor, omni conatu ut effugem de memetipso et de omni alia rationali creatura persequor et arceo undecunque, id mihi sive a te, quod non credo, sive ab alio, cui tu credere non debuisti, nequissime imponitur eque et falsissime.

3. Condolui autem tibi quoniam et si forsitan iuste non nihil doles, nimium tamen ne doleas vereor. Quod me suspicari cogit, hinc ea quam de te habeo inolita pridem opinio, inde illa quae mihi est cordis et mentis Magistri Iohannis Marie notitia. Ipse enim in iis que cum illi in tuis litteris obiicis ita se accusat ut purget, ita purget ut accuset. Accusat enim et modum sermonis et imperfectam intelligentiam eorum que ibi vel apud te vel apud alios loquutus est. Excusat mentem, excusat intentionem, excusat substantiam eorum quae dixit. Et propterea persuadet mihi quoniam novi a natura insitam illi ut affecte nimium atque aperte que sentiat ita et parum modeste minusque caute in ambiguis rebus atque in varias partes ac varios sensus versabilibus solere effari falsique suspectum ob nimios affectus, simplicitatisque nature proferre, quicquid etiam verissime concipit ac purissime ut concepit exprimere studet.

4. Quam etiam ob causam acri censura non semel impositum est illi a me, ut /25v/ multi sciunt, eorum, quae non sunt artis proprie seu naturalis notitiae, maxime vero eorum, que ex me audivit, silentium, quia certum sit mihi non capere eum plurima ex verissimis et purissimis Christi sanctorumque sensibus que a me passim de Scripturis sacris notantur in locum quemlibet ex singulis et sparsis scripturarum et doctorum locis collecta in unum concordemque ac centalem

sensum eque ab omni spirata et naturali veritate testimonium recipientem ut illi atque isti reddentem.

5. Cuius divini muneris ita noti mihi actu et habitu ut ignorari non possit, quia impressum indelebiter per monita singula variis modis semper inuritur, ipsa notitia facit ut neque meritis neque industrie proprie tribuam quod divine solius est laudis et divini operis ac non pro voto et arbitrato meo aut electione qualibet tribuitur, sed tantum spontanei datoris voluntate ac placito quantum et quando ipse vult, quoque tempore, loco, et modo, quaque mensura destinat qui largitur. Conceditur mihi in mea ipsius tantum et non alterius rei ante illam preter quam dei notitia.

6. De qua meorum mihi delictorum, meeque omnibus in rebus semper a vero et bono deficientie lapsusque et casus tam fixa et stabilis vel cognitio certa vel visio oritur, ut si liceat mihi quod verum est ut sentio effari, sanctissimo et verissimo iure iurando, affirmare possim mentis mee rationalem actum unicum esse, luctam scilicet certamenque indesinens contra statuam Nabuchodhonor et altare atque idolum antichristi eiusdemque odium. Insectatio, manifestatio, et quantum datur destructio, adeo me totum intus et extra hinc inde subtus et supra occupit et sibi soli vendicat, hoc nullo ocio intermissum negotium.

7. Eamque ob causam, ut superius scripsi, vehemens mihi et intimus dolor fuit, audienti ea de me perperam et mente pessima confingi, quorum neque <in> me neque extra me signum ullum indicium /26r/ ve minimum sit, cum et genus vite imperfectum omni ex parte in me palam sit, non minus veritate ita volentis quam vero voluntate, studio, et amore veritatis. Ipsa vero doctrina publice quidem sed necessariis tantum comunicata vel necessitate officii vel caritate consilii, nihil aliud in verbis et sensibus sonet ac sentiat, declaret atque ostendat, quam unicum esse ac naturalem et Patri equalem Iesum Christum dei et Marie virginis filium deum et dominum nostrum, qui ‘rapinam non sit arbitratus esse se equalem deo, sed per omnia exinaniverit semetipsum’, ut inquit Apostolus.¹⁶

8. Cuius rei contrarium nunc in suis membris faciat secunda bestia, *cuius numerus sexcenta sexaginta sex*,¹⁷ cohors magna immundorum spirituum illam inhabitantium ad effigiendam et exprimendam in ea similitudinem Iesus Christi altissimi et Dei. Cuius bestie habentis cornua agni similia datum est mihi Dei munere numerum computare in malitia, characteremque nosse in falsa vita et doctrina. Cuius muneris divini concessio mihi et perseverato in me legitimo usu,

¹⁶ Philippians 2:6–7.

¹⁷ Revelation 13:11–18.

ita possum errores bestie intueri et nosse in membris eius; ut illis implicari et divinum cultum aperto mihi et patenti ad sensum aut rationem vel occulto mihi tam in mea inferiore ac sensibili quam in superiore ac rationali mea, desiderio appetere nec velim posse nec possim velle.

9. Que me ad te scribere veritas et caritas impulit, ut scias me non antichristum esse nisi specie tenus forsitan et omni volendi genere invitum atque involuntarium et renitentem pro viribus corruptioni nature, per quam illi forsitan possum secundum signa quedam sine ulla substantia similis apparere eque ut plurimi cum vera et plena antichristi substantia per furtum et rapinam signa Christi adepti, similes eius apparent.

10. Atque /26v/ ut noris me et Beati Francisci affectuum desideriorum ac sermonium simplicissimorum, verissimorum atque altissimorum ob nimiam illorum cum Christi affectibus et desideriis similitudinem et pro suo gradu et mensura dono accepta identitatem devotissimam amantissimum ac studiosissimum amatorem, laudatorem, probatorem, ac defensorem indefessum et intrepidum, doctrineque Christi Apostolorumque et *Spiritui Sacre Scripture non littere*¹⁸ secundum interpretationem sanctorum, catholicorum, doctorum inherere, pavidum semper ac timidum, et de me ipso meisque sensibus eo magis dubitantem, timentem ac trepidum quo magis et meos affectus Christi sanctorumque affectibus substantialiter appropinquare, ipsum lumen veritatis ostendat, meaque vel scripta vel de divinis rebus verba et sensus Christi et sanctorum votis et intelligentie consentire, perspicuum sit mihi ea perspicuitate intelligentie, cui omni spirata et naturali veritati convenienti, naturalia quolibet in sua puritate accepta et spirata conveniat omnia, nec tam conveniat quasi inducta aut tracta quam presentia consistentiaque ac consubstantialia sint.

11. Servata mihi interim ac semper ex parte altera mee preterite ac presentis hebetudinis ignorantie rerum omnium ac stultitie certa visione non in quolibet sed in supremo tantum gradu, cuius est capax natura corrupta, cum equale odio et eiusdem gradus contemptu malicie ac nequitie proprie, ratione tam individui quam speciei nec minus infermitatis ac privationis omnis virtutis intelligibilis quae sit aut esse possit in actu quolibet, cuiuscunque rationalis potentie vel in ipsis potentiis.

12. Cuius gratuiti mihi muneris, supra et contra omnia mea impropria merita et propria peccata concessi, beneficio singuli ipsimet potentie, non potentie mihi sed impotentie sue videntur, agnoscantur et amantur quatenus pene et /27r/ divini honoris instrumenta equissima et

¹⁸ See 2 Corinthians 3:6.

ordinatissima sunt, non autem quatenus divine offense et humane iniurie occasionem habent vel minimam. Que mihi omnia hactenus et cum mortali omni tacita et industria omnia celata.

13. Et apud Deum tantum non autem apud me ipsum ullo modo recondita donec non fuit quisque interrogans me obliqua vel recta questione, quis sim, christianus videlicet an antichristianus. Iam vero per te ut velim potius atque adeo crediderim quam a te pulsatus petitione professionis ac nominis infedelem rem et indigna beneficiis domini mei Ihesu Christi, arbitratus sum sanctum nomen eius negare, antichristianumque expresse profiteri aut tacite confiteri, cuius nominis vi et comprehensione ideo non censeor neque appellor, quoniam ab eius mala substantia dei numere non concludor. Quemadmodum igitur quicquid non sum negare me veritati consonum et equitati condecens fuit ita quid ex me ipso aut in me ipso: quidve in Christo aut per Christum sum, interroganti aperta voce profiteri et veritati convenientissimum et iustitie fuit.

14. In quo meo sermone, siquid intelligis preter aut supra, extra vel contra statum ultimo genere et gradu corrupti hominis tam corruptione propagationis quam proprie voluntatis, totum id ei cuius est deo ascribe. Mecumque senties, quicquid vero infra eos, quos prefati sumus, humane corruptionis fines esse consideras, mihi imputa, meum enim solius ac proprium est. Et mihi consenties. Nec te scandalizet suspicio quelibet mee in hac re presumptionis et iactantie cuiusquam quem tu coegisti in insipientia loqui.

15. Hec scripsi de improvise, cessantibus preter opinionem a me expectatis negociis, propter que scribere ad te nunc posse me minime arbitrabar, scripsi autem et /27v/ quia Deus ita statuit et quemadmodum statuit. Quia diligo te in Christo dilectione intima ut ne supramodum doleas de aliena qui plusquam velim, habeas unde de propria doleas culpa ne ve arbitreris honorem Beati Francisci et religionis ipsius, aliunde quam ex amore verorum Christi affectuum et vera Francisci imitatione Iesu Christi posse pendere qui debeas nosse veritatis laudem ex mendacii ac falsitatis manifestatione ac detestatione oriri et cumulari. Licet contra hanc verissimam et negari impossibilem sententiam stet pro rostris et acie plurimorum cum dracone contra Michaellem pugnantium et veritati agnate repugnantium stulta et dannata sententia.

16. Quid dixerit medicus incertum est mihi. Ego tamen illum, tuis litteris motus, acerbè redargui. Iuste an minute plus aut minus equo non me penitet. Volui enim quod debui et quod satis fuerit agere. Culpa autem ipsius, si qua est, qualibet est tota ipsius, nulla autem ex parte mea est. Inter vos agite opto autem ut optime et sanctissime, humaniter ac benigne, ignoscatis invicem et condoletis condonetis quemadmodum spero.

17. Si quid autem quod nolim, secus acciderit vel hactenus accidit, id tu mihi queso ne iniuste ascribas. Neque enim ego in eius anima sum, neque ego errores doceo aut docui ipsum aut alium quempiam, neque discipulos ullos aliquando in disciplinam suscepi, neque me preceptorem ulli professus sum. Exhibui autem et populo mihi subiecto curam quam debui exemplo ac verbo, ad salutem illos invitans, ut potui. Respondique de veritate querentibus discendi non contendendi studio ea quae data sunt mihi penetrare et intelligere de iis quae salutaria petentibus novi. Hoc ipsum autem seorsum potiusque palam ob verecundiam petentium feci. Alterius generis discipulos nec habeo nec **/28r/** volo, sciens Dei munere quid desit mihi. Quia desunt omnia cui nihil est proprii veri et subsistentis boni. Ea ob causam nec pinnaculum nec suggestum nec pyrgum aut pergulum unquam ascendi, docendi causa, siquando mihi dederit Christus discipulum eius fieri posse, optime actum mecum putabo. Ac tunc minus presumam mihi nomen magistri cum discipulus eius esse et magistri et dominum.

18. Vide quantum distet quod tu credis a vero. Ego me ipsum non imitor, nec cesso alios admonere uti me non imitentur, nec quicquam magis timeo aut frequentius doleo quam fieri me et esse omnibus mihi convenientibus scandalum.¹⁹ Habeant discipulos quibus postquam fecere ut Christus datum est dicere quod fecerint. Secularis clericus sum. Eorum quae prohibita mihi non sunt, lege expressa vel tacita nihil obmitto, nihil non facio locis et temporibus suis. Minor Christi consiliis ad precepta me extendo ut in iis eorumque observatione, apprehendam *si quomodo possum in quo et comprehensus sum.*²⁰ Nihil autem supererogo, non quia nolim aut non cupiam, sed quoniam negari sentiam mihi non implenti iussa, non servanti mandata propter inhabitantem in me hoc est *in carne mea legem contrariam legi mentis mee.*²¹ Quotidie deficio, momentis singulis intra me ipsum recidens confundor, proptereaque id ipsum quod odi de me ipso in me non possum aliis imitandum componere. Habuit discipulos Christus, habuit Johannes Baptista, merito uterque. Magis tamen ille in cuius discipulatum transierunt ab ipso missi et pervasi Johannes discipuli qui discipulos quidem putantes ipsis esse quod ipse non putabat, non sibi sed Christo accepit, ad quem se relicto illos remisit, quemadmodum fecerunt santi omnes et novissime omnium ac maxime Beatus Franciscus paucis cognitus, paucio **/28v/** rebusque in formam susceptus ex animo, sicut ipse se probuit et quemadmodum suscipi volui. Quod de viro vere sanctissimo grandis nobis sermo et interpretabilis ad dicendum relinquatur alio loco et tempore.

¹⁹ See Matthew 18:7; Mark 9:42; Romans 14:13; 2 Corinthians 6:3.

²⁰ Philippians 3:12.

²¹ Romans 7:23.

19. Ignosce si quid scriptum est quod te offendat aut pungat. Non enim pungendi offensive studio scriptum est, sed plena et integra caritate. Tamquam mihi ipsi in Christo et coram Christo quia nec mentitus sum quicquam astute aut subdole composui, placens mihi aut querens aliud quam in Dei beneplacito et honore comuneque salutem, quemadmodum apertius et significantius spero me tibi a domino probatum in hac parte et cognitum fieri. Si quando unquam dabitur nobis comuni desiderio veritatis invicem colloqui invicem respondere et querere. Si qua sunt a me obmissa de iis que tu per nos scire desyderas, Dominus Johannes comunis frater prudentia sua supplebit. Bene vale in domino nostro, nostri memor in orationibus tuis nosque in Christo mutuo ama. Oramus et nos pro te ac pro omnibus vero affectu Christi et Francisci vestigia imitantibus atque ad perfectionem evangelice vite aspirantibus. Multo et vehementius ac frequentius quam pro ipsius parentibus et omnibus nobis in presenti sive alia vita secundum carnem et sensum ac naturalem rationem dilectis sumptis, ut novit genita eternaliter et in tempore humanata veritas Christus Iesus quem tu testimonium sue gratie nunc et in futuro iudicio invoco sicut et iudicem hac in re letus expecto.

Ex plebe Mutilliane.

4. Letter of the Copyist (Sev., fols 135r–136v)

The letter is undated and there is no place indication. The hand is similar to that which composed the manuscript; we can assume therefore that the letter was written by the copyist.

1. /135r/ Honorando quanto padre in Christo Don Philippo, et mio patrone et mio maestro, et se quanto evidenter non cossì al presente tamen me cumfido in Dio per l'avenire, se piacerà a chi me ne po' dare la gratia. Et honorando quanto patre messer Gian Maria, mio cordialissimo patre. Et honorandissima in Christo matre mia sor Diambra.

2. El Signore sia con voi tutti quanti et tutte le famiglie vostre, et con tutti che temeno Dio et desiderano et amano misser Gabriello, vere divino, peroché tutto in lui et tutto nel divino honore in vita et in morte resolutò, perfectò, et consumato, tra quali timenti Dio, et che mancano de misser Gabriello, et che desiderano et vorriano (quanto in questa vita nullo altro nulla altra cosa) solo misser Gabriello (benché havutole et venutome dreto et cercato de tirarme sempre verso Dio, essendo continuo sommerso nel vitio de la mia falsità et duplicità con Dio, et quello che ho facto²² in vita sua et a presentia sua quello medesimo io faccia oggi, pur non vorria desiderare altro como me par desiderare, et Dio me lo faccia desiderare solo essere con voi tutti de lui misser Gabriello.

3. Et non voglio vivere se non è Christo per concedermelo /135v/ et levimi de questa vita che non ce ho che fare un pelo. Nulla è in mi vita. Nullo ho fine in mi. Nullo in me fundamento, se non sono racomandato a misser Gabriello, ma solo peccato, offesa de Dio, et vanità, et frustratione de tutti miei giorni da si che nacque fino a questo punto.

4. Io, honorandi i mei patri et madre sor Diambra, sono sano et con altri qui che ve desiderano de vedervi. Sia pregato Dio, che ve conservi tutti quanti ancora voi, che possa essere con voi, che possesse stare a vostra obedientia, et pregate Dio che me mandi una saetta da cielo, et a questa hora sia sprofundato nel centro de l'inferno, che reputarò Dio farme gratia et misericordia, che non me lassi più a colmarmi nel peccato, et che me sententie a l'una et l'altra morte²³ se voi non veda, se voi non me corregiate, se da voi non sia castigato, se da voi non sia

²² Facto] *follows* con Dio *cancelled from the Ms.*

²³ See SEGNERI 1740, p. 46: 'Convien che qui ve reduchiate a memoria, come la nostra Natura era soggetta a una doppia morte, e di colpa e di pena. Era suggestta alla morte di colpa, sì per quel peccato originale, in cui nasciam tutti, e sì per li peccati attuali, che vi aggiungiamo, raddoppiando con debiti nuovi il debito vecchio, lasciatoci dal nostro primo Padre Adamo. Questa morte alla Grazia, che fu la prima, tirava in conseguenza dietro di sè la morte seconda, cioè la dannazione.'

pregato, Dio me percota con la mano sua, et siate pregato ancora voi che pregate Dio che li piaccia nel fine mio farne misericordia, contra ogni rasone et contra quello che è iusto.

5. Et tremo in la da voi de ogni cosa perché chi ha del tempo, chi è conficto de pene, altri afflicti da Dio, altri afflicti dal mondo, et chi da l'uno et l'altro, che so io che cosa è odo, che è summo mio danno, in tutto contrario a Dio, anco in questo /136r/ non posso sentire che nisuno mancasse de misser Gabriello che non voglio vivere. Vanno nella confidentia de Dio et cossì, nel riposo et pace sempiterna et gloriosa gratia collocati, da tante penalità levati, cosa a mi desiderabile, che non devo desiderare se non ogni bene vostro, ma solo io sotto al celo sono lo scontento, remango el manco, peroché a tutti sono debitore, che me vedea tractabile una volta como per nanti intractabile, et cosa inimica et rebelle a Dio.

6. Cercati, quanto Dio ve concede, stare sani, se a Dio piacesse che giovassivo ad altri. Io me recomando a Dio, che se li piacesse et a voi fosse possibile ch'io venisse, mo mo io lasso tutto, et povero et senza valore, me ne vengo, et butto me nanti pedi vostri. Io, se è vero como me pare de volere credere a Dio, pigliare dico in fede da Dio che lui me exerciti el tempo che 'l vole, et sia senza voi, et in cosa però da dovere essere in utilità et tale quale et tanta quanta²⁴ piacerà et vorrà lui, et questo quando piacerà a lui. Et in questo mezo quanto al proposito di sopra, io crucci et viva misero et infelice. Voglio havere patientia. Non me sono già appiccato o desperato, ma sto nelli confini, et non ho de eligere se non de doverme /137r/ amazare mi medesimo nanti che²⁵ volere dovere sempre stare con el diavolo, che io posseda lui e lui me, se Dio non per sua omnipotentia non remova me (quando che sia) essere ingiottito dal diavolo.

²⁴ Quanta] follows et cancelled from the Ms.

²⁵ Che] follows devere cancelled from the Ms.

5. *Ratio triplicem actum facit* (Mag., fols 19r–22v)

The text begins with a short introduction (§ 1). Here, Biondo explains the three acts associated with the faculty of reason (*ratio*) and the extent to which human intellect can understand God. Some attempt to cross the limits imposed by nature through the use of drugs, others through fasting, meditations, and by observing night vigils (§§ 2–3). These actions are inspired by demons (§ 4). Finally, with the help of illumination, some can pass from meditation to contemplation (§ 5). There can be either a natural or a supernatural illumination. Biondo is interested, firstly, in the case of natural illumination (§ 6). After answering a personal doubt, Biondo confronts the problem of supernatural illumination (§ 7). He clarifies grace's centrality against human industriousness (§ 8). After pointing out that illumination is only temporary, Biondo shows that the soul returns into the body, conscious of its sinful state (§ 9). The text appears to end abruptly.

1. /19r/ *Eiusdem reverendi presuli domini Gabrielis Blondi.*

Ratio triplicem actum facit: discurrit seu ratiocinatur; componit seu cogitat; meditatur seu inquerit veritatem et substantiam rerum seu formam. Discurrit per phantasmata seu rerum imagines in accidentibus notis. Componit seu cogitat abstrahendo phantasmatum similitudines et invicem illas commiscendo, ac novas imagines ex illis formando. Meditatur seu inquerit in accidentibus rerum causas et rerum esse ac ipsas formas. Et quoniam ipsa per se non aspicit sed per sensus et sensibilia, et rerum cause ac veritas ipsarum esse latet sub accidentibus, non pervenit ad optatum sed, ut potest, odoratur utrumque plus aut minus, secundum quod ratio est melior et maiori lumine nature, quae intra hos fines iacet, illustratur. Fortis tamen ratio per dispositionem organi et secundarum causarum favorem ad suam perfectionem ducta, quia purius accipit phantasmata et ea magis abstrahit ac separat et velocius miscet et magis unit, de causa et veritate ipsarum esse melius opinatur, et facit sapientes /19v/ naturaliter. Isti tamen stant in suis terminis; et vident se naturaliter intelligere quae intelligunt.

2. Si autem isti adhuc se magis exerceant in speculabilibus, crescit actus et facilitas agendi eorum rationis, in tantum ut videantur super naturam intelligere. Si autem isti iidem ultra usum addant et artem in disponendo organum per pharmaca et ieiunia et applicationem vehementem animi ad aliquid intelligibile, semotis omnino aliis curis, et amplius inspectis astris tempore favorabilis influxus ad id - quasi applicant activa superiora passivis partibus sue rationalis bene disposite - tantum lumen capiunt et tantum agendi agilitatem circa naturalia intelligibilia per

actus rationis supradictos, ut putent se quasi super naturam ferri, et intellectus eorum videatur potius pati quam agere, quia nec possunt volentes in acto suo sistere, abstractiones et meditationes suas; et sunt in periculo destruendi organi nisi sit valde virtuosum et potens laboris ac ponderis. Et qui huiusmodi sunt ipsi quidem non solum sciunt hec in se naturaliter agi; sed quia sentiunt quod actus ille est adeo supra comunem et usitatum nature cursum, modum, et virtutem, ut non recipiat operationem cum illa. Credunt /20r/ istum esse ultimum rationalis illuminationis terminum; et quod de sanctis illuminatis attribuitur divino supernaturali influxui, isti deputent secundarum causarum favori et proprie industrie; et hoc dicunt tam de prophetis quam de aliis quomodolibet illuminatis, omnes actus gratie coartantes intra limites nature. Et ideo tales communiter de religione male sentiunt et sibi ipsis multum credunt, fidem reputantes stultitiam, ut Averrois et similes ei in hoc multi.

3. Est aliud genus quorum organum est eque ut illis aut ex aliqua parte per se dispositum aut disponi aptum; et hi quidem si per viam spiritus incedentes studiis se applicant speculabilium, et sint curiosi et sui amatores, nec sibi caveant, aut quia se ipsos non no<ve>rint aut quia ne sciunt vicia sua cognita declinare vel negligant, quoniam in via spirituali exercentur ieiuniis, vigiliis, et meditationibus.

4. Demon, videns vasa apta sibi ad deceptionem sui ipsorum et aliorum, inspirat eos illa agere per quae disponatur eorum organum ipsis hoc ignorantibus. Et adhibet forsitan ac applicat ipse invisibiliter pharmaca. Et facit denique istos cadere quasi casu. Et, ut ipsi putant, divina spiratione agere quae superioris ex arte faciunt et ipse applicat activa passivis, eorum mentes erudiendo aut per /20v/ somnia de futuris ex astrorum impressione et demonum cooperatione, aut in vigilia quasi in meditatione sacrorum et divinorum. Et ipsi dum sentiunt se ita supra rationis comunem cursum et modum trahi et quedam sibi abdita patere, a Spiritu Sancto illuminari se putant, et fiunt sibi ipsis sub divino nomine credentes eo magis se ieiunis et austeritatibus dantes, quo per medium illorum senserunt se ad eam excellentiam pervenisse et sic multis et variis ac quasi infinitis modis demon plurimos decipit. Et isti magna faciunt, coluntur et adorantur, procuratore demone etiam in conversionem quandoque fidelium aliquorum, ut eliciat ex ipsorum intrumento aliquod a se maius et magis intentum malum ipsorum et aliorum; et de iis demum non quidem propter ipsos nisi cognoscendos et vitandos cum suis viciis veriis et falsis virtutibus dicta fuit hec, cum mihi non alias de ipsis cura sit.

5. Ceterum ii, propter quos sermo assumptus est, qui ex meditatione et per meditationem transeunt vel ducuntur in contemplationem, multum diverso itinere ducuntur. Nam omissis

eorum principiis et mediis usque meditationem perfectam, dicam aliquid quomodo eorum meditatio transeat in intelligentiam et quomodo intelligentia intellectum pariat et contemplationem.²⁶

6. /21r/ Et primum non negabo quia eorum mens aliquando illustretur naturaliter tantum, per dispositionem organi et applicationem ad causas superiores, tanquam passivorum ad activa, non quod ipsi hoc quaerant <aut> procurent aut advertant sed Deo ita disponente nunc ad exigentiam instantis eis ipsis, ut disposuit a principio dum ordinaret astrorum influxus ex tunc prout ex nunc. Etiam credo quod aliquando gratia perficiendo concomitetur naturalem influxum tam in dispositione organi quam in illustratione disposite rationalis. Quid enim mirum si idem agens diversis mediis idem agat, idem per medium gratie et per medium nature dum gratia est ibi perficiens naturam,²⁷ vel opus eius id est secundarum causarum sicut divina potentia per se concurrat astro formativo corporis infundendo animam illo formato, quam non potest infundere astrum et sic perficiendo opus illius, quod utique est opus suum per aliud medium, sicut infusio anime est opus proprium sine alio medio. Illustratur igitur aliquando rationalis eorum qui recte in Deum tendunt etiam naturaliter tantum. Sed quia hoc totum servit meditationi, proprie loquendo, non contemplationi nisi in latitudine verbi, et multum improprie ac dissimiliter quantum distant celi a terra, licet illam /21v/ quandoque sequatur raptus, ut in Socrate et ut ego credo in Scoto.

7. Dicam nunc quomodo illustretur supernaturaliter, quia tunc ex meditatione transit in intelligentiam rationalis pars anime. Sed prius attingam unum dubium adhuc mihi: utrum scilicet illustratio supernaturalis accedat naturali influxui et dispositioni nature ab extra semper: vel eorum alteri, an per se, et disponat organum et faciat in instanti operationes secundarum causarum in rationali <parte>. Et certe non dubium est mihi quod secundum non expectat, immo sepius facit contra illud, et credo idem de primo. Et auderem dicere quod multo magis, sed nolo neque hoc neque aliud de tota hac materia nisi opinative dicere, ne videar nimis de me considerare.

8. Ad propositum redeundo, dico quod aliquando post legitimam exercitationem rationalis in meditatione Dei vel sui vel eorum quae ad alterutrum cognitionem ducunt, quando Deus vult, sollicitam rationalem <partem> in investigatione quesitae veritatis et cause rei, novo lumine vestiendo, sistit auferendo ei naturalem appetitum inquirendi ostensa aliquo modo veritate. Et

²⁶ On the distinction between contemplation and meditation, see PANZIERA 1492, fols 8v–15v.

²⁷ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2: ‘Gratia non tollit, sed perficit naturam’.

tunc rationalis quae prius per seipsam ambulabat, mota quidem a gratia et adiuta ac concomitata, sed insensibiliter et quasi ex se, nunc non sue sed gratie /22r/ motu agitur, quasi ipsa non ipsa sit in se, sed in gratia, sicut vere est.²⁸ Et tunc rationalis <pars> mutat nomen sicut et actum ac modum agendi et iam sue discursu intelligens nudam quodammodo veritatem appropinquat ad separatarum substantiarum similitudinem, quae vident rerum nudam substantiam omissis accidentibus. Et ideo intelligentia appellatur, quia eius similis sit, et eius actus est intellectus id est veri ac cause visio quedam, *licet imperfecta in comparatione eius quam habitura est postea separata*.²⁹

9. Hec igitur intelligentia, cum se habet per modum transeuntis, intellectum parit, cum vero sistit, contemplationem per intellectum hunc generat. Habet autem principium intelligentia a causa extrinseca, id est a gratia. Finem vero ab intrinseca, id est ab infirmitate rationalis, pondus laboris non ferentis et in se ipsam recidentis, si aliunde non detur ab alio extrinseco, id est a creatura. Et ideo quae dum elevaretur sensit se contra proprium meritum et supra vires elevari. Iam postquam recidit a lumine in proprias licet minus densas quam antea tenebras, cognoscit aperte culpa /22v/ se propria cecidisse. Et sic seipsam incinerat et sub Deo anihilat, proficiens subinde tantundem in sui quantum et in Dei cognitione. Cuius rei contrarium contingit superioribus, curiosis et deceptis. Et hec de intellectiva pro nunc qualiter perficiatur sufficiant. Ceterum qualiter volitiva purgetur, uniatur, inflammetur vere, et qualiter falso sibi hoc tradat: alia est ratio.

²⁸ Est] *follows* Et ideo intelligentia appellatur quia eius similis fit, et eius actus est *deleted*.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

6. *Bonitas divine nature* (Mag., fols 23v–24v)

This highly compressed text is Biondo's closest attempt at dealing with the mystery of the Trinity. It can be divided into a doctrinal and an exegetical part. According to the Dionysian principle (*bonum diffusivum sui*), it starts with God's definition as the love that communicates itself. Both the creation and the two Persons of the Son and the Spirit originate from the Father's fontal love (§ 1). Three elements symbolize the *circumincessio* of the three Persons: the Spirit in the sacred texts, the water (a symbol of grace), and the blood in nature (§ 2). Nature obeys grace by becoming its matter (§ 3). Grace obeys the Scriptures by following the holy texts' rules and laws (§ 4). The Spirit obeys, firstly, nature but then grace (§ 5). In the second part, Biondo explains the various senses associated with the Scriptures to show how the Spirit obeys, initially, nature and, then, obeys grace. (§ 6) The first sense is historical or literal. Then, we have the prophetic. Both are related to historical events. (§ 7) When the Spirit talks about interior and moral facts, it follows grace.

1. /23v/ *Eiusdem Gab. Bl.*

Bonitas divine nature, preter actum intrinsecum quo se ipsam communicat in productione secunde et tertie persone, communicat se etiam extrinsece in productione rationalis, corporee et mixte creature.

2. Et sancto eius ac perfecto operi *testimonium perhibent Spiritus in scriptura, aqua in gratia, et sanguis in natura.*³⁰ Quorum unum perficit alterum, et alterum alteri servit, et circumincedunt se invicem in similitudinem divinarum Personarum; quibus etiam per attributa respondent; et formant triplicem statum in creatura, quorum quilibet alteri similiter servit; et vel formatur vel perficitur ab altero aut in altero. Atque horum omnium quatenus ad institutum facient, propriis quibusquam locis, rationem explicare paucis conabimur.

3. Natura enim gratie servit ut materia forme ad ipsam se ex tota intentione disponens tripliciter, ad tres formas – bonam, meliorem, optimam – suscipiendas. Quae tertia secunde et prime forma est vera. Secunda tertie instrumentalis et exemplaris non autem substantialis est ut prima secunde et tertie de quibus infra dicetur.

³⁰ See the Vulgate 1 John 5:8: 'Et tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in terra: spiritus, et aqua, et sanguis: et hi tres unum sunt'. See also John 19:30–34.

4. Gratia servit Scripture, ad ipsius leges et instituta se accomodans in dispositione /24r/ ac formatione nature.

5. Scriptura autem, *hoc est Spiritus eius vivificator, nam littera occidit*³¹ nature primum, dehinc gratie servit.

6. Nature servit primum illius decursum extrinsecum in genere et in spetie distribuendo. In genere, principia, media, et fines, temporum mutationes et successus statuum et regnorum. In spetie collectivias multitudines, varias et singulares personas, propriosque actus et passiones illorum notando. Hinc exit sensus histori<c>us seu literalis et propheticus.

7. Deinde intrinsecum, ex parte alicuius multitudinis, ex toto autem singularium personarum actus mentis et passiones depingens; et hinc exit sensus moralis. Servit gratie: in genere illius actum extrinsecum in distinctione statuum, per dona et actus varios, similiter et singularium personarum signando et hinc exit sensus allegoricus et propheticus totus et ex parte aliqua moralis. Servit gratie in spetie internum illius actus in accessu et recessu vario, ac intensione, extensione et remissione multiplici eius, ex parte cum multitudine aliqua varie distinguibili, ex toto autem cum singularibus personis: et hinc exit sensus moralis ex toto, et ex parte /24v/ propheticus. Propheticus quatenus singulares personas tangit et signat in suis mentis itineribus moralis in illis et in omnibus aliis locis; in quibus semper mirando dei consilio non tam est illis applicabilis et reductibilis, quam eis subordinatus serviens et subiectus omnis literalis scripturae totius cuiscunque generis sensus. Servit adhuc magis in spetie triplicem nature dispositionem ad triplicem terminum et perfectionem sui suscipiendam a gratia.

³¹ 2 Corinthians 3:6.

7. *Pars superior et inferior hominis* (Mag., fol. 25r–v)

In this short text, Biondo clarifies his understanding of the human body, desires, passions, and bodily motions (*motus*). His description starts from the lowest level: sleep, hunger, weariness (§ 1). He continues with appetites and fear (§ 2). Then, he speaks of those motions born out of love and senses (§ 3). Finally, he deals with imagination, curiosity, desire for knowledge, presumption (§ 4). These motions, which are in the highest part of the animal side of human nature, seem rational but are not. Notably, the first motions belonged to Christ and his mother; the latter were absent in both.

1. /25r/ *Eiusdem reverendi presuli domini Ga. Bl.*

Pars superior et inferior hominis, homo novus et vetus, interior et exterior, possunt varie distingui. Et primum inferior sic. Nam sunt quidam eius motus qui tantum carnis sunt. Et hi subdividuntur. Nam quidam sunt inseparabiles a veritate nature prout nunc est natura corrupta ut fames, sitis, somnus, lassitudo, et alie similes passionis; quidam separabiles ut motus membrorum, generationis inordinatio sensum ut videlicet gustus, nimius appetitus, et passio, et sic auditus, et relinquorum, et hi non fuerunt in Christo nec matre veneranda similiter summersio rationis in somno.

2. Sunt alii motus sensus et hi quoque distinguntur. Nam alii sunt circa obiecta sensuum per appetitum; alii circa contraria per horrorem quia visus sistit in pulchro, gustus in dulci, et cetera et contraria arcet.

3. Sunt tertii motus eius a sensualitate, id est, ab amore sensuum.³² Et hi sunt circa ea querenda et servanda; quibus sensus quiescunt, et alia fugienda ac vitanda, quibus /25v/ turbatur. Et hinc est appetitus divitiarum et temporalium omnium, et hi minus fuerint in utroque.

4. Sunt quarti motus animalitatis, id est supreme partis ipsius sensus, quae adiacet fine rationis parti, et plus de illa participat quam tertia, quae etiam aliquid decerpit rationis. Et hi motus supreme partis querunt rationales fieri, esse, et videri. Unde exit appetitus discendi, sciendi, docendi, ostentandi suas excellentias, quibus argui et concludi putat quod sit rationalis in adeptione, conservatione et usu eorum. Nascitur curiositas ex appetitu sciendi vana et inutilia; presumptio de scitis et stabilibus proximis secundum imaginationem et non rem. Nascitur de

³² Sunt] *follows* alii motus sensus *deleted*.

tertia inanis gloria et iactantia, et appetitus laudis et phame. Et hac omnia ad inferiorem rationis partem spectant. Nam et si inferior tamen ratio est, et hi fuerunt minime in alterutro.

8. *De potentia volitiva hominis quotuplex sit* (Mag., fols 26r–27v)

The text investigates how many different aspects constitute the human will. A similar subject was supposed to be dealt with in document 9 (see the proposed table of content in § 1). The two texts are perhaps part of a more extensive treatise. This text is structured as a series of questions and answers. Biondo starts by dividing the faculty of the will into two parts (§ 1). The first is rational and superior. The second is sensible and inferior. These two parts can either choose (*electrix*) or love (*amans*). The *electrix* can choose either the ‘good truth’ (*bonum verum*) or the ‘true good’ (*verum bonum*) (§ 2). The *electrix* deals with the two objects either affirmatively or negatively (§ 3). Therefore, it has four possible acts: love the ‘true good’ or flee the ‘true evil’ (*verum malum*); love the ‘good truth’ (which is what the intellect has declared to be good) or flee the ‘false good’ (*falsum bonum*). Biondo begins to analyse the loving part (§ 4). Before he continues, however, he is keen to establish the centrality of the choosing. The human being always desires something, while the intellect can either know or not know. For this reason, like the *electrix*, the *amans* can pursue either the ‘good truth’ or the ‘true good’ (§ 5). In § 6, Biondo examines the difference between this choice and the previous one, analysed in § 2. The first choice was unique, simple, and instantaneous. The second choice has a duration, is duplex, and can be divided into pure act and habit. Finally, Biondo considers how the second choice can choose the ‘true good’ and the difference from the first choice (§ 7). The second choice pursues the *verum bonum* with fierce love; it adheres to its object and cannot move from it. Similarly, the *amans* refuses and moves away from what it does not love (§ 8).

1. /26r/ *Eiusdem reverendi presuli domini Gab. Bl. De potentia volitiva hominis quotuplex sit*

Quotuplex est hominis volitiva? Duplex prima divisione.

Que sunt eius partes prime? Rationalis et sensitiva, superior et inferior sicut due sunt ipsius anime partes.

Volitiva, in quantum est una trium potentiarum anime rationalis, patiturne alias sui divisione in partes reales diversas? Patitur.

Quomodo potest dividi cum sit una? Quomodo dividitur anima et remanet una.

Que sunt volitive partes? *Electrix* et *amans*.

Que est electrix? Ea quae precedit intellectum et ostendit intellectui imponendo quid intelligat.

Que amans? Ea quae necessario intellectum sequitur sistens in cognito ab intellectu bono.

2. Electrix patiturne divisionem? Patitur.

Quam? In eam partem quae appetit verum bonum et aliam quae appetit bonum verum, et unaqueque habet actum duplicem, affirmativum et unum alterum negativum.

3. Primus et affirmativus appetentis verum bonum est appetendo ferri in verum apertum bonum. Secundus, illi contrarius et negativus, est, ex naturali potentie et sic potenciali tantum /26v/ odio, fugere verum apertum malum. Actus vero affirmativus appetentis bonum verum est appetendo ferri in aliam appetitum a socia potentia bonum ut verum. Contrarius illi et negativus ipsius actus est ex actuali odio, gustati falsi boni actualis cum horrore, fuga illius proportionabilis odio.

4. Volitive rationalis potentie amans portio patiturne divisionem? Patitur.

Quam? Eandem quam electrix illius.

Quare? Quia electrix domina et regina est, utens intellectu ut ministro, amante ut regno. Et sic ipsa est unum cum suo ministro et regno. Est enim anima nihil aliud quam actus substantialiter, et hic actus rationalis est quia ipsa voluntas rationalis est. Est ergo in anima voluntas quidem quasi ut substantia, intellectus vero quasi ut accidens. Propter quod cum non possit non velle, potest tamen non intelligere; atque idem prorsus quantum ad hec in demone est; et ideo bestia a Domino dicitur qui ex arbitrii libertate ipse sibi fecit ex sua substantia accidens; dum naturali intellectu non est usus naturaliter et sic substantialiter; sed est usus innaturaliter et sic peregrino et novo modo et quasi accidentali et sic /27r/ quasi accidentaliter. Eodemque modo faciunt miseri homines et ideo bestie sunt ut demon et multo magis.

5. Amantis portio volitive potentie pars electrix: quae rursus dividitur in appetentem verum bonum et appetentem bonum verum.

6. Quomodo appetit primum verum bonum et in quo differt a primo electricis actu simili actus eius? Differt primum tempore dupliciter. Primo quia precedit non solum actum eius, verum etiam actum intellectus. Differt etiam tempore quia duratione. Illius enim actus quasi instantaneus est, istius protenditur. Differt etiam aliter quia illius actus simplex et unus est; istius autem primum duplex est. Dividitur enim in actum purum et habitum. Rursus actus puri tot sunt divisiones quot sunt renovationes et genera: quia alius alio fortior: et eque alius alio

longior, dum hic plus intenditur et alius plus alio extenditur. Habitus etiam multiplex est, quia eque ut actus intendi et extendi potest; potest augeri; potest minui; potest tolli; potest reparari.

7. Quomodo appetit verum bonum amantis haec portio electrici similis et in quo differt ut sit non eadem sed similis? /27v/ Differt primum motu quia fertur in illud violentius; differt duratione quia sistit pertinacius inherens et quasi moveri nescia. Minus tamen violenter fertur quam socia quae appetit bonum verum, quia illa quasi lege omni soluta vi tamen nature integre aut corrupte fertur; hec vero legibus veritatis iuncta illis temperatur, propter quod quantum est electricis parte simili vehementior, tantum socia ipsius amantis quae bonum verum appetit remissior.

8. Quod autem de activo utriusque actu contingit, idem de negativo per omnia, nisi quis addat quod violentius etiam contraria arcere et horrere quam naturalia appetere utraque videtur. Hec autem vera cum sint in iis que vel recte appetuntur, vel recte etiam fugiuntur ab his partibus, recipiunt tamen mirabilem vim et augmentum partium actus obliqui et perversi earum et omnino exleges fiunt ac propterea irrevocabiles et immutabiles sunt ac precipue in arcendis contrariis quae naturali corruptione precipites in suos actus ferre non possunt. Ea autem contingit simpliciter vera esse, quoniam falso simpliciter opponitur nihil nisi simpliciter verum.

9. *De libertate arbitrii* (Mag., fols 28r–33r)

Biondo intends to write a treatise on free will. In § 1, we find the main points of his argument. He wants to start from the case of Lucifer, then to move on to the other angels, Adam, and then the case of other human beings. He also wants to examine the interaction of free will and grace. Here, he managed to write only about the free will of Lucifer; some of these questions seem to have been answered in other texts (see documents 8, 13, and 14). The starting point is to establish the object of Lucifer's intellect (*intellectiva*) (§ 2). Within the limits of Lucifer's intellect, this object is the 'preexisting truth' (*preexistens verum*). The intellect was drawn necessarily towards this object (§ 3). This necessity originated from the object but found its completion only in Lucifer's faculty (§ 4). Biondo then asks why the object (i.e. God) wants to be known (§ 5). He answers that God wants to be known as the good and, secondly, the intellect wants to know the object that can perfect it (namely, the truth).

Biondo now starts to examine Lucifer's will (§ 6). The object pursued by the will was the good that existed before Lucifer thought about it (*preexistens et precogitatum bonum*). Unlike the intellect, the will chooses its object and can decide whether or not to pursue the preexisting good (§ 7). However, when the will decides its object of love, an unavoidable and violent necessity occurs. The conclusion is that while the will has two acts, the intellect has only one (§ 8). The freedom of Lucifer consisted precisely in the possibility to love or not the 'preexisting good' (§ 9). In § 10, it is asked why Lucifer was unable to love God. Biondo answers by saying that God 'suspended' (*suspendit*) the 'pleasure' (*delectabilitatem*) associated with him, and, therefore, Lucifer no longer saw God as the supreme good.

God led the two faculties towards a third object, which alone could satisfy both the will and the intellect (§ 11). This object was a created being (*ente*). Lucifer, who thought of himself as eternal, refused to acknowledge the fact that his blessedness, the truth, and the good, were now grouped in this created being. Biondo explains that Lucifer could not understand that the truth was achievable only through a created being (*sub ratione entis*) (§ 12). Since Lucifer did not see the truth in this created being, he could not love it. Biondo clarifies that it was part of the very nature of Lucifer's intellect to be brought beyond its limits (§ 13). He then clarifies that it was in God's freedom to express or not himself (§ 14). He also adds that the will had to be brought beyond its limits (§ 15). The intellect could not comprehend that the humanity of Christ was the *ens* which contained and expressed the truth (§ 16). What Lucifer could not appreciate in Christ was his dual nature (§ 17). Lucifer's refusal of Christ did not depend on his own limits but on a choice based on malice, pride, and hatred (§ 18). It is precisely here that

Biondo locates the freedom of Lucifer: he could have loved, but he chose to hate (§ 19). Biondo asks again why the faculties could not rest in their respective objects (the truth and the good) but had to be brought towards a third object (§ 20). The answer is that Christ preceded and united the two objects. Therefore, to reach their respective objects, the two faculties had first to be united in Christ. The text ends abruptly.

1. /28r/ *Eiusdem reverendi domini Gab. Bl. De libertate arbitrii*

Ad materiam libertatis arbitrii discutendam primum occurrit considerare qualis fuit libertas arbitrii angeli qui prior creatus et nobilior ex se est. Deinde qualis fuerat libertas arbitrii Ade, utrum similis libertati angeli et quomodo. Deinde utrum angeli nunc habeant libertatem arbitrii, et qualem boni et qualem mali. Deinde an homo nunc dicatur habere aliquam libertatem arbitrii absque gratia et quam. Demum quam libertatem arbitrii habet homo ex gratia et an una omnium an multiplex sit ista libertas. Demum an ista distinctio multipliciter sit tamen secundum gradus eiusdem libertatis in eodem subiecto et an etiam secundum varietatem subiecti potentie alicuius aut partis eius intelligibilis. Deinde an plene possit intelligi eius multipliciter sit.

2. Pro intellectu primi quesiti rursus querendum videtur quae sit proprietas intellective partis angeli; et respondetur quod est ferri in preexistens verum quatenus ab ea apprehensibili est.

3. Deinde querendum utrum intellectiva /28v/ hec angeli a principio ferretur in verum ex electione aliqua an ex necessitate. Et respondetur quod non ex electione aliqua ipsius potentie sed ex necessitate.

4. Rursus querendum unde erat hec necessitas et violentia motus ab ipso obiecto an a potentia. Et respondetur quod ab obiecto. Rursus: ubi subsistebat? Et respondetur quod in potentia subsistebat hec necessitas, non in obiecto, quia obiecto nihil deest, potentie deest actus proprius qui est perfici, et ideo fertur quia perficitur in eo in quod fertur. Ferri enim et ibi esse differunt in eo consideratione nostra non tempore actus, quia ipse actus eius est etiam pariter quies quia nec desunt ferri sicut nec intelligere. Ferri enim est in hoc motus nature causans actum cuius est terminus quies. Et motus ipse est imperium Dei eternaliter et sic invariabiliter agentis secundum suam eternam et invariabilem in se ipsa voluntatem.

5. Rursus quare ab obiecto erat hec necessitas potentie, et respondetur quod erat ex duplici causa. Una ex parte obiecti, altera ex parte potentie. Ex parte obiecti erat bonitas volens se

ipsam delectabilem communicando perficere potentiam. Ex parte potentie erat /29r/ amor obiecti delectabiliter ipsam perficientis. Rursus queritur quod erat obiectum. Et dicitur quod erat veritas.

6. Viso de potentia intellectiva, rursus videndum de potentia volitiva ipsius angeli. Et primum queritur que esset illius proprietas quando creatus fuit et secundum creationem. Et respondetur quod erat ferri in preexistens et precogitatum bonum quatenus cogitatu apprehensibile erat.

7. Rursus queritur utrum hec quoque ex necessitate ferretur aut ex electione. Et respondetur quod ex electione non ex necessitate. Rursum queritur quid esset in eo electio, quid necessitas. Et dicitur quod electio erat libertas quedam sistendi in suo obiecto vel non sistendi in eo, sed in alio sibi electo, et ferendi secum in illud suum amorem. Hoc est actum volendi. Quid erat necessitas? Erat quedam violentia, motus ipsius potentie tendentis in suum obiectum, semel a se, hoc est, ab ipsa volitiva per sua libertatem electum.³³

8. Quare volitiva duos actos habet et intellectiva unum? Quia sic placuit conditori. Quare? Quia voluit bonitatem suam communicare utrumque potentie, et per libertatem communicat bonitatem intellective et per /29v/ amorem communicat illam ipsi volitive.

9. Dum ipsa amat bonum verum quod ipsa libertas per intellectivam elegit, hec ipsa libertas volitive fuitne proprie ipsa eadem libertas arbitrii quae data fuit angelo creato? Ipsa prorsus. Fuitne in bonis et in malis eadem? Omnino eadem.

10. Quomodo potuerunt mali, hoc est, qui facti postea sunt mali priusquam fierent mali, mutare obiectum potentiarum? Et quomodo intellectiva expectavit electionem libertatis volitive et non fuit ipsa vi obiecti delectabilis coacta in eo sistere et amorem volitive post se trahere? Respondetur quod Deus bonus ut servaret volitive suam libertatem et ut ipsam volitivam ampliaret ad summum et dilataret quo capacior centrum glorie angelis in utraque potentia, et illam honorabilius possideret, suspendit delectabilitatem utriusque obiecti potentiarum ipsarum. Et suspendendo delectabilitatem, suspendit necessitatem.

11. Et sic ipsas ultra terminum cuiusque proprium traduxit ad tertium utriusque partis comunem obiectum, ut ibi plene communicatis sibi invicem propriis actibus simul extra se, hoc est, suos actus sisterent in obiecto comuni in quo sunt ambo utriusque partis obiecta, ut unica angeli substantia in unico obiecto /30r/ simul in duobus suis obiectis beata fieret. Nam cum intellective obiectum sit veritas, volitive autem bonum, traxit utranque in obiectum entis, ut

³³ See Text 8, § 7.

illud ab intellectiva sub ratione veri apprehensum imperium elective amaretur ab ipsa volitiva ut bonum verum cognitum. Verum in ente ipso cernens angelus peregrinam se inferiorem creatam naturam eternaliter electam per quam opus haberet beata fieri. Utraque ipsius potentia ut per medium per quod sistitur in utroque obiecto recusavit in eo sistere, et est reflexus in se per utranque potentiam et stetit in sua substantia infeliciter.

12. Quomodo potuit Deus facere ut ipse cognitus ut verum et apprehensus ab intellectiva angeli non delectaret illam et delectando non sisteret? Respondetur quod Deus potuit multo plura facere quam intellectus non cogitare, sed noster intellectus potuit intelligere verum apprehendi ab intellectiva absque delectationem intellective ergo et cetera. Preterea potuit dici quod ipsa intellectiva dum apprehendit verum ut verum habet delectari tanquam in proprio naturali obiecto sed, quando apprehendit verum non sub ratione veri sed sub ratione entis, non habet /30v/ delectari in eo in quo non sistit, nec in eo in quo sistit, ente scilicet, quia non est eius obiectum et sic neutrobique habet delectari.

13. Quomodo potuit angelica³⁴ intellectiva ferri ultra suum obiectum, cum in suo fine omnis natura quiescat? Respondetur quod non solum potuit sed oportuit illam tunc ita ferri. Rursus queritur que fuit ista necessitas? Respondetur quod fuit proprietates et nobilitas nature ipsius angelice intellective. Quia cum verum non sit alia ratione verum nisi quia est, ex nobilitate potentie est, verum ipsum intueri an et quomodo sit priusquam in eo sistere et sic delectari in illo.

14. Preterea quia potuit Deus absolute hoc facere, voluntarie enim agit Deus non ulla necessitate et sic voluntarie delectat cognitus, non autem ab ipso emanat ipsa delectatio ut involuntario aut insensibili neque est in potentia intellectiva angeli aut hominis ipsa proprietates delectationem sentiendi in vero absque Dei voluntate et actu naturam illam servante et in ea id agente, scilicet ut sentiat delectationem immo illam delectante: est enim ipse *fons delectationis*:³⁵ et sic potuit non velle delectare et potuit non delectare et fecit.

15. /31r/ Numquid eadem ratio fuit in volitiva quae in intellectiva quod non steterit in suo obiecto sed ultra illud translata fuerit? Eadem prorsus et multo fortior. Nam cum volitive, ut dixi, duo sint actus, libertas seu electio et amor seu voluntas, electionis fuit proprium indagari bonum illud occurrens volitive sic ut finis, an et quomodo esset et libertatis fuit non sistere in

³⁴ angelica] *follows natura deleted.*

³⁵ See the Vulgate John 4:14: 'sed aqua quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam'.

ipso ut bono prima vice sed ut ente.³⁶ Uter libertas et electio volitive sint idem actus an diversi? Respondetur quod libertas non est actus sed proprietas et ratio electionis in nostro intellectu antecedens in ipso actu coniuncta electioni.

16. Quid abominata est in ente intellectiva angeli propter quod refugit? Respondetur quod abominata est accidens. Quid fuit illud accidens? Fuit humanitas Christi assumpta in unionem Verbi, hoc enim accidendo illi in tempore in eo quo accessit quasi etiam accidit.

17. In quo ergo decepta est intellectiva angeli per electionem volitive ut erraret? Decepta est in eo quod, dum accidens illud cerneret substantiale, electionem illam sistente in accidente per se considerabili ut est accidens non stetit in eo ut est substantiale quia stetit in substantia /**31v**/ et sic in ipso ente et transivisset ipsum accidens per se et eatenus vidisset illud verum in sua reflexione quatenus substantiale; et sic stetit in suo vero et substantiali ente ut in proprio obiecto et tunc delectata potuisset et secum ac post se traxisset volitive actum secundum ut se consequentem et amasset bonitatem substantialem ac verum ens in suo accidente et ipsum accidens bonam et veram substantiam in ente: atque ita non cecidisset: sed in illo accidenti substantiali unitus amore participasset illius substantie: et amissa ipse quoque accidentali sua proprietate in ipso accidente substantiali factus fuisset consubstantialis. Quid est abominata in ente volitiva angeli? Hoc idem accidens. Quare? Quia illius naturam duplicem vidit, ex una parte inferiorem sua simplici.

18. Fecit hoc volitiva ex proprietate et lege sua nature? Non, sed ex malitia. Qua malitia? Quia voluit suam naturam accidere enti per seipsam, non per aliud se inferius parte aliqua accidens, et quia non potuit quod voluit, noluit quod potuit. Quare noluit quod potuit? Superbia primum considerata per reflexionem potentiarum /**32r**/ in se proprie excellentie naturalis et dilecte in comparatione nature vilioris considerate in Christo et pre ut diligibilis sibi electe. Deinde invidia, quia de Christi assumptione doluit et illius humanitatem principaliter odiando etiam Personam consequenter et substantiam odivit³⁷ sic totam sanctissimam Trinitatem.

19. Libertas arbitrii in angelo posuit ne aliquid aliud ab ipsa natura? Non. Quid ergo dicit in eo hec libertas? Dicit novitatem et primitatem actus de sua potentia exeuntis qui cum posset et deberet ab illa exire secundum illam, non exiit; sed exiit secundum proprium actum ex libertate producentis maliciam, quae malicia illi ex actus electione accessit.

³⁶ On the acts of the will, see Text 8.

³⁷ odivit] follows etiam deleted.

20. Ad illud quesitum: quare potentie angeli a principio non steterunt in propriis obiectis et quomodo potuerunt ultra illa ferri, cum potentia feratur ex necessitate in proprium obiectum et eadem necessitate ibi sistat et quiescat, et non velit nec possit ultra ferri, nam velle in ea est posse, et posse est ferri? Respondetur aliter quam in alia pagine hoc modo, quod cum omne /32v/ quod verum et bonum est, ideo verum et bonum sit quia est – et non³⁸ econverso secundum ordinem intellectus qui presupponit esse cuiusque rei ipsius duratione seu identitati et qualitati – et cum angeli substantia una tantum sit, licet due ipsius potentie in se sint diverse, et eius substantie, que in se ipsa indivisibilis sit, necesse sit actum, licet secundum quid divisum sit ac diversum, secundum quid tamen esse unum et eundem; propterea, potentiarum angeli sicut sunt obiecta singula, quia etiam ipse potentie sunt inter se diverse, ita obiectum aliquod comune esse utrique ut actus sit idem aliquo modo, necesse etiam sit; et cum angeli intellectiva obiectum habeat verum et volitiva bonum, in quorum singula singule quoque ferantur et vero et bono ut dixi presupponitur ens, necesse est ipsas prius convenire in ente quam ferantur in propria obiecta.

Substantia enim ipsarum presupponitur ipsis potentiis et convenientia comunis actus earum propriis actibus necesse eadem ratione supponi. Necesse fuit igitur eas ferri prius simul in ens quam sigillatim in vere et bonum. Ens autem divinum dicit /33r/ naturam et substantiam, hoc est, essentiam; sicut verum dicit identitatem et durationem, hoc est, eternitatem; et bonum dicit proprietates naturales et substantiales, quae in nobis participate dicuntur qualitates potentia sapientia bonitas rerum eiusmodi.

Hac ratione cum potentie angeli non possit ferri in propria obiecta, nisi per comune utrique obiectum, non potuerunt in eo sistere in quod non dum ferebantur: et sic non potuerunt ab eo teneri quod non dum erat illarum obiectum. Cum igitur haberet sistere primum simul priusquam divideretur earum actus, in ipsa essentia et natura divina sistere illas oportebat. Et in illa ut comuni obiecto stantes pariter sicut stant in sua substantia: in eadem quoque sic stantes dividi in suos proprios actus sicut in sua substantia stantes dividuntur proprietate potentiarum diversa in ipsas potentias. Verum et cetera.

³⁸ non] *follows* est ergo *deleted*.

10. *De gaudiis beatorum* (Mag., fols 33v–36v)

The text explores the kinds of rewards the blessed receive in the afterlife. Biondo's text is highly dependent on a treatise by Ugo Panziera, whom Biondo quotes extensively but does not acknowledge. Firstly, the blessed look at what they have avoided (i.e. Hell), at the Heaven in which they are now, at the other blessed, and, finally, at God (§ 1). Biondo then examines the three types of rewards they have gained (§ 2). There is a substantial reward corresponding to the three theological virtues; a consubstantial and an accidental reward. Biondo lists the three different kinds of rewards again (§ 3). Now, he focuses on the consubstantial reward (§ 4). It corresponds to the four cardinal virtues and the four dowries (*dotēs*): agility, subtlety, clarity, and impassibility. He then examines what the glorified body will be like (§ 5). Interestingly, the body is no longer limited by the senses. Biondo seems to suggest a sort of diffused body. He explains that the blessed will sing, dance, and play musical instruments (§ 6). The accidental reward coincides with these activities (§ 7). According to Biondo, there are two forms of accidental reward. The first type is associated with the body and pertains to the soul only in an accidental way (§ 8). The second form of the accidental premium depends on whether God is approached through the intellect or the will. If one approaches love through the intellect, then, as some suggest, the reward is knowing to be loved by God (§ 9). Others, however, propose that God's love comes to the created beings mainly through the will. If this is the case, the premium shows the same duality as love. One can either be conformed to God's love or love the creation. Ultimately, however, the love for the neighbour is subsumed into the love for God (§ 10).

1. /33v/ *Eiusdem reverendi presuli domini Gab. Bl. De gaudiis beatorum*

Beati convertunt se aliquando ad inferiora et gaudent tripliciter: quod demones vicerunt; quattuor vicia quaedam quidem per divinam gratiam vitaverunt et quaedam correxerunt; quattuor inferni penas evaserunt. Convertunt etiam aliquando se ad exteriora et vident locum spatiosum, victum deliciosum, ornatum curiosum, thesaurum preciosum, in haec mixtim proseguere. Locus altitudine, latitudine, claritate. Convertunt etiam se aliquando iuxta se ad propiora, et vident sociorum multitudinem, pulchritudinem, beatitudinem, amabilitatem, amorem. Convertunt se aliquando super se et in Deo gaudent delectabiliter dulciter eternaliter.

2. De praemiis eorundem.

Premium substantiale, consubstantiale, accidentale.³⁹ Substantiale per perfectionem triplicis virtutis theologicæ, correspondentis triplici anime potentie. Nam fidei et rationi dabitur visio summi; tristabili spei et memorie tentio; charitati sive voluntati amor perfectus. Consubstantiale in quattuor dotibus corporis correspondentibus quattuor elementis, humoribus, /34r/ virtutibus: prudentie subtilitas aquae, fortitudini impassibilitas terre, iustitiae agilitas aeri, temperantiae claritas igni. Accidentale. Et cetera.

3. Iterum de praemiis beatorum. Prima divisio. Premium substantiale, consubstantiale, accidentale. Substantiale respondet tribus theologicis virtutibus quia pro fide datur visio nuda Dei; loco spei datur possessio eorum quae quondam credita, iam videntur in Deo; caritati diminutae ratione organi succedit cum perfectione organi perfectio eius.⁴⁰

4. Consubstantiale primum anime in corpore glorificato est in quattuor dotibus corporis quae correspondent quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus.⁴¹ Nam iustitia quae in via reddidit Deo sibi et proximo quod suum erat quia nihil remansit alieni et nihil erat proprii merito datur in corpore in quo hoc fecit summa levitas sive agilitas.⁴²

Fortitudini quae corpori et sensibus ac menti vim pro Deo fecit, superans passiones illorum merito datur immortalitas ac impassibilitas.

Prudentie, cuius actus est penetratio difficilium, et effectus operatio similium /34v/ tam in iis quae intra mentem sunt cogitatis omnium temporum quam in iis quae sunt in corpore aut circa corpus difficilia ut sensui, carni, ac rationi, quoque secundum naturam corruptam contraria, merito datur in corpore quod fuit particeps actus illius similitudo quedam agendi, quae penetratio seu subtilitas appellatur.

Temperantiae actus quoniam ex parte magna extrinsecus et proximi edificatorius atque instructivus et illuminativus fuit per corporis passiones, merito acquirit corpori ut subiecto splendorem et claritatem.

³⁹ See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 15v: 'El premio della meritoria virtù [...] si può in tre differentie distinguere. El primo et maggiore si è substantiale. El secondo consubstantiale. Et il tertio accidentale'.

⁴⁰ See Ibid., fols 15v–16r: 'In patria el premio substantiale si è il perfectio guidardone che alle tre virtù divine si risponde: cioè sono Fede, Speranza, et Charità. El quale guidardone si è Idio et in Dio. Onde alla fede si risponde il conoscimento di conoscere Idio in sua natura, et quanto è da Dio amato. Per la speranza si riceve Idio in possessione. Per la charità viatica si riceve in Dio perfecta charità consumata'.

⁴¹ The basic biblical text on the dowries is 1 Corinthians 15:35–58. See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 16r: 'El premio consubstantiale in gloria sono le quattro dote del corpo glorificato et le quattro virtù cardinali'.

⁴² See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 16r: 'La perfecta iustitia rende al creatore et a sè medesimo et a tutte le creature ciò che è loro di ragione. Adunque non ritenendosi l'huomo alcuna cosa indebita, nulla cosa el può debitamente gravare. Et però a questa virtù somma corporale leggerezza si risponde, la quale è Agilitas chiamata'.

He quatuor dotes corporis respondent substantiali premio in quo fundantur sicut virtutum a quibus pariuntur exercitia interno actui mentis et caritati commensurabantur in via.

5. Corporis sensibus iam spiritualibus ratione dotium corporis factis, nec proprium nec ullum aliud corpus obstat; neque loci distantia que erat terminus corporis imperfecti in organis sensuum quod iam est perfectissimum atque ideo terminum non habens in actu suorum sensorum. Preterea quia anima in corpore posita gravabatur, hoc est impediabatur, corruptione corporis iuxta /35r/ illud Apostoli: *Corpus quod corrumpitur aggravat animam*⁴³ et serviebat passionibus eius. Iam dominium illius adeptam, eo sibi assimilato utitur libere absque impedimento. Atque ideo ut ipsa potest per se in plurima obiecta simul ferri sic, et in obiecta quelibet tam cuiuslibet quam omnium simul sensuum.

6. Beatorum corpora non sunt ociosa sed proprium actum exercent tripliciter: cantu et corporis modulato gestu ac extrinseco manuum exercitio in tactu perito organi musici convenientis proprie glorie.⁴⁴ Perfectioni cantus competit vocis perfectio que tribus concluditur plenitudine, suavitate, flexibilitate.⁴⁵ Modulationi corporis competunt levitas, fortitudo, pulchritudo sive ornatus, et omnibus his ars oportuna est.⁴⁶ Quatuor dotium corporis glorificati sola claritas est intelligibilis, reliquae non sunt imagina imaginabiles quomodo se invicem excedunt. Corpori glorioso dotes proprie sunt premium substantiale, anime vero consubstantiale.⁴⁷

7. Accidentale praemium beatorum est in gloriosis obiectis glorificatorum sensuum que sunt quasi infinita in dotibus corporum et in infinitum variata, /35v/ verbi gratia, vocum suavitas, corporum pulchritudo, lucis magnitudo, colorum pulchritudo. Denique consubstantiale praemium est in potentia usus beatorum corporum; accidentale vero in actu eorum; quamquam super et ante hec omnia substantiale premium corporum sit in gustu et participio glorie anime et substantialis premii illius quod excedit omnia et consubstantialia cetera et accidentalialia corporis delectamenta. Quicquid accidit corpori beato accidit at anime pariter atque accedit, quia redundat delectatio corporis in animam beatorum magisque viatorum, in quibus tam misere plurimum resultat.

⁴³ Wisdom 9:15: 'corpus enim quod corrumpitur aggravat animam'.

⁴⁴ See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 17r-v: 'In paradiso hanno e sancti corporali exercitii ne quali sono secondo l'ordine della loro disposizione sempre in acto, de quali tutti sono perfecti maestri in cantare, ballare, sonare'.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, fol. 17v: 'Al bene cantare bisognano quattro cose. La voce buona, bella, alta, et bassa, quanto alla superna harmonia si richiede'.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, fol. 17v: 'Al ben ballare ne bisognano alre quattro cose. El corpo bello, forte, leggiere, et ornatamente vestito. Et insieme con tutte bisogna l'arte'.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, fol. 18r: 'le dote del corpo glorificato et i loro gloriosi sentimenti sono all'anima premio consustantiale, et al corpo sono premio substantiale'.

8. Accidentale praemium beatorum duplex est. Alterum quod per corpus resultat in animam quia illi totum accidentale est, et huius generis est totum quod substantiale est corpori et accidentale quamquam et ipsum substantiale corpori sit anime aliquo modo consubstantiale lato sumpto vocabulo, proprie autem et vere est accidentale.⁴⁸

9. Alterum vero est proprium ipsius anime accidentale; et hoc bifariam dividitur. Nam sicut caritatis duplex est actus, Dei videlicet amor et proximi, ita actus volitive potentie beatorum, quatenus est actus et non passio, nam totum substantiale premium volitive potentie est /36r/ passio et non actus proprius. Sensus enim hoc est intellectus et sensatio intellective potentie, sentientis substantialiter se amari a Deo, facit substantiale praemium eorum. Et hinc quod quidam dicunt quod beatitudo principaliter consistat in intellectu nec mentiuntur nam ipsum cognoscere se a Deo amari beatum facit.

10. Licet finis et conformatio actus divini tanquam in subiecto principaliter sit in volitiva et non in intellectiva, propter quod alii non falso senserunt beatitudinem principaliter consistere in volitiva. Est enim vere beatitudo in volitiva ut in proprio subiecto et fine, est autem in intellectu tanquam in principio instrumentali. Ipse enim amor divinus est qui beatificat animam, suo proprio hoc est Dei actu, non ipsius anime. Amor autem divinus non habet pro suo obiecto intellectivam potentiam sed volitivam eque in patria et in via. Quoniam igitur substantialis beatitudo, quod idem est quod premium substantiale beatorum, non actus sed passio est, actus potentie volitive beatorum parit in eis accidentale gaudium et praemium eorum. Hoc autem duobus modis. Nam aut reflectitur in Deum ipsius actum in se trahentem et sistentem sequens, et ibi accidit ei proprio /36v/ actu divinum sequente, quod est in ea eterno actu in ipsa permanente; aut hec ipsa volitiva potentia fertur in creaturas non principaliter sed secundario. Impossibile est enim ferri eam in creaturas quae sit in Deo, et quae videat *Deum in omnibus et omnia in Deo*.⁴⁹ Dum ergo fertur in Deum tanquam creaturas in se continentem, nam primo actu fertur in eum, ut est in se simpliciter se ipso contentus atque ipsius beatitudine delectatur.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, fol. 18r: ‘Tutto el premio di patria che è accidentale al corpo è accidentale all’anima’.

⁴⁹ See 1 Corinthians 12:6; 15:28; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 3:11.

11. *Quid est habitus in anima?* (Mag., fols 37r–48r)

The text examines the notions of habit, act, and virtue. There are various repetitions as Biondo attempts to refine his argument. A habit is a disposition, which can be either natural or infused by God (§ 1). An act is a motion that follows from a habit according to the will (§ 2). Virtue is the annihilation of what is contrary to grace (§ 3). Virtue, however, does not coincide with grace. Biondo quotes the poet Jacopone da Todi and says that a virtuous person can still perform acts and possess dispositions contrary to grace. Various levels of infused habits must be acknowledged (§ 4). For this reason, all saints are virtuous but are not equal. Biondo states the definition of virtue again (§ 5). This time, he emphasises that virtue means, more than an infused habit, the annihilation of what is contrary to virtue (§ 6). Virtue becomes valid only when the annihilation is continuous.

There are three kinds of habit: virtuous, vicious, and the habit which seems virtuous but is not (§ 7). Therefore, the acts are divided into those worthy of salvation when they originate from the virtuous habits and those that are unworthy of salvation or conducive to penance when they originate from the other two habits. (§ 8). The virtuous acts are sometimes called virtues, but this is appropriate only when the acts are firmly established and continuous (§ 9; the same point in § 6). Just as expressed in § 3, the person who has infused habits can, nonetheless, perform acts contrary to those habits (§ 10). The habits contrary to the virtues are called vices (§ 11). Biondo points out that they are not correctly habits. Since the process of continuous annihilation had defined virtue, it follows that, when vices are destroyed, one enters a state of impassibility; when virtues are also annihilated, one reaches a state of insensibility and *stupor anime* (§ 12).

Driven by the distinction between acts and habits established in § 10, Biondo explains that a radical distinction exists between good and wicked acts. While the latter can help us determine the existence of a wicked disposition, the former cannot. Therefore, nobody can be sure of living in a virtuous state judging by their acts (§ 13). The reason for that is that no one can safely say whether they act out of self-love or love for God (for the same problem, see below § 27). It follows that nobody can love the love they discover in themselves, but they are forced to become like Christ and empty themselves (§ 14). Since nobody can actualize a complete self-annihilation, the only solution is to accept that only grace can perform it (§ 15). Thus, the possibility to act a complete *spogliamento* is the fundamental distinction between human beings and God: the former cannot realise their own disrobing.

Biondo reiterates the same point about human love's uncertainty by analysing the meaning of the notion of synderesis (§ 16). Ultimately, what human beings can do is to pray for guidance (§ 17). To support his statements concerning grace, Biondo quotes passages from Ugo Panziera, who is never explicitly mentioned (§ 18). Biondo then explains how grace works in human beings (§ 19). During this lifetime, grace comes and goes. Nobody can possess it. Sin and desire are compared to a rabid dog. He who can stay away from this dog is blessed.

In § 20, Biondo asks the following question: what does grace place in the soul? He answers that grace mainly brings quietness and passion (*quies* and *passio*), but also motion and action (*motus* and *actus*). He clarifies that the motion is a passive motion that leads to quiet action. The good inclinations and virtues cooperate and prepare the arrival of grace (§ 21). None of these virtues and their corresponding acts, however, coincide entirely with grace (§ 22, see above § 3). Virtues can, therefore, be deceptive or originate from Satan himself. Here Biondo, suddenly, introduces a personal reader to whom the text is directed. To elucidate better his ideas on evil deceptions, he shows to his reader six cases of mystics who have had either genuine or misleading religious experiences (§ 23). These were most probably people known both to Biondo and his mysterious correspondent.

The text returns to an impersonal and formal tone. Biondo asks again what a habit is (§ 24). He now emphasises that habits and acts are related to both the will and intellect. The will desires and elects a specific habit; the intellect considers it acceptable; the will will, then, love it as the good and try to pursue it. The merit lies in the correspondence and dialogue between the two faculties (§ 25). It follows that when adversities occur, merit does not depend on the execution of the act but on the intention to perform it. Acts such as contemplation, fasting, and chastity are not specific to certain people but are available to everybody. To have merit, one must pursue what is available to them. Biondo concludes that grace cannot establish itself permanently and undisputedly (§ 26). It must be continuously reaffirmed and confirmed.

Biondo returns to a problem he had already dealt with in § 13: why it is impossible to distinguish between self-love and love for God (§ 27). According to Biondo, human beings think they love God; in truth, they love their act of loving. In the act, which is their creation, they love themselves: they praise their supposed ability to love God. For Biondo, loving God becomes an expression of self-love. The text ends with a comparison. Those who are burdened by contrary habits, tribulations, and anxiety will eventually be liberated (§ 28). Eventually, they will be able to fly into God.

1. /37r/ Eiusdem domini Gab. Blondi.

Quid est habitus in anima? Est dispositia ad aliquem actum, quae adeo dum sit ille habitus dicitur infundi, et hec dispositio dum infunditur, non tollit eo ipso contrariam dispositionem, sed actus ab illa elicit illam denique tollere possunt.

2. Quid est actus et in quo differt ab habitu? Est voluntatis per gratiam libere motus secundum illam dispositionem cuius dicitur actus. Ipsa autem dispositio secundum quam movetur habitus est.

3. Quid est proprie virtus? Est annihilatio dispositionis contrarie suo actui et habitui, per quam gratia non impeditur amplius quando, quotiens, et quantum vult movere voluntatem ad actum qui est secundum dispositionem ad illam virtutem seu habitum, possit et ideo semper movet quotiens opus est. Unde ille sagacissimus virtutum verarum odorator et venator optimus Jacopone ait: ‘Fra la virtute et l’atto multi hanno scacco matto’⁵⁰ quia actus virtutis dum fit tollit aliquid de contraria dispositione, nisi tamen ita frequenter et ferventer sit factus ut totam abstulerit, non dum est virtus gratia et ideo qui fecit nunc unum aut plures actus virtutis, nondum anihilata dispositione contraria, potest ex libera voluntate secundum illam dispositionem /37v/ contrariam operari actus viciorum et damnari.⁵¹ Et hoc multis contigit et contingit. Et adeo dicit quod inter actus virtutis unum aut plures, antequam acquisita sit virtus, multi perdunt vitam eternam in vicio et peccato, illi virtuti non dum habite contrario morientes.

4. Habitus cum infunduntur differunt inter se magnitudine? Differunt maxime, et habent gradus quasi infinitos sicut ipsorum virtutes differunt varietate et ideo *non est inventus similis illi qui conservaret legem excelsi*,⁵² quia data paritate meriti inter aliquos sanctos est dissimilitudo in virtutibus et habebunt se in pluribus ut excedentes et excessi.

5. Quid est virtus? Est anihilatio aut maxima debilitatio dispositionis, contrarie actui et habitui cuius est illa virtus, ut libera quotiens opus est posset operari gratia in homine actus secundum habitus illi datos.

6. Virtus igitur non supponit solum habitum infusum et actum elicitem, sed supponit habitum contrarium⁵³ annihilatum aut maxime debilitatum, ut ab habitu illius virtutis actus proprius sit

⁵⁰ See *Laude*, p. 133: ‘Entra la vertute e l’atto molti ci ode al ioco ‘matto’’. For the different variants of this line, see JACOPONE DA TODI 1974, p. 531.

⁵¹ See Text 12, § 6.

⁵² Sirach 44:20.

⁵³ On the side: ‘quamvis non dicatur proprie habitus’. The same point is reiterated in §§ 7 and 11.

a gratia facilis elici, et tunc quanto actus est magis facilis ad elicendum ab habitu, et habitus magis reducibilis ad suum actum, illa virtus dicitur tanto magis perfecta. In /38r/ genere non comparata alterius simili virtuti quae potest esse a perfectiore habitu, contra autem remoto omni obstaculo semper operatur, et sic fit virtus continua, et tunc est virtus.

Quandiu igitur anima sentit in se esse dispositiones contrarias alicui virtuti, sciat se non habere illam virtutem. Etiam si aliquando videatur operari actus secundum illam virtutem, aut facile aut delectabiliter quia potest esse magnitudine gratie reducens habitum ad actum, pro illa vice et ex magnitudine habitus. Cum tamen ibi virtus ideo non sit generata, quia non sit sublata illi virtuti dispositio contraria: quod non potest videri uno signo solo operationis, videlicet actus proprii virtutis, sed a mortificatione aut debilitate dispositionis contrarie, alio medio tempore scilicet quando non est in anima tantus fervor gratie, et a continuatione actus virtuosi ex continuatione gratie, quae cum venit non descedit nisi eiecta a suo contrario, et elongate secundum presentiam sui contrarii in anima vel proximitatem ad illam ex inclinatione.

7. Habitus triplex est. Virtuosus vere, et hic est supra naturam et est informatus a caritate. Et sic finis actus ab ea eliciti est amor Dei purus. Que tamen puritas habet gradus suos /38v/ et quasi infinitos et tamen infima puritas non est impuritas simpliciter, sed ex comparatione talis videtur, et non desinit esse meritorius actus eius quia purus utrunque est.

Alius est viciosus omnino. Hic est contra naturam et huius actus est finis simpliciter amor proprius creature. Et hic non dicitur habitus nisi quando anima non habet infusum habitum virtutis contrarium et tunc anima totaliter possidetur ab habito.

Alius est virtuosus apparenter et viciosus vere et huius actus finis videtur esse amor Dei et est interdum secundum aliquem respectum, sed finis verus et principaliter intentus est amor proprius creature. Hic tamen non dicitur proprie habitus sed dispositio quaedam. Et huius sunt quasi infiniti gradus et species, et est semper naturalis, non infusus, licet habeat similitudinem infusi interdum, viciosus vero aperte est contra naturam.

8. Actus qui procedit a vere virtuoso habitu est meritorium in salutem. Actus vero qui procedunt ab aliis duobus non, sed sunt meritorii nisi aut temporalis aut eterni mali. Et interdum maius malum merentur actus eliciti ab actu virtuoso apparenter quam a simpliciter vicioso, quia sunt cum aliquali aut multis sepe gratiis gratis datis eliciti /39r/ quarum abusus meretur magnam penam, quia dicunt maiorem ingratitudinem, rebellionem, iniquitatem.

9. Interdum tamen actus virtuosi virtutes appellantur, et sunt secundum quid quia sunt momentanee virtutes in anima, proprie autem dici possunt et sunt virtutes quando sunt stabiles saltem ad aliquod tempus et multitudinem actuum, non recipientes interim actus sibi contrarios. Actus tamen virtuosi, licet non sint virtutes, sunt meritorii salutis eterne quia ab habitu infuso et caritate formato procedunt.

10. Qui habet habitus virtutum infusos potest operari actus contrarios illis stantibus talibus habitibus et hoc ex dispositione mala contraria dum est negligens ad introducendam seu admittendam gratiam per quam habitus virtutum reducat in actus suos, qui excluderent contrarios primum et postea inclinationes illorum.⁵⁴

11. Dispositiones contrarie virtutibus appellantur proprie vicia. Possident omnino animam, reiecta omni dispositione ad virtuosum actum, id est habitibus in baptisate seu aliis infusis nunquam aut a longo tempore ad actum non reductis et per mortale /39v/ peccatum extinctis. Et tum etiam non sunt vere habitus, quia non vestiunt sed spoliant animam, sed quia ad similitudinem infusorum habituum producant suos effectus pessimos, dicuntur et videntur esse habitus.

12. Vicia mortificantur interdum ad tempus et ad tempus manifestantur plus et magis aut minus sed quod per gratiam. Actus virtuosi, sepe aut raro, minus aut magis fortiter, reducuntur ad suum actum donec vicia sunt non extincta aut viciosi habitus. Semper est inter eos lucta dum durant. Viciis autem extinctis sequitur impassibilitas virtuosus in anima habitibus; virtuosus extinctis sequitur insensibilitas anime et stupor.

13. Ab actibus cognosci possunt habitus mali, boni autem et meritorii non omnino, quia nemo sit utrum etc. Actus autem per suos conceptus cognosci habent quando non sunt ex se mali omnino. Qua est ratio quod nemo scire potest ex comuni lege utrum odio dignus sit an amore? Respondeo quia nemo scire potest perfecte an Deum diligat vel se ipsum. Si enim quis posset scire certe an diligeret Deum vere, hic profecto etiam sciret quod a /40r/ Deo diligeretur, quia *ipse dixit ego diligentes me diligo*,⁵⁵ et ipse quos diligit dignos facit sua dilectione, nam ipsius dilectio non est aliud quam dignativa electio.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See above § 3.

⁵⁵ Proverbs 8:17.

⁵⁶ See Romans 8:29–30; Ephesians 1:4–5.

14. Non enim potest diligere bonum in nobis inventum sed opus est ut diligat bonum, quod ipse [Deus] facit in nobis esse dum nos diligit sibi gratificando, ut efficiamur conformes imaginis Filii sui, expoliet igitur se unusquisque a proprio amore et propria voluntate, quantum potest.

15. Quia non potest se totaliter sic expoliare, ut non remaneat vestitus aliquo sui amore reciproco aut interpretativo qui sufficit pro veneno totius inquam esse, sola autem gratia sine nobis facit ultimam illam et totalem expoliationem nostri viciosi amoris. Qui est limes inter Deum et hominem. Quem qui transvehitur, non enim transire illum propria virtute quis potest, hic non iam homo sed Deus est. Hoc autem est in totali consumatione virtutis.

16. De singularibus autem actibus eadem est etiam ratio, quia pondus synderesis quorsum inclinet nemo perfecte novit, an scilicet conservet se Deo an sibi ipsi (conservatio enim dicitur). Hinc est quod *Deus dicitur solus esse scrutator cordium* ⁵⁷ /40v/ non alienorum tamen sed uniuscuiusque. Et illud *nemo scit quod sit in homine, nisi Spiritus Dei supplet qui est in homine*.⁵⁸ Non si est ibi Spiritus, id est, amor verus Dei, ibi est aliquod sui autem nihil. Si igitur dum videmur nobis aliquid propter Deum agere, possemus omnino perspicere an propter Deum tamen et non etiam propter nos faceremus, possemus unquam etiam scire an vere amaremus eum, et sic an amaremur ab eo. Sed voluntatis nostre radix semper occulta est nobis. Nam ad hoc ut propter Deum aliquid vel omnia, aut ipsum Deum solum velimus, non possumus videre nisi per privationem, quibus mediis et causis ducamur, quibus dum privamur postea agnoscimus ex amoris Dei cessatione quid amabamus.

17. Et ideo qui habere se sentit ad horam aut putat se habere Spiritum Dei beatus est, non si cum illo celos aut angelos aut etiam ipsam sanctissimam Trinitatem scrutatur et investigat scire, sed *profunda cordis sui, que solus scrutator Spiritus*,⁵⁹ sed si postquam hec scrutatus est et quantum datum est perlustravit emendans, et adhuc sentit eundem Spiritum, non iam illum ducat amplius pia quada resistantia, non permittens se duci propter se extra se ut prius /41r/ sed duci se libere permittat, si impetrare potest, a suo corde in cor Christi.

Si non impetrat id in vite ipsius aliquem actum, unde rursus ex comparatione cordis sui profunda prospiciat quod si ne id quoque impetrat et tamen cupit: libere iam et duci et ferri se quolibet securus permittat dum tamen rediens ad se iisdem vestigis conetur intrare in se nunquam inde exiturus nisi ex obedientia.

⁵⁷ Wisdom 1:6; Psalm 7:10.

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:11.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:10.

18. Omnis virtus est virtus et gratia sed omnis gratia non est gratia et virtus; unde spiritus prophetie, visiones, raptus, iubila, extasis, sunt gratie sed non virtutes.⁶⁰ Gratie que non sunt virtutes non sunt de sui natura meritorie sed meretur in illis creatura ex pio usu et humili ac grata mente.⁶¹ Gratie que non sunt virtutes in predestinatis fere ortum cum virtute habent ac exercitium ita ut sunt semper et gratiae et virtutes, aut quasi semper.⁶² Quedam sunt gratie que semper sunt gratie et virtutes, sicut habitus virtutum et habitus statuum mentis et statuum contemplationis.⁶³ Huius virtutis indicium sumitur ex gratia praeservante in lapsis et ad altiora ex illis semper animam adducens per sui cognitionem et Dei cum debito affectu. /41v/ Nemo gloriatur de alta Dei notitia et gustibus spiritualibus quando talia non sunt gratie et virtutes quia certus sum quod sepe hec dantur in peccato mortali existentibus, ad revocandam creaturam a suo malo statu, ad revocandam ad perfectionem habitum, ad premium temporale quorundam operum in prescitis,⁶⁴ ad excecandum lapsos ab altis statibus in suis erroribus in quos propria presumptione inciderunt et quos cognoscere errores nolunt.⁶⁵ Varios effectus et quasi contrarios operatur sepe gratia in anima, unde etiam infiniti sunt status mentis et contemplationis et gustuum ambulantium in via Dei.⁶⁶

19. Quando gratia incipit operari in anima, vicia illius, que videbantur esse et erant ei quasi contigua, incipiunt paulatim separari ab ea et sic gratia de longinquo appropinquat anime. Deinde gratia perseverans ad animam appropinquat et vicia elongat donec ipsa fiat contigua anime et continua, et tunc vicia sunt extincta cum suis habitibus propter continuationem gratie.⁶⁷ Ante hoc autem tempus sepe fit accessus et recessus et appropinquatio et elongatio

⁶⁰ PANZIERA 1492, fol. 3v: 'Ogni virtù è virtù et gratia, ma ogni gratia non è grazia et virtù. Onde spirito di prophetia, revelationi, visioni, ratti, iubili, et estasi sono gratie, ma non sono virtù'. See also *ibid.*, fol. 68r: 'Ogni virtù in salute meritoria è virtù et gratia, ma ogni gratia non è gratia et virtù.'

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 3v: 'Le gratie che non sono virtù non sono di loro natura meritorie, ma merita la creatura nelle gratie per lo buono uso humile nella perfecta gratitudine'.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 'Le gratie che non sono virtudi sono dalle virtuose creature a salute predestinate sì tosto dalle virtù virtuosamente sonate che la gratia è quasi sempre gratie et virtù'.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 'Alcune gratie sono che sempre sono gratie et virtù, come sono gli habiti delle virtudi et gli stati della mente, et gli stati della contemplatione'.

⁶⁴ On the side: 'iudicia dicitur'.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fols 3v–4r: 'Nissuno si glorii molto del conoscimento di Dio, né delle sue creature, né delli spirituali sentimenti, perochè io sono certo che questi doni si danno molte volte stando la creatura in peccato mortale. Et le ragioni sono quattro. La prima è per chiamare la creatura del suo male stato a perfecta salute. Seconda, per ritrarre la creatura che fu già perfecta et è fatta grande peccatrice. Terza, fa l'Altissimo Iddio che alchuna creatura che ha facte et fa per esso Iddio grandi cose non si debbe salvare et però la pagha in via degli spirituali sentimenti. Quarta et ultima ragione si è perochè alchuna creatura riceve da Dio inconsiderabili gratie, et fabricala in mirabile perfectione perfetta'.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fols 4v–5r: 'Infinite quasi et contrarie operationi fa la gratia nella creatura [...] Infiniti quasi sono gli stati della mente et quelli della contemplatione, et gli spirituali sentimenti delle virtuose et eccellenti creature.'

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, fol. 2v: 'Nelle communi vocationi delle creature in salute [...] la gratia [...] nel primo tempo è remota, nel secundo è contigua, nel tertio è continua'.

viciorum et gratie ab anima. Mensurat hec qui expertus est, quomodo Deus dicit mari cordis *huc usque venies, et hic collides /42r/ tumentes fluctus tuos.*⁶⁸ Et videt quod synderesis post periculum lapsus, cum pervenerit ad certum terminum, sistit Dei beneficio, certis temporibus, citra et ultra secundum gratiam, quam in se sentit anima pro tempore diversimode operari. Sentitur ligari fomes stricte strictius strictissime, laxarique late latius latissime, quandoque generaliter, quandoque particulariter, quandoque particulariter et generaliter. Nam quandoque in uno sentietur totaliter aut quasi ligatus, et aliis secus erit valde et incomparabiliter, et tamen aliququaliter et sepe multum, ita ut mortale non possit appropinquare et veniale non multum possit penetrare.

Aliquando mortale appropinquabit et tanget causis iniquitatis animam et mordere videbatur et tamen nulla morsus vestigia dimittet et reperietur non infixisse dentem. Aliquando dubitabitur an infixerit et dubium stabit quia non erant signa certa nec sanitatis nec vulneris et sic variabitur diversis modis accessus et recessus istius rabidi canis, quia etiam cum mordere non potest latrat. Felix autem ille qui vere est a morsibus et latratibus liber in uno, aliquo, pluribus aut omnibus. Et hoc quidem */42v/* de illis dico quibus lumen vere sapientie lucet ut per singulos gradus pronuntient *Illum a quo est omne bonum.*⁶⁹

Nam multi alias confessi sunt innumeris quasi vulneribus et captivi, ac se non solum integros et liberos sed impenetrabiles et incaptivabiles putant quibus veh multiplex reprovatur, a quibus per participii aut similitudinis vicinitatem longe sit anima mea! Qui nihil habent iam quod pro se orent soli populi saluti intenti, quibus data est *clavis David*⁷⁰ qua et celum aperiant peccatoribus quibus voluerint, et corda quoruncunque voluerint ut putant quando pro libito aperiant Christo. Nam ego unum novi qui tales claves se habere dixit una vice, et altera quadam, nominatis istis clavibus intulit quod si quis eas haberet magno honore dignus esset.

20. Quid ponit in anima virtus? Motum aut quietem? Actum an passionem? Secundum diversa principia ponit utrunque, magis autem proprie quietem ac passionem. Nam dum tollit dispositionem contrariam et eius actum, ponit in ea quietem a proprio et passionem ab infuso

⁶⁸ Job 38:11.

⁶⁹ The phrase ‘a quo omne bonum est’ (from whom every good comes) is extremely common. See AUGUSTINE 1844–1865, XXXIV, col. 137 (*De vera religione*, 18.36): ‘Nulla autem res obtinet integritatem naturae suae, nisi in suo genere salva sit. Ab eo autem est omnis salus, a quo est omne bonum; at omne bonum ex Deo: salus igitur omnis ex Deo.’ See also BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX 1844–1865, CLXXXIII, col. 329A (*Sermones de tempore, In festo Pentecostes, sermo II*): ‘quicquid boni in te inveneris, illi tribuas, a quo omne bonum, et sine quo non parum aliquid, sed nihilominus potes incipere, ne perficere dicam.’

⁷⁰ Isaiah 22:22: ‘Et dabo clavem domus David super humerum ejus; et aperiet, et non erit qui claudat; et claudet, et non erit qui aperiat’. See also Revelation 3:7: ‘Et angelo Philadelphiae ecclesiae scribe: Haec dicit Sanctus et Verus, qui habet clavem David: qui aperit, et nemo claudit: claudit, et nemo aperit’.

habitu et eius actus. Dum autem in ea per eam operatur actus virtutis, ponit in ea etiam motum voluntatis et actum illius: /43r/ neutra tamen passio sine actu, et neuter actus sine passione. Dum enim quiescit et non agit, est in ea motus voluntatis, in non actum et in suum nihilum tendit. Dum vero agit et movetur quasi extrinsecus, in actum apertum cooperans gratie, quiescit tamen in actu ipsius gratie, sentiens se et volens non suo proprio motu sed gratie duci, illi tribuens totum quod agit. Et suum actum non sentit actum aliquid agentem, sed actum actionem virtutis et gratie impediens et destruentem, quia nihil sentit se agere nisi malum in eo quod non penitus acquiescit gratie, tarde illam recipiens, et acceptans lente, et non obediens cum illa ambulans, et cito illam manere parata et cupientem, deserens: ita quod proprie actus anime actus in opere virtutis, quies est, passio est, cessatio est.

Per actum tamen voluntatis adiute a gratia, et cessare a suo actu proprio et malo volentis ut in ea locus detur actioni gratie, bonum semper actum agentis, et bene convenit ei illud Esaie 37: *Dominus mere aperit mihi aurem, ego autem non contradico retrosum non abii: et cetera.*⁷¹ Nihil enim aliud agit anima cum non male agit, nisi quia non contradicit sananti voluntatem; retrorsum /43v/ non abiit dum sana producitur ad operationis bone consumationem, quia ambulat cum illa permittens se duci ab ea et quousque hoc agit bene agit. Postquam autem ex carnis infermitate ceperit contradicere et retrorsum tedio affecta abire et elongari a Deo per dissimilitudinem voluntatis, id est, velle aliquid ex se, tunc male agit.⁷²

21. Quelibet bona inclinatio naturalis et rectitudo disponit ad alias et illas aequaliter causare videtur per destructionem suorum contrariorum; et sic praeparatur subiectum virtuosus habitibus. Et quasi materia quedam, quam in suos veros habitus superveniens caritas universalis, id est gratia gratumfaciens formet in esse verum ipsorum habitum virtuosorum. Et sic qualescunque rectitudines nature ante illam non sunt habitus quia nec ille vere rectitudines ullomodo. Et sic actus ab illis elicit non sunt virtuosus nec meritorii. Isto modo verum est quod virtus ab alia procedit, ut dicunt doctores,⁷³ id est quia praeparatur eis materia a sociis

⁷¹ The pericope is from Isaiah 50:5. At 37:17, we find this passage however: 'Inclina, Domine, aurem tuam, et audi; aperi, Domine, oculos tuos, et vide: et audi omnia verba Sennacherib, quae misit ad blasphemandum Deum viventem'.

⁷² See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 3r: 'Interrogatio. Che è virtù? Respondo. La virtù è pura forma nell'anima, la cui quantità virtuosa è immensurabile et è la volontà della creatura facta una cosa con la volontà di Dio, se la virtù è perfecta'.

⁷³ See *ibid.*, fols 1v–2r: 'Nulla virtù può l'una l'altra generare. Et nulla virtù né in acto né in habito da alcuna altra virtù procede propriamente parlando perochè la charità propriamente tutte le 'nforma. E sancti doctores dicono che una virtù genera l'altra, et l'una dall'altra procede. Et così è largamente parlando con alcuno debito respectu in questo modo. Quando la gratia comincia a ridurre gli habitus negli acti, si riduce più tosto è più perfectamente quelli habitus a quali la creatura è in anima et in corpo meglio disposta. Accompagnando quelli habitus alloro virtuosus acti gli habitus crescono in perfectione et l'aptitudine a peccare in mente et in corpo in parte s'adormenta. Per la qual cosa dove erano in prima penosi si dilectano. Onde le loro virtù si destano, et in acto si riducono, et però più tosto

rectitudinibus naturalibus antequam sunt habitus virtuosi infusi, deinde adiuvantur ab aliis perfici iidem habitus.

22. /44r/ Le gratie che se infondono in stato de gratia ad alcuni, et alcuni in peccato mortale, se sono infuse in stato de gratia, si togliono per el peccato mortale, molto più le gratie che non se infondeno mai se non in stato de gratia perdendosi per el peccato mortale, adonche certe gratie de rapti et gratia de dolore de li peccati er pianto de la passione de Christo, date a certe persone a te note, in diversi tempi et lochi, quia constat tibi quod ille gratie steterunt etiam post peccatum mortale, certum est quod vel non fuerunt gratie infuse, sed operationes naturales per deceptionem Sathane, aut fuerunt infuse in peccato mortali, sed potius primum cordis.

23. Similiter et gustus quidam illius in raptu, et cuiusdam alterius in oratione, per quem gustum in presumptionem proprie excellentie, et contemptum aliorum veniebat, fuit potius naturalis, ut scis certis nominis, posse a demone fieri, quam infusus. Ille enim in suo raptu, nil nisi colores odores splendores et dulcores in interioribus autem sensibus sentiebat et dulcores quosdam infusos. Iste autem in sua oratione dulcores quosdam mentis leves et similiter infusos⁷⁴; et uterque sine lumine interiore, immo magis excecatus in sui cognitione restat.

De raptu autem S. I. nondum plene discernis, an naturalis an infusus: credis tamen potius /44v/ infusum, similiter et dulcores eius infusos putas et in statu gratie. Sed an virtus etiam gratia sit, vel tantum gratia dubitas et potius credis quod tamen gratia. Similiter et elevationes mentis eius, quia cum parvo lumine redire videtur, dixi parvo quia non sine aliquali.

De U. autem aliter sentis quia totum esse videtur in eo virtus et gratia. Sunt enim cum lumine divini beneplaciti et cognitionis sui nihili: quantum ad ipsius statum spectat, nam quia unicum statum gustat unum lumen, etiam consequitur.

Ih. autem videtur multipliciter ferri et lata esse, et sic multiplicius lumen habet, altiolem quidem statum contemplationis et mentis habens, quam U. multo, sed minus perfecte, consequuta est suum statum et ad minorem illius gradum pervenit. Nam U. a culmine, a perfectione, a pace, a stabili amore incepit; et quotidie proficit, ut videtur, in illo licet imo contemplationis et mentis statu.

et più perfectamente, et con meno pena gli habiti negli acti si riducono. Conchiudo adunche l'una virtù genera l'altra et procede dall'altra per la dispositione che ad operare la virtù si seguita in mente et in corpo per la virtù dinanzi exercitata in acto'.

⁷⁴ infusos] *follows* et similiter infusos.

A. autem gustus et elevationes et cetera partim infusos partim naturales puto. Et nescio an et in statu gratie, ac vereor quod non, quia in suis illis gustibus et elevationibus lumine caret et propterea fixa est in opinionibus amatrix tenera sui. Et non solum a se sed nec ab alio, sibi contradici patiens absque nimio merore, et statim ad desperationem vergit et pacem /45r/ non habet, quia nec fide stat nec spe erigitur, nec caritate nobilis est, nec avida est veritatis nisi placite et consentientis sibi.

Idem et peius sentis de R. quam audisti U. et cetera.

Aliquos etiam gustulos habuit, L. quos naturales putas et sine lumine, et quia sine conatu ac virtute saltem naturali anime ad opera pietatis que ei profecto provenissent ab infusione, quia parcam animam etiam viciosa avida fit augmenti illius doni viciose amans illud et multum amans et propter illud praesumens temere quae illi non dantur, et aggrediens: et omnino vehemens in suis motibus pietatem imitantibus propter quod etiam quod scit et cetera.

24. Iterum de habitu. Quid est proprie et secundum se habitus? Multa presupponit hec veritas ut noscatur. Cum enim habitus oriatur per actum, in adultis sive ille actus infusus sit sive industria quesitus, certum est quod oritur per actum voluntatis. Utrum autem in voluntate, hoc est ipsa volendi potentia, subsistat, videtur quod sic, quia actus sunt de natura potentie, et actus eius sunt meritorii vel nam ex proprietate voluntatis. Sed non est verum quia substitunt in intellectu, quia intellectus unum, voluntas duplicem actum habet, libertatem scilicet vel electionem et amorem seu actum volendi /45v/ et quidem electio seu libertas eius dant originem habitui, imprimendo intellectui ut illud velit.

Intellectus tamen accepta impressione illam servat et dat legem secundo voluntatis actui, hoc est, amori seu volendi actui, et precedit illam attrahendo post se. Illa autem, hoc est, volitiva potentia, sicut precedit intellectum sistendo illum in placito sibi et a se electo vero, sic sequitur eam per actum suum secundarium volendo et amando ut bonum illud quod intellectus sic qualificatus ei ostendit ut verum. Et sic licet actus intellectus non fit meritorius boni aut mali, sed voluntatis, est tamen causativus actus ipsius voluntatis qui est meritorius. Habitus igitur ut quid inherens est in intellectu et sic ut dispositio et causa in sua materia et subiecto, est autem in voluntate ut transiens, et sic ut actus ab illa dispositione elicitus.

25. Si igitur dispositionis origo a Deo fuit, meritorius est actus eius; sin autem ab industria hoc est quesitus et naturalis non est meritorius actus illius. Habitus virtutum cum per novam gratiam reducantur ad actum suum voluntarium, etiam sine actu extrinseco sunt meritorii, ideo et infirmi possunt habere meritum ieiunii, et nupti castitatis, et occupati contemplationis, et cetera.

Atque ideo /46r/ quiescendum cuique est in proprio munere, qui in statu imperfecto sunt perfectionis, si ad illum ferri non possunt impedimento extrinseco. Extrinsecum autem hic voco omne involuntarium, etiam intrinsecum, ex defectu proprio et culpa presente veniali et antiqua mortali procedentem, quia extra actum voluntatis presentis est, et sic extra substantiam anime ad penam relictum.

26. Habitus virtutum per reductionem frequentem ad suum actum facilitantur et perficiuntur in proprio genere, quia contraria dispositio paulatim tollitur, sicut et crescit cum tales habitus raro ad actum reducuntur, et redit postquam quasi penitus extincta erat: si negligantur: et raro habitus reducuntur ad suos actus. Est igitur quandoque remota, quandoque proxima, quandoque contigua et continua gratia reducens habitus virtutum ad actus secundum nature obliquitates, et contrarias inclinationes accedentes ab anima vel recedentes et succedentes sibi invicem frequenter. *Qui igitur stat videat ne cadat,*⁷⁵ *qui tenet teneat,*⁷⁶ *qui iustus est iustificetur adhuc,*⁷⁷ quia non est status in via sed motum in altum aut in imum virtutis at vicii. In patria autem gratia talis erit concreta quasi innata, ideo ipsi semper iidem.⁷⁸ In nobis /46v/ autem cursus, id est vehemens et continuus motus et tempus, id est mera mutatio et successio unius status ad alium; et ideo *non est prudentium sapientia, neque velocium cursus,*⁷⁹ quia nemo vere sapiens, nemo vere velox nisi ad momentum ex munere gratuito, disponente causas secundas organum et media. Et si verum est de veloce, multo verissimum in sapiente propter naturalem intellectus cecitatem in naturali sapiente et in gratia supernaturali vestita ex libertate et spontaneitate gratie momentanee, plus et minus pro libito largientis et accedentis et recedentis.

27. Quare est quod nemo scit an amat Deum vel se ipsum, cum multi sentiant se motu voluntatis ferri in Deum, et amor nihil aliud sit quam voluntatis vehemens et continuus motus in aliquid volitum? Respondeo quia ignoramus de comuni lege an primus motus voluntatis nostre in nos tenderit an in Deum, et sic an voluerimus nos ipsos vel Deum. Nam cum accessoria omnia sapiant et sint de natura sui principalis, si nos primum in nos tetendimus quam in Deum, motus qui videtur esse in Deum, non est in eum sed in nos, quia videlicet tendimur in eum propter nos, et amor noster qui videtur esse /47r/ amor Dei non est amor Dei sed amor amoris Dei, hoc

⁷⁵ See 1 Corinthians 10:12: 'Itaque qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat'.

⁷⁶ See 2 Thessalonians 2:7: 'Nam mysterium jam operatur iniquitatis: tantum ut qui tenet nunc, teneat, donec de medio fiat'.

⁷⁷ Revelation 22:11: 'Qui nocet, noceat adhuc: et qui in sordibus est, sordescat adhuc: et qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc: et sanctus, sanctificetur adhuc'.

⁷⁸ See PANZIERA 1492, fol. 3r: 'In patria, la gratia per la quale gli habiti negli acti si riducono, non è intra gli habiti et gli acti né rimota, né contigua, né continua, anzi è negli habiti et negli acti concreta'.

⁷⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:11.

est amor actus amandi Deum, a nobis volitus et electus, quia sublimat et perficit ille actus eos qui se habent, non qui se amant.⁸⁰

Aliud est tamen illum habere, aliudque amare et desyderare nam cum ille actus in his qui se habent creatus sit in gratia, per quam habetur, creatura est, quam nos amantes idolatre efficitur, et adoramus quod amamus, aut verius id propter quod illud amamus, id est nos ipsos propter quos illum actum amamus. Sicut enim volunt velle quod nolunt, non vere volunt sed nolunt, nam si illud vellent, non utique voluntatem illius sed illud vellent, sic qui Dei amorem amant, non Deum sed amorem amant et dum videtur sibi pro Deum amant, non amant Deum sed eius amorem, hoc est actum propter potentiam illius quam in se habere volunt, non advertentes quod voluntas non potest simul et semel eodem modo, hoc est sub eodem fine ferri in plura, sed unum tamen tendat necesse est ut finem et in alia ut media.

Et qui finem constituit actum amandi, non Deum adorat sed illum actum, quem finem sibi constituens dicit sibi et vult esse loco illius qui dixerit: *Ego sum principium et finis.*⁸¹ /47v/ Finis est enim propter quem alia quisque vult. Et voluntati rationali est bonum, si recta sit et bona. Sin autem non bonum, sicut enim falsum bonum, non bonum est et ideo malum, ita verum bonum, bonum est vere et simpliciter, et ideo finis voluntatis rationalis recte.

28. Origo autem istius voluntatis et amoris profundum, id est obscurum et celatum cordis vocatur, quod *scrutari dicitur solus Deus*,⁸² quia solus novit an motus ab nobis ipsis et propter nos sit in nobis vel a se in ipsum, quia si a nobis, etiam si in ipsum post nos tendere videatur, in nos recidit et desinit semper, sic e contra licet in nos ex parte ferri videatur post primum verum in Deum motum, voluntas nostra vere tamen tendit in Deum, et quo difficilius ex rebellionem inferioris in Deum tendentis, eo potentius propter quod si tollitur rebellio, si amoveatur contrarium, quasi qui assuevit armatus et onustus currere, cum liber sit ab onere solito, non currit sed volat. Perpeti et sisti nescio cursu hinc et quo graviori onere premimur et quo potentiarum obice quasi sistimur, eo etiam post modum, non solum velocius sed et potentius currimus, fulguris similes, et idonei /48r/ contrarias quasque materias quasi fluvius in undas tollere et capere, frangere et ad nihilum redigere.

Finis.

⁸⁰ On the perfection of the loved object, see Text 9, § 5.

⁸¹ Revelation 1:8.

⁸² 1 Corinthians 2:10.

12. *Super illud: Veh mihi quia tacui quia vir pollutis labiis ego sum* (Mag., fols 48v–50r)

In this short commentary, Biondo examines Isaiah 6:5–8. He is primarily interested in what causes the prophet to be silent.

*/48v/ Super illud: Veh mihi quia tacui quia vir pollutis labiis ego sum.*⁸³

1. *Veh mihi quia tacui* et cetera. Non dixit tacui tantum sed tacui quia vir pollutis labiis ego sum. Accusat se de triplici peccata: de propria immundicia, de participatione aliene, et */49r/* de silentio, quisquis enim male vivit facto tacet virtutes contrarias peccatis que agit, et loquitur vicia in quibus vivit, etiam si verbo aliud faciat. Et sic committit hoc triplex peccatum: tacet virtutes, polluit labia dum loquitur facto suo immunda, ducit ad alienam malam vitam. Et sic tenetur de aliena labiorum pollutione quam aut causat, aut roborat.

2. Sed preter hoc notandum quod dicit se tacuisse, propter id quod polluta labia habuerit, ut doceat etiam tacere eos qui adhuc se sentiunt male vivere. Aliter etiam polluta labia habet quisquis male vivit et bene loquitur quia dum loquitur ea que non facit sermo ipsius eum pollutum ostendit. Et sic sermo bonus ab eo qui malus est prolatus, inficit labia se proferentis, quia cum rubore necesse est dici a nobis ea que audientes sciunt non esse in nobis. Et ideo forsitan iste tacuit eo quod labia polluta habuerit quia, quamvis loquutus fuerit ea que ipsum loqui oportuit, quia eadem non fecit, perinde fuit ac si tacuisset, quia sine fructu loquutus fuit. Tacet enim eque vel maxime loquendo et vociferando, quisquis inania vel inaniter loquitur. Tacet quisquis verum */49v/* et bonum non dicit, quia nihil dicit. Tacet quisquis aliter quam opus est, quod dicendum est dicit quia nec vere nec bene dicit quod intelligibiliter et acceptabiliter non exprimit.

3. *Habitavit autem iste in medio populi polluta labia habentis*⁸⁴ quia de talibus unum nec primus neque ultimus numero aut gradu sed multis similis fuit, cum tamen esse non debuerat, quia *Dominum Israel viderit oculis suis*,⁸⁵ quia eo damnabilior eius impuritas vite et sermonis fuit, quo magis eum decuit non solum esse a ceteris vite conversatione lubrica segregatum, sed summa puritate lenem superferri omnibus creatis etiam affectu oportuit, qui oculis suis Dominum Deum Israel viderat, quem videre non potest nisi mundo corde iuxta Salvatoris

⁸³ Isaiah 6:5.

⁸⁴ Isaiah 6:5.

⁸⁵ Isaiah 6:5.

dictum,⁸⁶ ut noscas eum et habitu puritatem habuisse et actu non habuisse, aliquando elevatum, sed in se relapsum.

4. *Unus autem de Seraphin carbunculo tangit labia eius et mundaur iniquitas eius,*⁸⁷ quia cum cordis immondicia, ex qua polluntur labia oris, sit ex amore proprio, superveniente divino amore tollitur proprius, et mundantur labia cordis et oris quia mens que vere Deum solum amat de ipso semper cogitat, /50r/ et loquitur quicquid occurrat, et tollitur ab anima spiritus *inanis glorie*⁸⁸ bene loquentis labia inquinans, postquam intravit caritas *Spiritus veritatis*⁸⁹ et iam securus potest predicare qui nescit se ipsum reciproce amare et potest aliis preesse qui non potest per inflationem sibi obesse. Unde a tali anima sui ipsius amore vacua petiit Trinitas: *quis mittendus sit et quis iturus*⁹⁰ pro solius gratia Trinitatis, quia cum videat prelationem esse illi totam onerosam, vult ei per sui oblationem ad divinum placitum cognitum esse ad meritum. Non autem ante se obtulit, quia nec invitatus fuit inhabilis nec iturus erat nisi vocatus fuisset.

⁸⁶ Matthew 5:8: 'Beati mundo corde: quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt'.

⁸⁷ Isaiah 6:6–7.

⁸⁸ See Galatians 5:26.

⁸⁹ See John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13; 1 John 4:6.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 6:8.

13. *Ad intelligendum quomodo gratia operetur* (Mag., fols 54v–58r)

This text examines how grace works in nature by completing it wholly or partially (§ 1). Biondo intends to discuss five points: where grace works, how it works, what results from its activity, the acts of the faculties which originate from grace, and finally, he will also say something about the *apex mentis* (see § 12). Biondo briefly explains how the two main faculties, intellect and will, are divided into superior and inferior (§ 2). He is only interested in the superior side. The superior intellect is divided into abstract intellect and reason (*ratio*); the superior will is divided into electing and loving wills. Biondo then explains that grace is a created substance that God places into human beings and partially or entirely reforms the human (§ 3). There are many kinds of graces; each works differently; sometimes, they are joined; at other times, they are separated (§ 4). Grace is mainly divided into *gratia gratum faciens* and *gratiae gratis datae* (§ 5). The first type of grace corresponds to the Pauline *caritas*; the second to the various virtues. An essential aspect of all virtues is that they have *caritas* as their form, and they aspire to it; however, all virtues can exist without *caritas*. This also happens in the elect themselves (§ 6).

When grace works in the elective will, it uses the abstract intellect only as a means (§ 7). On the other hand, when grace works in the abstract intellect, it leads to either God's knowledge or a mix of divine and natural knowledge (§ 8). In the first case, one sees the world and God simultaneously (it follows that the world is understood as God's belonging). In the second case, one sees the world and God disjointedly. Thus, the creation is separated from its creator.

When grace descends from the abstract intellect into the inferior parts, there is a discrepancy between grace and its acts; acts do not always correspond to the grace which inspires them as ideally as they do in the *apex mentis* (§ 9). Nobody can be sure of how or when the grace percolates down into the reason or senses; therefore, nobody can be sure to have it (§ 10). Biondo compares it to the development of an argument. The first and second parts can be easily understood as they are developed in the abstract intellect. The conclusion, however, is heard in this world and therefore is unintelligible and confused. Biondo returns now to the case of grace in the elective will (§ 11). In the *apex mentis*, there is no distinction between the will and the intellect; the two are distinct but almost indistinguishable (§ 12). When grace descends from the elective will, it spreads into all other parts; however, it does not lead to any sort of comprehension (§ 13). Grace as love is true, but the cause (namely grace itself) remains mysterious.

1. /54v/ Ad intelligendum quomodo gratia operetur in natura, illam ex toto vel ex parte perficiens, multa sunt prius considerata et discutienda. Primum in qua parte ipsius compositi corporis videlicet et anime; deinde quomodo; demum quo exitu; et quidem cum in toto composito operetur quandoque simul et semel, licet raro et imperfecte, tamen principaliter et causaliter seu formaliter operatur in anima et anime quidem operationes et actus cum sint de natura potentialium.

Potentie vero varie ac multiplices sunt. Nunc tantum de duabus nobis sermo futurus est, quibus immediate, causaliter, formaliter, et formaliter unitur. Et sunt intellectus seu ratio sive rationalis potentia, et voluntas seu volitiva potentia. Utraque in suo apice. Est enim utrique apex quidam et culmen de quo pauca sed necessaria iam dicemus.

2. Voluntatis enim seu volitive potentie rationalis et superioris eius videlicet quae distinguitur contra inferiorem portionem ipsius volitive, seu sensum, cum alio loco a nobis ostensum sit principales partes duas esse, sunt enim plures utriusque partis, realiter a se distincte portiones, ipsius prime divisionis partes quas principales appellavimus et quas duas esse **/55r/** affirmavimus, he sunt electiva videlicet et amativa, seu volitiva et affectus.⁹¹ Potest enim secunda ipsarum tribus his nominibus non incongrue appellari. Similiter rationalis potentie intellective et superioris, quae contra inferiorem sua distinguitur, de qua nunc dicere non est necesse, portiones sunt principales due, rursus in alias distincte, de quibus nunc non est agendum. Suo enim loco tractate sunt.⁹² Harum nomina sunt: prime et separatio a sensibus, intellectus abstractus; secunde vero intellectus seu ratio simpliciter.

3. Preter hoc sciendum etiam quod gratia cum in anima operatur, quatenus creatura est et non creator, hoc est quatenus essentielle aliquid, et novam quandam substantiam de nihilo creatam et anime ipsius reformatricem ex toto aut ex parte pro natura ipsius gratie ponit seu dicit in anima.

4. Quando una est, quandoque multiplex et varia a se ipsa realiter distincta, aliquando enim due, aliquando tres, aliquando plures et plurime erunt in anima simul eodem tempore. Rursus aliquando quedam simul operabuntur ceteris quiescentibus, aliquando omnes concurrent et erunt in suo ac proprio actu. Iterum aliquando **/55v/** singule singulos actus producent; quandoque vero omnes aut aliquae pariter in eundem actum concurrent.

⁹¹ See Text 8.

⁹² See Text 7.

5. Sciendum etiam quod ee gratie inter se primam sectionem patiuntur in partes duas. Quarum prima est ea que dicitur universalis caritas seu gratia gratum faciens, ea videlicet quae a nonnullis contra caritatem distinguitur, quae theologica a nostris nuncupata, *fidei et spei sociabus suis a Paulo praeponitur*.⁹³ Secunda vero, gratia simpliciter nuncupatur cuius sunt multo plures quam superioris partes si modo dici possit, quod superior <non> aliam quam graduum hoc est intensionis et remissionis patiatur realem distinctionem.

6. Huius secunde autem partis divisiones realissime et prope innumere sunt, adeo ut nonnullae inter se in pluribus videatur contrarie. De hac nobis tantum iam dicendum est aliquid quod faciat ad propositam materiam. Primumque affirmamus quod distinguatur in duas partes inter se notabiliter differentes. Quarum prima continet tres illas precipuas quae theologice appellantur virtutes. Secunda autem [continet] reliquas omnes. Quarum inter se cum sint plures differentie cause, hoc est primi et secundi generis partium, una est ceteris maior: quod, plerunque ac semper fere, suam /56r/ habeant formam universalem illam videlicet caritatem, immo rarissime absque illa inveniuntur, atque hoc tantum profundo et inscrutabili Dei iudicio in prescitis reprobis cernere sit. Secundi vero generis partes omnes ac singule sine illa universali caritate constare per se possint, et constant plerunque etiam in electis.⁹⁴

Rursus sciendum est quod praeter theologicas aliarum quoque nonnullae ita dentur illi principali caritati iuncte et nunquam sine illa suos actus producant. Nonnullae vero mixtim et sine illa et cum illa in actum producant diversis temporibus. Rursusque advertendum cui alicui, ut dictum est, sub hac felici forma concessae sunt, plures absque illa dari et absque illa suum actum perferre diverso tempore stante in eo universali illa caritate. Que omnia suis locis cur dicta sint facile patebit.

7. Prima universalis gratia, quandoque operatur principaliter in altera duarum partium, quas intellectus et voluntatis apicem constituere diximus, quandoque in utraque simul et iunctim.

Cum autem in electiva operatur non nisi per intellectum abstractum operari potest, sed per illum transit, /56v/ in hac sistit.

8. Cum vero in intellectu abstracto operatur, fit reflexio, et primum quod, per ipsum abstractum intellectum ad ipsam electivam penetrans, mox in intellectum abstractum se recipit. Neque est tantum hic ordo actus eius momentaneus in suis iniciis, verum stabilis et perseverans ac continuus. Et siquidem particulares gratie, que in anima creantur, in intellectu subsistunt, ab

⁹³ See 1 Corinthians 13:13.

⁹⁴ See Text 8, § 3.

hac ipsa universali forma enarrato superius ordine, a Dei notitia ferunt ipsam intellectivam in notitia sui.

Verum inter primam et secundam notitiam, hoc interest quod prima absoluta est et Dei solius, secunda autem mixta, et vel per reflexionem in Deum tendens vel per abundantiam luminis illum in suo contrario cernens.⁹⁵ Huius actus diversitas fit ex intensione aut remissione luminis.⁹⁶ Videt enim pariter si multum habeat; successive minimo tamen intervallo si minus habeat luminis. Atque in his omnibus perseverans ordo et virtus actus originis duo semper facit actu aut habitu. Afficit enim ut docet contrarie contraria iunctim aut successive. Iunctim si multum est lumen; successive si minus.

9. /57r/ Nam si gratia per abstractum in inferiores partes descendit, si denique in ipsam inferiorem rationalem et secundam partem penetrat, quatenus hinc se, eatenus et inde comunicat per electivam in volitivam ac ceteras inferiores partes descendens.

Eatenus autem extensive et secundum correspondentem locum, non autem eatenus secundum virtutem actus et intensionem. Tunc enim minus afficit quam illuminet quia principaliter agit in intellectu, et per concomitantiam in affectu. Atque ideo non est semper sensibilis actus gratie in affectu amoris aut odii eque ut est in intellectu, quin potius contingit ut illud sensibile quandoque sit quod a gratia fiat in intellectu, insensibile autem quod in affectu.

10. Contingit autem acuerans dixerim fit semper gratia hec comuni ex lege insensibiliter in suis exordiis sepe et in toto progressu. Ac rarus quisque est, ne dicam rarissimus, cui detur sentire accessum recessumque huius luminis, in quo est certitudo divine benivolentiae ac gratie.

De qua certitudine nunc id dixisse sufficiat quod is cui datur quo maior tribuitur, eo et incertior voluntarie linquitur dato volitive dono, ut volens possit celare /57v/ intellectum et tantum id velit quantum possit, possit autem tantum intendi voluntas illa quantum et intensum fuerit lumen intellectum certificans.

Primam enim partem et secundam argumenti audit pacifice electiva in abstracto intellectu fieri, conclusionem autem qua certa fiat audire non potest in hac valle miserie. Ac propterea plerunque etiam ante argumenti demonstrativi minorem partem extensam adhuc implicite gustans se opponit et quiescit volens in sua loci huius ignorantia; ac quo magis et purius quiescit eo fortius et frequentius dimicat. In vacuum enim tendit plenitudo gratie.

⁹⁵ See Text 10, § 10.

⁹⁶ See above § 5.

11. Si vero nostra hec universalis gratia in electiva principaliter sit, transit quidem, ut dixi, per abstractum intellectum in ipsam electivam, si transitus tamen dici potest contermine coherentis ac quasi unite partis illius ad istam. Est enim in reali ipsarum separatione unitum ac unum quid: per quod fiat negari penitus non posse alteri quod uni detur. Quod contra contingit in ceteris omnibus potentiarum ipsarum partibus: atque eo magis: quo magis in sensum declinant.

12. Hic proprie acies est gladii et cuspis suprema, cuius /58r/ partes indivisibiles sunt, licet inferiora realiter distinguantur.

13. Actus tamen qui a gratia fit, cum ab electiva seu per electivam in volitivam descendit inferioresve partes illius, non communicatur intellectui simplici eiusve inferioribus partibus, nisi ex maxima quadam redundantia gratie ipsum abstractum intellectum sic implente ut conterminus illis intellectus simplex a contiguitate sue contermine partis aliquid minimum degustet, quod statim suo accidentali lumine nesciat et suo modo intelligat. Est autem interdum tanta hec plenitudo et redundantia ut in omnes intellectus ipsius descendat, atque id cum sit per notitiam Dei, eque in suimetipsius notitiam ducit animam maiore quidem affectu aut odio, minore vero intellectu causarum odii aut amoris ipsius.

14. *Quoniam necesse est rerum diffinitiones* (Mag., fols 58v–63v)

Biondo intends to examine the nature of grace. Logically speaking, document 13 ought to precede this text. Biondo starts his examination from a definition of grace (§ 2). According to philologists and grammarians, grace seems to have two possible etymologies (§ 2). When grace is associated with the adjective *gratus*, grace means gratitude for a gift (§ 3). On the other hand, when grace is associated with the adverb *gratis*, it suggests that something happens gratuitously (§ 4). The natural connection between cause and effect appears to be severed.

If we follow the connection of grace with *gratus*, two aspects of grace arise (§ 5). Firstly, the created being is made acceptable to God. Secondly, the created being shows gratitude to God for all that he has done. If we follow the connection of grace with *gratis*, two further aspects are made evident. Firstly, grace shows that everything that the created being possesses has been obtained without merit (§ 6). Secondly, grace's activity must be distinguished according to the person who receives it. In the blessed, grace works both outwardly and secretly. From the outside, grace appears to be a form of suffering or tribulation; from the inside, grace educates the created being to obey God (§ 7). By those who have been predestined to damnation, grace is misunderstood (§ 8). It becomes a means of self-glorification, which, in turn, brings the exalted being to refuse and hate God (§ 9). Biondo emphasises that one must both recognise God as the cause of grace and the effect of grace, that is, the glorification of the giver (§ 10).

Having explained the etymology of grace and the possible meanings of the term, he points out that it would be relevant to investigate the link between grace and the phenomenon of light. However, since he has already examined the issue in another treatise, he moves onto another issue (§ 11). In § 12, Biondo examines the situation of those who mistake grace for a temporal belonging and do not see it as a means for eternity. The passage investigates the distinction between *gratiae gratis datae* and *gratia gratum faciens* from a different angle. After an gap, Biondo explains how the soul is appropriated by God, and becomes one with God (§ 13).

1. /58v/ Quoniam necesse est rerum diffinitiones precedere tractatum ipsarum, ut dum rerum diffusio emanat a capite intellegi possit ex genere capitis natura eorum quae procedunt ab illo, volentibus nobis aliquid de gratia dicere, oportunitate rati sumus verbi pondus secundum latinam proprietatem disquirere, ut valeamus ab ipsius vi et natura partitiones nostri sermonis ordiri.

Nec mirum videri debet in tractatu rei altissime ac dignissime grammaticorum venari suffragia. Nempe quoniam res nominibus signentur, de gramaticis sumere opus est quod est tanquam ipsorum proprium apud ipsos. Non enim dedignatur quisquam veritatis amator veritatem undecumque proquirere ac ubicumque compertam honore debito atque amore pariter proseguere. Igitur et nos de gratia loquituri prius verbi eius vim et pondus de gramatice fonte scrutemur.

2. Gratia vel a genitivo huius nominis gratus videlicet grati formatur addita ‘a’ vel ab adverbio gratis dempta ‘s’ et apposita ‘a’. Posset assignari et tertia derivatio eius quae tamen primae respondet quamvis diverso ex verbo. Grates enim plurali numero nomen quod habet duos casus tantus */59r/* nominativum et accusativum. Si in singulari dativo casu, cuius non est usus, accipiatur qui est grati, respondet suo adiectivo nomen deducitur, de quo superius diximus, et sicut habet eandem derivationis formam ita et significationem compositi.

3. A gemino igitur fonte tamen velut Iordanen fluvium oriri hoc nomen dicamus. Quoniam ita est ac propterea dicendum. Prima derivatio, que fit a genitivo nominis gratus, ut sciatur quid signet, videre opus est prius que sit vis nominis ipsius unde deducitur. Gratum autem proprietas latina dicit hominem vel qui placeat cuiquam vel qui accepto beneficio per quod amari se senserit et ipse quibus rebus possit indicet amorem agnoscere; ac paratum pari benevolentia si possit rebus amorem referre; si rebus nequeat verbis, nutibus, animum ostendere benivolum: et de rebus ac beneficiis aut quibuslibet signis amici voluntatem et propensum erga se animum agnoscere. Totum hoc in duo capita constringitur: quorum primum est ut gratus sit alteri qui amore preventus est, nondum ipse amans eum qui se prevenit. Potest enim fieri, et fit frequente, ut alteri gratus */59v/* quis sit quem ipse non novit nec si se amet intelligit.

4. Secunda derivatio, que fit ab adverbio gratis, de vi sui primitivi etiam sumenda est. Gratis autem fieri aliquid factumve esse, latina proprietas dicit, quod ab aliquo in alterum sine ipsius merito fiat. Cuius rei gratia, quoniam et ipsum meritum duplex sit, bonum videlicet ac malum quia et bene et male mereri dicamur, duo etiam significata prodeunt ex bina acceptione propria huius adverbii gratis. Primum eorum est ut gratis fieri dicatur comuniore usu quod sine merito fiat. Secundum vero, quod rarius usurpatur, est ut gratis fieri dicatur⁹⁷ quod nulla rationabili causa mali in alterum fiat. Hoc ipsum autem in duo capita scinditur. Cuius alterum causam tantum habet, alterum vero solum effectum, quoniam neque causam dicere quis possit cuius

⁹⁷ dicatur] *follows comuniore use deleted.*

effectus nullus sit, neque effectum cuius non praecessit causa. Igitur hac ratione et gratis dicitur fieri quod sine causa fit; et eque gratis dici potest factum cuius effectus sit nullus.

5. Gratia igitur secundum primam deductionem ab hoc **/60r/** nomine gratus, duo nobis affert significata de suo primitivo. Atque hoc ordine, gratia vel est donum Dei, quo quis de non grato fit gratus illi et de non dilecto dilectus. Hoc est secundum personam. Nam naturas omnes diligit Deus in omnibus quoniam, ab ipso create, bone semper⁹⁸ atque ideo amabiles sunt. Persone autem quoniam in actu consistunt, merito et amabiles Deo sunt cum bone sunt et odiose cum male. Vel eque donum Dei est gratia, quo Deo gratus carus et dilectus sine proprio merito factus quis agnoscit Datorem atque amat, pro viribus, totum quod accepit atque est. Quoniam *quicquid habet accepisse*⁹⁹ et quicquid est ab ipso et per ipsum esse se sentit, reddens Datori corde, ore atque opere, volens amare quantum potest, laudare quantum et scit, et potest, Datorem ipsum ac eius voluntati quod est laudi eius ex se toto intus et extra servire.

6. Gratia iterum secundum derivationem a gratis adverbio duas etiam significationes affert, ut prima deductio de vi sui primitivi. Quarum prima est conformis primo tantum capiti deductionis prime, hoc autem in pluribus non enim in omnibus **/60v/** omnino consimilis est. Licet enim hoc fonte deducta gratia, dicat nobis donum Dei se esse, quod qui accipit non ideo quia mereretur accepit, sed tamen ideo meruit accepisse quoniam accepit. Non tamen pervenit ad illud caput primae deductionis: quo quis gratus datori et dilectus fit, neque ad illud quo datorem agnoscens animo atque opere, totius in eum fertur sui oblitus.

7. Secunda vero significatio duas proprietates gratie manifestat. Quarum altera est expressio quedam divini actus et emanationis Dei virtutis in creaturam rationalem. Quo actu quave emanatione ipsa creatura a Deo dilecta puniri videtur dum eruditur ac manifeste puniri videtur dum flagellatur extra ut intus erudiatur et palam ut occulte ac clanculum doceatur. Verum quoniam non propter peccata ipsius punitur ut puniatur sed propter pietatem dilecta eruditur et illustratur ut perficiatur et gratior Deo et carior continuo magis redditur, sine causa puniri videtur atque ideo odio haberi per ea quibus et ipsa subinde amantior atque amantior semper efficitur.

8. Altera vero secundi huius capitis proprietas dissimilem omnino ac contrarium huic actui divine emanationis et virtutis Dei **/61r/** actum indicat. Quo creaturam suam rationalem

⁹⁸ semper] follows merito deleted.

⁹⁹ See 1 Corinthians 4:7: 'Quis enim te discernit? quid autem habes quod non accepisti? si autem accepisti, quid gloriaris quasi non acceperis?'

reprobam denique futuram atque ideo talem ab eo prescitam Deus dono quodam ditat ac munerat multiplicis gratie sue, quo non quidam fiat ab eo preventionem muneris cuiuspiam de non dilecta dilecta, ut fit creatura electa, sed permissa ea in personali malitia, quam ipse odit, perseverare ut vult, contra ipsius Dei imperium ac beneplacitum, sinatur ab eo tamen atque ideo ipsa possit assurgere in spem quandam et apparentiam divine servitutis ac divine benevolentie atque amicitie intime.

9. Quo dono et qua gratia, quamquam vera gratia Dei et divino dono, ut sine veris meritis ex presumptis tamen et secundum presumptionem ab eo ditari videtur creatura ipsa, et quantum in ipso est ditatur ac muneratur et munerari videtur, ita propter ingratitude eorum que accipit, presumptioni equalem, et propter abusum eorum que illi dantur, contra mentem atque honorem Datoris, cassa interim et privata omni effectum eius que in ea relucet gratie, dum magis quotidie ac magis crescit in odium Dei activum ac passivum, odio homines scilicet et odio habita, remanet multo magis /61v/ in suo execrabili fine delusa, et inanis omnis a se presumpto, atque ideo male concupito per divinam amicitiam servitutem et benivolentiam, effectum proprie beatificationis et proprie glorie.

10. Quarum rerum vice in omnes contrarias illis rebus et bonis miserias et mala, non volens incidit ex sola electione et arbitrio voluntatis tam delusa ab eo quam illi illudere voluit. Que pena quemadmodum in adeptione boni concupiti privat illam omni effectum, ita et in motu libere voluntatis ipsius manifestat eam omni sapientia fuisse privata in causa propter quam mota est, ut id faceret propter quod sciens et volens detrusa et in tantas miserias ac propterea sine causa vera fecisse monstratur totum quod fecit atque hoc modo gratia hec non quidam a Deo data est ei sine causa. Dederat enim ut bene uteretur si vellet ut poterat si voluisset. Verum ab illa sine causa accepta est, que ideo accepit ut male uteretur quae ei ad malum esse non poterat nisi male uti ea voluisset ut fecit. Ac propterea sine causa accepit illam, sine cuius effectum a se interito, presumpto, et credito neque /62r/ et fatua reperitur.

11. Secundum has divisiones que afferunt nobis prima capita operationum gratie divine in creaturam rationalem, querenda essent nobis vestigia gratie huius que lux et investigande illius semite iuxta Domini datum. Verum quoniam in alio tractatu de luminibus, de natura lucis huius, plura edidimus que faciunt ad propositum opus, de re infinita satis sit ibi attigisse quod ad partes primas gratie ex prima divisione perscrutandas facere videretur. Res enim immensa est et que verbis et tractatibus explicari non possit, igitur pro huius tractatus materia id tamen operis assumpsisse satis sit ut de secunde divisionis partibus ac de ultimis magis quam de primis

dicam, ac de iis quoque pauca de plurimis quae tamen ad rem facere hoc tempore satis videntur. Nescimus enim an faciant quoniam et doctrina ipsa disci inhabilis ab humano doctore est.

12. Et si distatur aliquo genere cuius gratia precipue hunc laborem assumimus et de quo multa dicturi sumus, inutilis est etiam a Deo edoctis qui alio munere seorsum dando non ferantur in eum qui docuit, quamobrem tremuli ac /62v/ trepidi scripturi sumus que ignoramus an pluribus pro futura quam nocitura sit ob generales temporis huius mentium atque animorum, hoc est omnium anime potentiaram, infectiones, quibus tota rationalis natura, tanquam in Eva hausto et Ade propinato veneni poculo, Luciferum imitari videtur, in eum transformata letali scientie boni ac mali cibo ac potu, similitudinem illius induens, cuius finem exprobrat quidem sed actum imitatur ignorans quoniam per viam quamlibet pervenitur ad finem illius non autem alterius que illa non est, quoniam alio deducit atque ideo tantum alia est: nam via ex se loco ad quem ducit comparata eandem rationem habet sui esse, quam tempus ad eternitatem, quoniam eque non sit de fine via, ut nec tempus de eternitate sed tantum ad destinatum locum ducat via extra illum manens: sicut ad eternitatem tempus perducit illius non particeps, nam si in eternitate esse potest tempus esse non posset eternitas. Quam veritatem quoniam non omnes apprehendunt, hec erroris ratio facit cecos confundere alterum in altero dum mensurant eternitatem in tempore et tempus in eternitate. /63r/ Viamque ita vident in fine ut finem intueantur in via, atque in eo sistere se posse putent quod fertur in aliud in quo tamen est verus et permanens non mobilis et imaginarius status eterne Dei voluntati et immutabili non proprie fluxe et labili ac propterea inani innixus ac ruina vera non status cuius portio hypocritarum est omnium ac maxime deceptorum, in quibus est iniquitatis cumulus et peccatorum contra quos haec scribere aggredimur.

13. Iam vero fertur in eum ut creaturas suas beatificantem. Et quotam in eis gradum divini actus sentit. Totum sibi assumit et proprium facit gaudens atque exultans de bono cognito creature et proprio, qui solus actus est illi reflexionis in se non propter se, sed propter Deum, quem sentit in seipsam a se ipso circulum facere ut iterum eam sistat in se ipso. Nam cursus hac visione concepta fertura in Deum, fertur inquam et agitur, non ut neque ambulat motu aliquo proprio, sed passione divini amoris et divini actus in anihilatione proprii, dum illam conservat semper eandem transformatam, beatificatam, et glorificatam conservantis. Aliter enim non esset anima et homo, quod dicitur in Apocalipsi *cum eo Deus qui est eius Deus*.¹⁰⁰ Quemadmodum enim

¹⁰⁰ Rev. 21:3: 'ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus'.

solari luci non addit ignea lux sed perdit actum proprium et proprium splendescere, ita et multo magis volitiva.