

ITALIAN LECTURE

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE PRINCE

By D. M. BUENO DE MESQUITA

Read 15 November 1979

CONSCIENCE cropped up in so many forms in the literature and records of Western Europe in the fifteenth century that few people, one might suppose, can have been left without some awareness of its significance and force. Theologians discussed the ways in which men experience it and the nature of the obligation it imposes upon them. The burden of conscience, a man's responsibility for action in accordance with moral judgements formulated by reason, is mandatory on the individual and must be obeyed. But it is not infallible, conscience can err, and most of those who wrote on the subject in the lull before the Lutheran storm stressed the importance of avoiding error. So there grew up a whole body of case law, records of the opinions given by bishops or preachers, and encyclopedic collections of useful examples, the *Summae de casibus conscientiae*, through which the teaching of theologians was mediated down to the broadest pastoral level for the benefit of those who consulted their confessors.¹ Laymen too referred to conscience,

Note: I have used the following abbreviations:

Cart. Sf. = Carteggio Sforzesco, Archivio di Stato, Milan;

L. Miss. = Registri Lettere Missive, *ibid.*;

ASL = Archivio storico Lombardo;

DBI = Dizionario biografico degli Italiani;

Inv. e Reg. iii = Inventari e Regesti del R. Archivio di Stato di Milano, vol. iii, a cura di N. Ferorelli (Milan, 1920);

Marcora, *MSDM* = C. Marcora, articles on the Archbishops of Milan in *Memorie storiche della diocesi di Milano*;

RIS, ns = Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, nuova serie.

¹ M. G. Baylor, *Action and Person: Conscience in late Scholasticism and the Young Luther* (Brill, 1977) (I am grateful to Professor Henry Chadwick for a reference to this book); R. Creytens, 'Les cas de conscience soumis à St. Antonin', *Archivum fratrum Praedicatorum*, xxviii (1958), pp. 149-220; M. Sevesi, 'I "Sermones" ed i "casus conscientiae" del B. Michele Carcano', *Studi francescani*, xxviii (1931), pp. 331-2. For the *Summae*, T. N. Tentler, 'The Summa for Confessors . . .', in *The Pursuit of Holiness in late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. C. Trinkaus and H. A. Oberman (Brill, 1974), pp. 103-26.

sought guidance on it, attributed their actions to it, and it is probably from these documents, emanating from every literate level of society and infinitely dispersed, that the response of laymen to the obligation of conscience could best be assessed. From Isabella the Catholic Queen of Castile, whose confessor kept a 'book of the discharges of the conscience of the Queen our Lady', now lost, to the shopkeepers who set out to build the new Jerusalem in Florence under the inspiration of Savonarola, there are probably countless references that show some concern for the obligation of conscience.¹

The conscientious prince had to take account of his actions in a dual capacity: in his private life, like any other man, and in the field of government where his decisions could affect the lives of all his subjects. There were plenty of academics—humanists and lawyers—eager to bombard the princes of Italy in the fifteenth century with instruction on how they ought to do their jobs. They wrote for the most part in very conventional terms, and were not inclined to question the advantage of a good conscience. Martino Garati, for example, who held a Chair of Civil Law in the University of Pavia in the 1430s, wrote in his treatise *De Principibus*: 'The Prince ought chiefly to seek two things, namely a good conscience and a good reputation in the eyes of men of the world.' And elsewhere, drawing on the earlier commentators: 'The Prince can pass judgement according to his true and just conscience. Let the Prince beware, however, lest his conscience be ill informed.'²

This formal attachment to what ought to be done was not universal. 'You can't govern states with paternosters' expressed the traditional pragmatic wisdom of Florentine statesmen, attributed quite appropriately even if incorrectly to the most successful of them all, Cosimo de' Medici the elder. And we have recently been reminded that Cosimo's contemporary, Leonardo Bruni, put the same sentiment into the mouths of those who spoke for Florence in the 1270s: 'aliter enim coelum, aliter terra regitur.'³ When Francesco Guicciardini, three generations

¹ Amalia Prieto Cantero, *Casa y descargos de los reyes católicos* (Valladolid, 1969), pp. 9–11, 466–7 (Dr. Roger Highfield has kindly discussed this with me). Domenico Cecchi, *Riforma sancta et pretiosa*, reprinted in U. Mazzone, 'El buon governo' (Florence, 1978), 181–206, *passim* (I mention these purely by way of example).

² G. Rondinini Soldi, *Il Tractatus de Principibus di Martino Garati da Lodi* (Milan/Varese, 1969), pp. 98 (q. 39), 148 (q. 262).

³ *RIS*, NS, vol. xix, 3, p. 62. I owe the reference to Professor J. H. Whitfield (in 'The Machiavellian Moment', *European Studies Review*, viii (1978), p. 367).

younger than Cosimo and Bruni, set down in the private pages of his *Ricordi* the realistic experience of the 'new' school of Florentine historico-political writers of the early Cinquecento, that 'one cannot keep control of states by acting according to conscience', he was surely saying much the same thing, and none of them was far removed from Machiavelli's concise defence of the double standard of judgement: 'accusandolo il fatto, lo effetto lo scusi.'¹ The rulers of Italy in the Renaissance were certainly not noted in their behaviour for the tenderness of their response, either as private or as public persons, to the admonitions of virtue that were addressed to them, but they seem to have been less ready than the Florentine writers to associate themselves openly with the recognition of political realities. It hardly needs to be said today that the institutions of the Church embraced them from childhood, and that they continued in regular observance of its outward forms. So the seed was there, sown perhaps in the dry ground of routine habit, but there was always the chance that, watered by adversity or personal loss, it might germinate and grow.

Some twenty years ago Dr Marcora of the *Biblioteca Ambrosiana* referred to *un fattore coscienza*, an element of spirituality that he claimed to have discerned in the conduct of Ludovico Sforza, seventh Duke of Milan, in the last years of the fifteenth century. The proposition, as he recognized, was likely to be received with some scepticism, and the evidence he mentioned—that Ludovico applied to the Pope for dispensation from the Lenten fast, and that he had a *correttore* of his conscience in the person of the Prior of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan (to whom I shall return)—does not in fact tell us very much about the nature and depth of Ludovico's spiritual commitment. The subject was not particularly close to Dr Marcora's theme, and he did not pursue it further.² As it happens, however, the records of Ludovico's government do go some way to illuminate the workings of his conscience, both in his relations with the Church and in his attitude to some of the problems that the habits of society in the Renaissance forced on the attention of a ruler. They cannot of course tell us anything

¹ *Ricordi*, ed. R. Spongano (Florence, 1951), p. 159, quoted by M. Phillips, *Francesco Guicciardini: the Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1977), p. 74 n. 30. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, bk. I c. 9.

² Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), p. 341. My debt to Dr Marcora's articles will be evident. I should like to add my thanks to him for courteously responding to an enquiry.

with any certainty about the conscience of any other prince. But the territory is so very faintly charted, as far as I know, that it seems worth while to examine a case history for which a rather unusual body of evidence happens to have survived.

The dynasty that ruled Lombardy in the fifteenth century was fairly consistent in its devotional attitudes. Filippo Maria Visconti, third Duke of Milan, that strange, tormented, and superstitious man, was very punctilious in prayer. His conscience clearly troubled him in 1446, a year before he died, for he posed to a committee of rather distinguished theologians the question whether there was any way in which a ruler who had oppressed his subjects with taxes, beyond the possibility of making restitution, could hope to save his soul. He received a long, careful, and not entirely discouraging response, replete with references to 'li doctori de ragione et sacra scriptura', but the doubt remained to disturb the conscience of those who governed the Duchy for Charles V a century later.¹ Filippo's only fully acknowledged child, Bianca Maria Visconti, was a woman of firm character and devout nature, 'religiosissima et sanctissima' as the Canon Regular Matteo Bossi wrote after an audience with her, and she brought up her children in the same spirit.² Some of it too seems to have rubbed off on to her husband Francesco Sforza, who by 1450 had brought under his own control the ten cities of Filippo's dominion and assumed the title Duke of Milan. Francesco, in the course of his earlier career as a *condottiere* had had too much political experience of Popes to treat them with great reverence, but he was careful to seek their approval where appropriate for 'the greater quiet of his conscience' and even, in one matter, 'although we are advised that we could do it without burdening our conscience'.³

Ludovico Sforza was probably the most able and certainly the most intelligent of the sons of Francesco and Bianca. Fate appeared to have condemned him to the common lot of younger sons, with no great place clearly reserved for him in either State or Church. But he seems to have believed with a rooted conviction in his own capacity and destiny for the rule of men. By

¹ P. C. Decembrio, *Vita Philippi Mariae*, c. lxxv, *RIS*, NS, vol. xx, 1, pp. 363-78. E. Verga, 'Un caso di coscienza di Filippo Maria Visconti', *ASL*, xlv (1918), pp. 427-87. For Charles V's Governors, Caracciolo and Del Vasto, see F. Chabod, *Lo Stato e la vita religiosa a Milano nell'epoca di Carlo V* (Turin, 1971), pp. 172 and n. 3, 173.

² Marcora, *MSDM*, i (1954), p. 238.

³ C. Canetta, 'Spigolature d'Archivio', *ASL*, viii (1881), pp. 632-3, 631.

1480, at the age of 28, he had grasped the rule of the dominion by a series of well-taken chances, as Governor and Lieutenant for his ineffectual and sickly young nephew Giangaleazzo. When Giangaleazzo died in 1494, Ludovico brushed aside the claims of his infant son and took the office and title of Duke for himself.

There was a strong element of temperamental insecurity in Ludovico's character that enhanced his need to look to the Church for assurance. There is no doubt that this need conformed to the education planned for him by his mother, and his attachment to the Church was certainly not weakened by his marriage at the beginning of 1491 to a young girl of 15, Beatrice daughter of Ercole d'Este Duke of Ferrara. An observer described Beatrice as 'pretty, dark, a designer of new dresses, given to dancing and amusements day and night', but she was lively and full of character, certainly no nonentity.¹ Her father presided over the most devout court of Italy, and she brought something of its spirit with her. Ludovico and Beatrice accorded special patronage to the new church of the Observant order of the Dominicans in Milan, Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Ludovico had a much-loved illegitimate daughter named Bianca; Beatrice, only four or five years older, also became very fond of the child. Bianca was about sixteen when she married the man who was probably Ludovico's closest friend, Galeazzo di San Severino, the winner of tournaments and pattern of courtly grace. Five months after the wedding Bianca died, quite suddenly, on 22 November 1496. Six weeks later, a more intolerable loss, Beatrice too was dead. Pregnant with her third child, she was taken ill during an evening's dancing and died, in the night of 2-3 January 1497, in giving premature birth to a stillborn son. She was 21 years old. She lies still in effigy by the side of her unfaithful and adoring husband on the great marble tomb, originally in the apse of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie where she was buried, but now in the left transept of the church of the Certosa of Pavia.²

Ludovico, twenty-four years her senior, mourned her with a sincerity it has never been possible to doubt. There are many signs of his grief, but the most consistent information comes from the reports received by the Venetian government and duly

¹ G. Lopez, *Feste di Nozze per Ludovico il Moro* (Milan, 1976), p. 64. J. Cartwright, *Beatrice d'Este Duchess of Milan* (London, 1899), is still useful.

² Usually attributed to Cristoforo Solari, but see F. Filippini, 'La tomba di Lodovico il Moro e Beatrice d'Este', *ASL*, ns ii (1937), pp. 198-201.

recorded by the indefatigable Marino Sanuto in his inexhaustible diary. After reporting Ludovico's initial despair, Sanuto noted in April 1497 that the Duke had become very devout after his wife's death, that he observed the fasts and lived chaste *come si divulgava* (and was it divulged without the authority of the Duke?). 'The court is no longer what it was, and at present he seems to show much fear before God.' In August Sanuto noted that the Duke went twice a day without fail to pray by the tomb of Beatrice. In May 1498 Ludovico still set aside each Tuesday as a day wholly dedicated to God, and spent much of it in Santa Maria delle Grazie.¹

On the day Beatrice died Ludovico ordered the payment of votive offerings she had promised to the Virgin Mary for her safe confinement. A courier rode to Varese with 25 ducats for the famous shrine of Santa Maria del Monte. The church of Santa Maria di Loreto in the March of Ancona received 100 ducats.² It was a natural impulse to honour his wife's vows in spite of the tragic non-fulfilment of the hopes that had accompanied them. So, too, filial piety required that a son should fulfil the testamentary dispositions made by his mother for the salvation of her soul. Six months after Beatrice died Ludovico signed with his own hand an order for payment of 2,285 lire 10 soldi to the Abbot of the Cistercian house of Chiaravalle outside Milan. 'They are part of a sum of 11,000 lire for which we are debtor to the Monastery by reason of the will of the late illustrious Duchess our mother, which it is our intention to put into effect.'³ But in this case Bianca Maria Visconti had already been dead for twenty-eight years, and Ludovico had been effective ruler of the Duchy for sixteen of them. The delay is in some measure explicable. But then, what had belatedly stirred Ludovico's conscience to his duty at this particular moment?

References to the Duke's conscience had in fact begun to appear, in letters issuing from the chancellery, in April 1497. And already before that, in March, there is a change of emphasis in the measures that were being taken to set up a Monte di Pietà in Milan. The campaign to endow these non-profit-

¹ M. Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. i (Venice, 1879), pp. 457, 575, 746, 960. Other references on pp. 460, 463, 480, 491, 512, 630, 812.

² L. Miss. 204, f. 193r, 3 Jan. 1497, to the Archpriest of S. Maria del Monte. A. Luzio and R. Renier, 'Delle relazioni di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga con Ludovico e Beatrice Sforza', *ASL*, xvii (1890), p. 648 n. 1.

³ L. Miss. 206 bis, f. 174r, 7 July 1497, to *Deputatis rei pecuniarie*. Repayment of his mother's and brothers' debts was confirmed in the will of 3 Dec. 1498: C. Cantù, 'Il Convento e la Chiesa delle Grazie', *ASL*, vi (1879), p. 236.

making loan banks, or pawnbroking offices, in the cities and towns of Italy, spearheaded by the mendicant orders, had been in progress for over thirty years. Some cities of the Sforza dominion—Parma, Piacenza, and Pavia where Ludovico had given full support to the efforts of the radical Franciscan preacher Bernardino da Feltre in 1493—had already set them up, while there was still certainly nothing more than a kind of embryonic pre-Monte supposed to have been opened in Milan in 1483. The endowment of a full Monte apparently met objections, perhaps from vested interests. But a group of Milanese citizens threw themselves into the cause, and eventually were able to get the Duke's consent at the beginning of July 1496 to certain specific requests that they put to him. This enabled them to start detailed planning; statutes were drafted, and accepted by the Duke in August.¹

The terms in which Ludovico expressed his approval at this stage suggest nothing much more than polite acquiescence. Nine months later, after the death of Beatrice, he had transformed himself into the leading champion of the Monte. He allocated the offerings of himself and his court on the first Sunday after Easter 1497 for the endowment of the Monte, and made elaborate arrangements to ensure a generous response. Shortly afterwards, in an ordinance laying down procedures for getting the Monte under way, he was arrogating to himself virtually the whole credit for the enterprise. 'We have thought how much benefit and honour would accrue to our city, if a Monte di Pietà were set up in it. . . . And so for the implementation of this idea of ours (*questo nostro pensiero*) we have put great diligence and study to give beginning and form to the said Monte. And even as the work stemmed from us (*l'opera procedeva da noi*) . . .'² Was it in the eyes of God or of men that

¹ P. Compostella, *Il Monte di Pietà di Milano*, vol. i (Milan, 1966), pp. 37–80, and 159–170 docs. 1–2 (in which, unlike Dr Compostella, I cannot see evidence of Ludovico's special interest). I have not seen F. Calvi, *Vicende del Monte di Pietà di Milano* (Milan, 1871), which refers to the 1483 foundation without identifying the evidence. For general accounts of the Monti, P. Holzapfel, *Die Anfänge der Montes Pietatis 1462–1515*, Veröffentlichungen aus dem Kirchenhistorischen Seminar München, Nr. 11, (Munich, 1903); V. Meneghin, *Bernardino da Feltre e i Monti di Pietà* (Vicenza, 1974); A. Milano, see below, p. 426 n. 1.

² Compostella, op. cit., pp. 171–7 doc. 3 (undated). See also pp. 181–3 doc. 5, decree published 17 June (the original is in L. Miss. 206 bis, ff. 139–42). For the offerings, Compostella, pp. 80–1, and add L. Miss. 206 bis, f. 24 (21 Mar. 1497, to Hieronimo Vincemala), f. 24&t (23 Mar., to Gianfrancesco Vicomercato).

Ludovico was seeking to attach to himself the credit that seems rightly to have been due to the Milanese citizens who had sponsored and worked for the establishment of a Monte?

The manner in which the Duke proceeded during this time to direct his conscience towards two issues closely linked to the foundation of the Monte may suggest the answer. The campaign for Monti di Pietà was fought to relieve the poorer part of the population from the need to have recourse to money-lenders at high rates of interest. Of money-lenders there were two kinds, the Christian and the Jewish. Christian usurers, some of whom lent money on a very large scale, broke the law of their Church, exposed themselves to the consequences of sin, and were liable ultimately to feel the need to make atonement in the hope of saving their souls. They also incurred criminal liability, to the financial profit of the Duke. A very prominent Milanese financier, Gasparino da Casate, who had begun to have misgivings about his occupation as early as 1477, made provision on his death-bed (1491), 'desiring burial as a good and faithful Christian', for all his profits from usury to be restored. The Archbishop of Milan himself declared that Gasparino had ensured the salvation of his soul by the provision he had made for restoring his ill-gotten gains, and absolved his heirs from all claims for restitution. The government then got to work. The Deputies for Criminal Affairs assessed the usurious profit to be restored at the enormous sum of over 50,000 ducats. The government in accordance with normal practice made a composition with the heirs for what it was thought they could pay, and agreed to settle for 20,000 ducats. By 1495 the rights of the borrowers seem to have yielded to the advantage of the Duke, who was still pursuing the heirs for 3,000 ducats. Then, four months after Beatrice's death, Ludovico Sforza showed misgivings about his personal part in these transactions. He set out the details of the arrangement with the heirs in a long letter to the Finance Board, signed *manu propria*—evidence that the Duke was personally dealing with the matter and had read the letter. 'However,' he went on, 'it is not our intention by reason of this to add burden to our own conscience, nor to exonerate or discharge the conscience of the heirs.' The phrases recur later in the letter: 'wishing to discharge our conscience', 'exonerating our own conscience and adding the burden to the conscience of the heirs'. The point, as I understand it, is that if the heirs were morally bound in conscience to repay 50,000 ducats and the Duke had agreed to compound for 20,000, there

might still be a moral responsibility for the remaining 30,000 ducats and in that case the Duke wanted to make it clear that it must rest on the conscience of the heirs and not on his own.¹

This concern to define and limit obligations that might rest on his conscience as a result of the exercise of public authority was underlined three weeks later when Ludovico declared his position *vis-à-vis* the second category of usurers. The Sforza had accepted the presence of small Jewish communities within their dominions, sanctioned their money-lending activities, and given them the full protection of the law against the hostility of their Christian neighbours. The Duke took his profit, for the Jews paid an annual subsidy in return for the concessions granted to them.² Each year 'the principals of the banks of the Hebrews' were summoned to 'fare la congregazione loro' at a determined place, where they were told the sum the Duke needed and were required to make the *estimo*, the assessment, that is to allocate the total sum between themselves. Thus in 1480 the 'congregation' was summoned to meet in Piacenza on 5 February. In July the subsidy had not yet been paid in full.³ And the Jews remained vulnerable. At the end of October, when the dilapidated state of the Ducal revenues had become a political issue, 'all the Jews of the dominion' are said to have been seized on charges of sacrilege, and were only released in December after agreeing to pay a composition of 32,000 lire, presumably on top of the subsidy already paid for the year.⁴

¹ Ibid., ff. 68–9t, 2 May 1497, to *Deputatis rei pecuniarie*: 'Nec tamen per questo era la intentione nostra de aggrauare la propria conscientia né exonerare né discaricare la conscientia de predicti heredi che non fossino tenuti alla restitutione de le usure extorte, nec similiter tollere jus tertii.' For the history of the case, G. Barbieri, *Economia e politica nel Ducato di Milano* (Milan, 1938), pp. 122–3; A. Noto, *Gli amici dei poveri di Milano*, 2nd ed. (Milan, 1966), pp. 191–2; L. Miss. 185, ff. 19t–20, 8 November 1491, to *Deputatis super rebus criminalibus*; L. Miss. 184A, 3 June 1491, 21 June 1491.

² C. Canetta, 'Spigolature', *ASL*, viii (1881), pp. 632–5. For some indications of the position of the Jews under the Sforza, E. Motta, 'Ebrei in Como ed in altre città del ducato milanese', *Periodico della Società Storica Comense*, v (1885), pp. 9–44; C. Invernizzi, 'Gli Ebrei a Pavia', *Bollettino della Società Pavese di Storia Patria*, v (1905), pp. 191–219; L. Fumi, 'L'Inquisizione Romana e lo Stato di Milano', *ASL*, xxxvii, 1 (1910), pp. 296–313.

³ L. Miss. 146, ff. 117t–18, 27 Jan. 1480, to all Referendaries; L. Miss. 150, f. 117t, 26 June 1480, to the Captain of Melegnano (where the 'thesorero de la universitate de li Ebrei' resided); *ibid.*, f. 197t, to the Podestà of Piacenza: 'certe subventioni li hano a fare di proximo'.

⁴ *Cronica gestorum in partibus Lombardie*, *RIS*, ns, vol. xxii, 3, pp. 81, 91 (6,000 ducats, but I have preferred the sum stated in a ducal letter of

In the long run, however, the Jews had most to fear from the popular hostility fanned by the violently anti-semitic tone of the immensely effective preacher Bernardino da Feltre and his Franciscan followers, for whom the expulsion of the Jews was a logical consequence of the foundation of Monti di Pietà. Ludovico Sforza seems to have had misgivings from quite an early stage of his rule about the activities of the Jews. There is no doubt that he ordered the expulsion of the Jews from his dominion at some time, probably in 1491 and certainly by 1492. No copy of any edict of expulsion seems to have survived, the immediate cause is totally obscure, and the expulsion was certainly not enforced with absolute rigour, for the finances available to the Monti were probably quite inadequate to take over the functions fulfilled by the Jews.¹ The correspondence about Jews in the government records is much thinner for the 1490s than it had been in the early 1480s, but Ludovico himself made no mention of the expulsion when he turned his attention in May 1497 to those activities of the Jews that lay on his own conscience. A letter addressed to the Exchequer and signed *manu propria* declared that 'our intention is to satisfy and restore everything that has come unduly into our hands'. The money for the annual subsidy paid by the Jews to the Duke could only have been acquired by usury, since they had no other resources—an apparent acknowledgement that all other economic options were closed to them. So the subsidy, paid with the fruits of usury, carried the taint, and when it came into Christian hands the sin of usury with it. 'We have been advised that we cannot keep this money with good conscience.' So 4,000 ducats a year were to be dispensed in alms, until the whole amount of the subsidy received in the years of Ludovico's rule had been paid out. The accounts had been checked, and the total amount to be dispensed added up to 75,587 ducats 40

4 Dec. to the Camera, summarized by C. Cantù in *Archivio di Stato di Milano*, *Registri Ducali* 213, p. 43).

¹ 'Essendo per noi ad honore del Salvatore nostro Jesu Cristo cazati li Judei dal Dominio nostro': Ludovico's 'political testament' (c.1498), G. Molini, *Documenti di storia italiana*, vol. i (Florence, 1836), p. 327. A quarter of the 'giudei espulsi dal ducato di Milano' had settled in Crema, according to a sermon of Bernardino da Feltre, July 1492: V. Meneghin, *Bernardino da Feltre*, pp. 450-1. In 1491 the community of Alessandria petitioned that a Jew should not have to leave the city: G. Barbieri, *Economia e politica*, p. 127 n. 2. For the limited resources of the Monti in general, A. Milano, 'Considerazioni sulla lotta dei Monti di Pietà contro il prestito ebraico', in *Scritti in memoria di Sally Mayer* (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 199-223.

soldi. At the rate of 4,000 ducats a year this would take 19 years. Thereafter the payments were to continue until the illicit gains of his father and brother from the same source—amounting to 42,272 ducats—had also been cancelled out. The Pope was consulted, and in September 1497 gave licence thus to commute to works of piety ‘agreed between you and your confessor’ the restitution due to unknown persons. The arrangement was confirmed by the terms of Ludovico’s will drawn up at the end of 1498. Though the souls of his father and brother must wait, wherever they might be, he accepted his responsibility for them in the long run, once he had cleared his own account.¹

The Duke’s conscience had begun to grapple with the sins of the Quattrocento even before he took these steps to escape from the stigma attached to usury. He wrote on 12 April 1497 to Galeazzo Visconti, privy councillor and commissioner-general of men-at-arms, evidently a sort of marshal of the household, ‘We have decided not to omit any provision needed to ensure that the sin of sodomy shall not be committed in our household.’ The records of lawcourts and denunciations of preachers have suggested a wide diffusion of this practice in the cities of Italy in the fifteenth century, speculatively linked to the relatively late age of marriage enforced on men by the inflationary rise in the rate of dowries.² However that may be, it was again the preachers of the mendicant orders who led the attack on it in the 1490s, associating it with the programme of Savonarola and his followers in Florence, leading the Council of Ten to start an inquiry into it in Venice.³ In Milan a proclamation of 1476 had recalled that the penalty was death by fire, though this was certainly not always imposed.⁴ But Ludovico Sforza’s

¹ ‘Et perché secundo la plena Intelligentia che habiamo hauuto, li prefati ebrei non haueuano altre Facultate saluo quelle che erano extorte et acquisite per usura, et ex consequenti tutti li loro beni erano obligati ad restitutione, ne è stato consiliato che li prefati dinari non possiamo con bona conscientia retenerne.’ L. Miss. 206 bis, ff. 98r–9, 22 May 1497, to *Magistris intratarum ordinarium*. C. Cantù, ‘Il Convento . . .’, *ASL*, vi (1879), pp. 232–3 n. 6 (the papal brief), 236 (the will).

² D. Herlihy, ‘Vieillir à Florence au Quattrocento’, *Annales*, xxiv (1969), pp. 1348–9; R. C. Trexler, ‘Ritual in Florence’, in *The pursuit of holiness*, ed. Trinkaus and Oberman, pp. 234–8, 240–2, 255 (and cf. Bouwsma’s comment, pp. 270–1).

³ M. Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. i, p. 61 (and p. 704, Marco Corner ‘confinato a morir per sodomito’, Aug. 1497). For Florence, U. Mazzone, ‘*El buon governo*’, pp. 97–111, 194–7; Trexler (see previous note), p. 255.

⁴ C. Morbio, *Codice Visconteo-Sforzesco* (Milan, 1846), p. 483 doc. 290 (7 May 1476). For some cases in the late 1470s, *Acta in Consilio Secreto*

concern in April 1497 was not with the enforcement of the criminal law or of the penalties laid down in it. Galeazzo Visconti was given authority to expel from the household anyone who committed the offence, 'be he among the first that we have, showing no regard for any one, whoever he may be', and commanded to take all possible steps to ensure that the guilty did not go undetected. It is the last sentence of the letter that reveals the Duke's purpose with unequivocal clarity. 'We give you this task upon the charge of your conscience; excusing ourselves for our part before our Lord God, who has to punish you if this our will be not enforced.'¹ Thus the Prince could sign away the burden of responsibility for sin from his own person to his officer, and leave the Lord God in no doubt what He was to do about it. The sins committed in Ludovico's household troubled him for the potential consequences to himself, not to the offenders.

Ludovico Sforza remained in Milan through the summer of 1497, renouncing the usual summer round of the Duke's country residences for his vigils by the tomb of Beatrice. 'The unburdening of our conscience', the promotion of religious living, 'the advantage of places dedicated to divine worship' figure without any exceptional prominence in the records. But Ludovico now began to frame a series of measures designed to resolve all the major issues in which the authority and interests of the Duke in the rule of his dominion could come into conflict with the rights or claims of the Church.

The Dukes of Milan had always kept practical control of appointments to benefices within their dominion very firmly in their own hands. Their subjects were strictly forbidden to enter into direct communication with the Curia in Rome, and though the rule might occasionally be waived by ducal licence it was otherwise strictly enforced.² Throughout the years of Ludovico Sforza's rule a special secretary for ecclesiastical affairs, a minor humanist of some repute in his day called Jacopo Antiquario, dealt with all the paperwork, kept the records, prepared lists of candidates when benefices fell vacant, forwarded the Duke's

Mediolani, ed. A. F. Natale (Milan, 1963-9), vol. i, p. 51; vol. iii, pp. 62, 229, 254.

¹ 'Ve dasemo questa cura sopra el carico de la conscientia vostra, excusandosi noi presso nostro Signore dio el quale habia ad punire voi, quando non sia eseguita questa nostra voluntà.' L. Miss. 206 bis, ff. 43t-4.

² L. Prodocimi, *Il diritto ecclesiastico dello Stato di Milano* (Milan, 1941), pp. 51-77. Marcora, *MSDM*, ii (1955), pp. 255-9; iii (1956), pp. 307-8.

nominations to Rome, and conducted correspondence with the Curia. He kept a 'book of promises of benefices', for a system of expectatives had grown up, used sparingly at first but rather lavishly by Ludovico Sforza. Ludovico himself was aware that all was not well, for he issued a decree in 1484 and again in 1490, revoking all letters expectative past and future because of the disputes and damage they caused, but the interests vested in the system seem to have proved too strong for it to be implemented effectively.¹

Three administrative instructions issued in the summer of 1497 aimed at infusing a new spirit and a new order into the exercise of ecclesiastical patronage. The first, addressed to Antiquario and signed *manu propria*, was primarily a declaration of intent to give priority henceforth to the best-qualified candidate: 'so to proceed that the consent we give in the nomination of persons should not have to put us in the wrong with God': *dare graveza con Dio*, a clear reflection of the *carico di coscienza*. This commendable sentiment was hardly compatible with a system of expectatives. Two months later expectatives were abolished by letters patent, backed by letters missive signed *manu propria* to Antiquario and, for good measure, to the chancellor who worked under him. It was to be Antiquario's duty to ensure that expectatives were never again to be mentioned or, if mentioned, put into effect, 'even if we ourselves give you the order for them'. 'Know that this is our will'—the ultimate sanction of the absolute prince, to prevail in this case even against his own countermanding order, for the 'absolute' prince depended on his civil servants to protect him from his inability always to say no to the clamour of powerful subjects demanding favours for themselves and their clientage. Two weeks later, two members of the Privy Council, both trained lawyers and one of them a Bishop, were appointed as 'persons by whom controversies over benefices may be heard'. Antiquario, who was not a lawyer, was to consult them when such problems arose, rather than wrestle with them himself.² In fact the only

¹ Prosdocimi, pp. 66–7. *DBI*, vol. iii (Rome, 1961), pp. 470–2 for Antiquario, with very little on his secretarial functions, which can be reconstructed in detail from the records. For the *Liber promissionum beneficiorum*, a note to Bartolomeo Calco, Cart. Sf. 1085, 11 Jan. 1481; Count Giovanni Borromeo to Niccolò Negri, Cart. Sf. 1120, 20 Feb. 1495 ('Libro del Rdo. D. Jacopo Antiquario').

² Prosdocimi, p. 68 and n. 66, from the batch of decrees issued on 23 Dec. 1497 (Inv. e Reg. iii, p. 143 no. 13). The original instructions are in L. Miss. 206 bis, f. 106 (26 May, to Antiquario), ff. 204–5 (23 July, to Antiquario and

person I know to have had his tenure of a benefice subjected to investigation by this little committee—to his own intense distress and indignation—was poor Antiquario himself.¹

Meanwhile Ludovico, continuing, as he put it, ‘the examination of our affairs, so as not in any way to leave a burden on our soul nor a risk to our conscience’, turned his attention to the whittling away of the proprietorial rights of churches ‘when they have to do with those more powerful than themselves’, whether as tenants or landlords. The extent to which the territorial endowments of the churches of Lombardy were being expropriated by their tenants in the fifteenth century seems to have been exaggerated, but the problem evidently was a substantial one.² Ludovico’s concern predictably extended only to the ‘displeasure and penalty’ he himself might incur if this befell in his own dealings, and he proposed to put himself out of risk by a counter-exchange of lands between himself and the churches which held from him or of which he was a tenant. Negotiations were being conducted in Rome during July 1497 by Matteo dell’Olmo, titular Bishop of Laodicea and suffragan to the Archbishop of Milan, but the outcome is unknown to me.³

Of all the issues involving the ‘freedom of the Church’ (that phrase of sinister import to secular powers), what most directly affronted the Curia was probably the legislation, going back at least as far as 1382 and re-enacted in a decree of 1480, that forbade the Duke’s subjects to seek favours or resort to the jurisdiction of courts outside the dominion. It is a measure of the seriousness of Ludovico Sforza’s concern to rid his conscience of all the burdens that the tasks of government laid upon it that he was prepared to renounce so firmly established a bulwark for the Duke’s sovereignty in his own dominion. Late in 1497 he instructed the Privy Council to consider what could be done,

to his chancellor Paolo Biglia), f. 274&t (5 Aug. to Cristoforo Latuada, Bishop of Glandèves, and Gian Andrea Cagnola, and to Antiquario).

¹ Antiquario to the Duke, Cart. Sf. 1139, 16 June 1498.

² C. M. Cipolla, ‘Une crise ignorée’, *Annales*, ii (1947), pp. 317–27. G. Chittolini, ‘Un problema aperto’, *Rivista storica italiana*, lxxxv (1973), pp. 353–93.

³ ‘Continuando lo examino de le cose nostre, per non laxarne in veruno modo graueza al anima né periculo de conscientia . . .’: draft of letter to ‘Mro. Mattheo de Ulmo de Como’, Cart. Sf. 1137, 10 July 1497; L. Miss. 206 bis, f. 194t, instruction to Gualtero Bascapè and Giuliano Guascono, 19 July. For dell’Olmo, F. Ughelli, *Italia Sacra*, 2nd ed., vol. iv (Venice, 1719), pp. 272–3; Marcora, *MSDM*, iv (1957), p. 329, v (1958), pp. 382, 393.

'saving the freedom of the Church and the conscience of the Prince', to protect the Duke's subjects from the demands of foreign courts—largely a euphemism for protecting the Duke from the inclination of his subjects to apply to the Curia behind his back. The Council, in view of the spiritual penalties that could be invoked against the decree of 1480, recommended its unconditional revocation, to be followed by a supplication to the Pope for assurances, backed by an indult for which a precedent had been found, that he would refer ecclesiastical cases to suitable judges within the dominion.¹ An edict dated 28 January 1498 accordingly annulled all decrees against the freedom of the Church, and especially those prohibiting resort to Rome in lawsuits and for benefices, 'for we know not only that this could not be enforced without damage to the freedom of the Church but that it could not be allowed by us to be observed without grave offence.' The new decree, published on 8 February, was issued so as 'not to leave burden on his Lordship's conscience nor on those of his subjects'.² It has been supposed that this step was the price for the political support of Alexander VI, and Ludovico wrote to Rome that he had taken this action as a 'catholic and religious prince', to demonstrate his devotion to the Pope, but also 'so that we may remove all scruple from our conscience, and can live in security and tranquillity'.³ It was the danger to himself, should he offend God's Church, that seems overwhelmingly to have predominated in his mind throughout this time.

There is little evidence to indicate whether these measures made any appreciable difference to the practice of the Duke's government in its relations with the Church, but perhaps the

¹ '... de aliquo temperamento per ipsos omnes Senatores cogitari debere, quo, salva libertate Ecclesiastica et Principis conscientia, subditi non trahantur extra Dominium suum ad agendas lites . . .': Cart. Sf. 1138, 4 Dec. 1497 ('Consultatio Senatus de non trahendis subditis extra dominium ad litigandum'). This mentions decrees of 1382 (Inv. e Reg. iii, p. 4 no. 60, mistakenly dated 1392?), and 1480 (ibid., p. 125 no. 46).

² Prodocimi, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–9. The decree (Inv. e Reg. iii, p. 144 no. 14) published by M. Formentini, *Il Ducato di Milano* (Milan, 1877), pp. 212–13 doc. 42, and (from a copy in the Ambrosiana) by Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), pp. 459–61 doc. 1. There is a copy dated 6 Feb. in Cart. Sf. 1139.

³ Letters to the Pope and to Stefano Taverna (*residente* at Rome), 1 Feb. 1498: Marcora, *MSDM*, v, pp. 340–2. Unfortunately there is a lost Register, in the series for Milan–Como–Novara–Lodi, between L. Miss. 206 *bis*, which ends (in its present state) on 10 Oct. 1497, and 207 which opens on 7 June 1498. But I suspect the demands of conscience were largely satisfied by the end of 1497.

treatment of jurisdiction in cases of incest may have been symptomatic. Incest was a sin, it was also a crime punishable by death under Roman law, but local statutory law often gave no guidance on it. So the judges in the secular courts before which cases came tended to consult the Duke about the penalty to be imposed. Thus the Captain of Justice in Milan wrote to the Duke in 1480 about Cristoforo Brambilla, 'a man of rustic nature, a farmworker of primitive mentality', whose wife had left him seven years before and who had been found guilty in the Captain's court of incest with his daughter: 'a case which rarely befalls'.¹ I am not sure that the offence was so rare, at least in the more remote parts of the dominion, nor that it was restricted to men 'of rustic nature and primitive mentality'. The Counts Antonio and Annibale da Balbiano, writing to the Duke about a case that had arisen in their large franchise centred on Chiavenna and extending northwards as far as the Swiss border, warned him that undue leniency would make it difficult to enforce the law in future, and encourage crimes of this kind 'of which in these parts there is no lack'. Their Podestà had passed sentence in a case of confessed incest between a man of the leading family of the little town of Piuro near the border, and his sister who was *non sana de mente*. It is an interesting case, complicated by the aggressive intervention of the Swiss relatives of the man's mother from across the border, and one might suspect that the Duke was not entirely unhappy to accept the existence of powerful franchise-holders on whom the immediate brunt of exercising jurisdiction in these mountainous regions could fall. It shows the readiness of secular courts to take cognizance of cases of incest up to the end of 1497, for there was no suggestion that the judgement of the Podestà was *ultra vires*.² A year later, when a case of incest came before the secular court at Domodossola, the government would have none of it. 'The punishment of incest does not attach to your office but to the Bishop and those to whom he delegates it. So you should leave this case to them, and not put your sickle in another man's harvest.'³ It seems that care was being shown,

¹ 'Vir rusticane nature et agricola rudis ingenii': Cart. Sf. 1084, 26 Feb. 1480. Another case in *Acta in Consilio Secreto*, vol. iii, pp. 120-1.

² Cart. Sf. 1157, 30 Oct. and 10 Nov. 1497 (the latter addressed to Bartolomeo Calco).

³ 'Merauegliamo multo de la domanda ce farete: però che el punire li Incesti non specta al officio vostro ma al vescovo et quelli che ne hano carico da sua Signoria, et però uoi doueti lassare questa cura a loro et non

since the repeal of the edict of 1480, to respect the rights of ecclesiastical jurisdiction which formed a part of the freedom of the Church.

Ludovico Sforza, like his predecessors, had always professed to rule 'as a catholic Prince'. Conscience was no newcomer to the language of government in Lombardy, and references to it can be found in the years of Ludovico's rule before 1497, though they seem limited in number and scope. They might reflect no more than the personal style and language of the chancellor who drafted the letters. Three instances within a year, referring not to the Duke's conscience but to that of the recipients of the letters, were all drafted by the same chancellor, Giulio Cattaneo, and he was the kind of man who approved of sermons by radical preachers attacking the vices of the court of Rome.¹ On the other hand, a proposal made in 1484 regarding the use to which a tax on vacant benefices might be put for the benefit of the empty Treasury was referred to the suffragan Bishop of Milan, to say whether it could be done 'without burden of conscience'. He answered, firmly, no, at least not without papal dispensation.² Ludovico himself wrote in 1489 of his determination, 'for the discharge of our conscience', to put an end to one of the endless disputes between powerful men and families over land that called for the Duke's personal attention. Fra Giovanni Pagano, a Dominican of the Observance known 'for the purity of his conscience', had already been called on to report what 'in right and conscience' the Duke should do in the dispute, which had been in progress for at least 11 years and blood had flowed, but the involvement of the Prince's conscience probably derived from the fact that one of the parties was a churchman.³

mettere la falce in alienam messem.' L. Miss. 207, f. 204, 6 Nov. 1498, to *Vicario Commissarii Domiossule*.

¹ L. Miss. 146, f. 236 (to the Podestà of Milan); 150, f. 238&t (to the Podestà of Novara); 152, ff. 199t-200 (to Giovanni Maria Visconti), 24 March and 27 August 1480, 17 February 1481. P. Ghinzoni, 'Un podromo della Riforma in Milano, 1492', *ASL*, xiii (1886), p. 76. Cattaneo was not in the Privy Council office (C. Santoro, *Uffici del Dominio Sforzesco* (Milan, 1948), p. 33), but in the main chancellery.

² Cart. Sf. 1089, 9 Dec. 1484, one of two letters of that date from the *Prefecti rei pecuniarie* to Ludovico Sforza: 'Senza altro carico de coscienza'.

³ 'Per discarico de la conscientia nostra, et adciò che la controversia quale vertise tra lo Rdo. Vescovo de Piasenza et li Arcelli habia fine': Cart. Sf. 1092, 30 Apr. 1490, Ludovico to B. Calco. '... referatis quid in causa cuius

Between 1492 and 1496 a recurrent problem which had caused trouble in the 1470s reappeared in the records. The enforcement on the clergy of the *gabella del sale*, the compulsory purchase of a fixed quantity of salt at a price decreed by the government which had the monopoly, and of other excise duties, was 'contrary to the freedom of the Church' and brought automatic deprivation of spiritual services on all those involved in it. So each year, at the beginning of Lent, the tiresome business began of obtaining a Papal brief of absolution, to release them from 'the worry over the unburdening of conscience'. In 1495 a suggestion was made that the Pope should empower the Archbishop of Milan to grant absolution, 'should your Lordship wish to confess and be absolved so that he can receive the sacrament, and all the rest of your servants as well' (the Papal brief had to arrive in time for Easter), but this proposal was apparently not accepted.¹ It may be that by 1495 Ludovico's conscience, burdened by the awareness that the recent disinheritance of his young great-nephew had no moral justification, was becoming increasingly sensitive. There is a suggestive emphasis in a note that Jacopo Antiquario attached to a letter he had drafted and sent open to the Duke for him to see before it was dispatched. The note gives no inkling what the letter was about, but 'it seems to me', Antiquario wrote, 'of its kind, conformable to the effect desired and to the discharge of your Highness's conscience, for the safeguarding of which we must always be on the alert'. And he added, with what sounds like a bland understanding of the

fit mentio de Jure et conscientia fieri oporteat': L. Miss. 173, f. 123, 19 Feb. 1489, to 'fratri Johanni Pagnano Ord. Sti. Dominici Obseruantie' (who was also to be involved in the case of the heirs of Gasparino da Casate). For 'la sincerità de la cosientia sua', an undated note in Cart. Sf. 1094 to Alberto (Ferruffino, the financial secretary?).

¹ L. Prosdocimi, *Diritto ecclesiastico*, pp. 122-4 (with references to the 1470s). 'Circa el principio de questa quadragesima, como è consueto, fo scripto alli Ambasciatori de Roma, che operasseno apresso el pontifice fosse dispensato, che per quelli di questo stato fosse reuscito opera contra libertatem ecclesiasticam, hauesseno absolutione da li soi confessori': B. Calco to Ludovico Sforza, 27 Mar. 1492, in Cart. Sf. 1086, folder for Mar. 1482 (there is an undated draft in Cart. Sf. 1094). '. . . quanto he necessario obtener de presente dal pontefice volendo la S. v. confessarse et essere assoluto per poterse bene comunicare, e noi altri servitori tuti': Cart. Sf. 1120, 27 Mar. 1495, Antonio Landriani (Treasurer General) to the Duke; 24 Mar., the same; 17 Apr., Ludovico to B. Calco. Cart. Sf. 1134, 30 and 31 Mar. 1496, *Deputati rei pecuniarie* to the Duke, and the Duke to B. Calco. There was more trouble over this in 1510 and 1514: Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), pp. 406-11.

Duke's requirements, that by using the procedure he proposed, 'there will be less burden to fear before God, and very certain escape from the blame of men'.¹ By 1495, at least, Ludovico's conscience was already sensitive to particular cases, but it was only during the year after Beatrice's death that general issues confronting his conscience in the context of his responsibilities as a ruler received a concentrated attention to which I think it would be difficult to find a parallel.

Naturally the Duke did not have to discover unaided what measures conscience required of him, though presumably the initiative came from Ludovico himself. He took counsel as a matter of course, and we have seen instances of it, on what in conscience he should do. It is possible to identify with some confidence three men who were close to the spiritual impulses of Ludovico Sforza and who had some influence on the steps he took for the unburdening of his conscience in 1497.

The Duke's confessor of course had a special responsibility in this sphere. Ludovico's confessor in the 1490s was a Tuscan from Montepulciano, an Augustinian Canon Regular called Bernardino d'Ilcino, for whom Ludovico secured preferment to the little see of Bobbio. Ludovico asked him in 1495 to report 'what we can do, with a safe conscience, about the boy that our cousin madonna Beatrice wants to have in her household, and added that 'we place ourselves entirely upon your conscience'.² But it seems that the Bishop did not always wait to be asked. A petition came in to the government in April 1497 from an unpaid creditor of the Podestà of Bobbio, who was a protégé of the Bishop. So the letter of complaint was passed on to the Bishop, 'and since you are wont to pass people on to us at times, when you think that in conscience we should make some provision, it has seemed appropriate to pass this one on to you; and when you have studied his petition, you are to report to us

¹ 'La quale ad me pare, che in suo genere sia congrua per lo effecto predicto: et per lo discarico de la conscientia de la celsitudine v., ad quam conseruandam est semper aduertendum; che saltem andando la cosa per la via ordinaria, et cum auctorità de lo iudice ecclesiastico, se ne pò timere manco graueza apresso Dio, et certissimo effugio del biasmo humano.' Cart. Sf. 1120, 19 Mar. 1495. Ibid., 13 Apr. 1495, Giovanni Molo, secretary for criminal justice, replied to an enquiry from the Duke 'se ho casa alcuna per l'officio mio de recordare de conscientia'.

² '... quello che per noi se possi fare salua conscientia nel factio de quello puto . . . In questo noi repossaremo in tutto sopra la conscientia vostra': L. Miss. 199, f. 126t, 6 Apr. 1495, to *D. Bernardino Episcopo Bobiensi*. F. Ughelli, *Italia Sacra*, ed. cit., vol. iv, p. 947 for d'Ilcino.

on your conscience what provision you think we should make upon it'.¹ It seems an unlikely point in time for Ludovico to be making sport over a matter of conscience, but one can hardly escape the conclusion that he sometimes found his confessor tiresomely officious in the fulfilment of his duties.

Perhaps this accounts for the appearance of a partner for him, under the terms of Ludovico's will at the end of 1498, in the task allotted to him by the Pope a year earlier of distributing the profits of usury in pious works.² The partner was in fact the man to whom Ludovico seems to have transferred some at least of the care of his conscience, Vincenzo Bandelli of Castelnuovo Scrivia, Prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie from 1495 to 1500. Bandelli, butt of one of Vasari's lively and unreliable stories and uncle of Matteo Bandello the writer of *novelle*, was a powerful figure in teaching and government among the Dominicans of the Observance in Italy. He had ample opportunity to bring his influence to bear on the Duke, for Ludovico seems to have welcomed his company and is said to have dined with him twice a week in the course of his visits to the tomb of Beatrice.³ Ludovico certainly referred cases to him as a moral arbiter at this time. In one case Bandelli gave his opinion on what would win praise 'before God and among men'. In another, he reported, with a secular jurist, what the Duke should do 'in right and conscience'.⁴

A Papal brief of 9 March 1497 instructed fra Domenico Ponzzone of the Observant order of St. Francis to go to Milan, at the urgent request of the Duke in view of his high regard for the friar's moral qualities, and to stay there for as long as the Duke wished.⁵ Ponzzone, who had an academic training, was in very great demand throughout northern Italy, like his fellow

¹ 'Et perché voi sete solito alle volte redriciarne qualchuno, parendoui che per conscientia gli habiamo prouedere, cusì a noi è parso redriciarui dicto abetore (?), perché examinato la petitione sua, in conscientia ce habiate referire quale prouisione ve pare che li habiamo fare.' L. Miss. 206 *bis*, f. 54t, 20 Apr. 1497.

² See above, p. 427 and n. 1.

³ D. Pino, *Storia genuina del Cenacolo* (Milan, 1796), pp. 72-3. For Bandelli, *DBI*, vol v (Rome, 1963), pp. 666-7.

⁴ 'Ne avrà lode appresso Dio et appresso li homini': C. Santoro, 'Un registro di doti sforzeschi', *ASL*, 8th series, iv (1953), p. 156, doc. 24, 19 Apr. 1497 (but I doubt whether Bandelli was a Councillor). 'An secundum conscientiam vostra Excellentia me habia poduto dare tal licentia': Cart. Sf. 1140, 25 Oct. 1498, Johannes Antonius ex Marchionibus Incise et Rochete to the Duke.

⁵ P. Compostella, *Monte di Pietà*, vol. i, p. 21 n. 30.

minorite Bernardino da Feltre, as a radical hell-fire preacher and as a committed champion of Monti di Pietà. He is supposed to have played a large part in the foundation of the embryonic Monte at Milan in 1483 and of the Monte itself in 1496.¹ He was well known in Florence, where his battle against Savonarola from the pulpit of Santa Croce in the overheated politico-religious atmosphere of 1495 led to the allegation, for which no impartial evidence exists, that he was an agent of Ludovico Sforza. In Venice, from the pulpit of San Polo, he led the denunciation of sodomy that moved the Council of Ten in 1496 to initiate a thorough inquiry, as Sanuto recorded, into 'a vice that was very prevalent in this city'.² So his affiliation with some aspects of the programme for the unburdening of Ludovico's conscience in 1497 is especially clear. A reference to his intercession with the Duke on behalf of a disloyal subject suggests that he did in fact go to Milan, but we do not know how long he stayed there.³

These pointers, however incomplete they may be, do at least give us some idea of the kind of spiritual environment in which Ludovico Sforza chose to immerse himself after his wife's death. There may have been others of their kind near him, like the friar Bernardino Caimi.⁴ The Sforza had shown special favour to the Observant orders, which attracted most of what talent and fervour were to be found in the Church in Lombardy in the second half of the fifteenth century. Attempts to purge and reform lax communities, regularly supported by the dynasty, seem to have reached a climax in the 1490s, with the active encouragement of Ludovico Sforza whose intervention might be said to have attained almost caesaro-papal proportions by 1498. Matteo Bandello asserts in one of his *novelle* that Ludovico had formed the intention, in these last years of his rule, 'to reform all the clergy, and every other kind of religious

¹ Ibid., pp. 18–22. Ed. V. Meneghin. *Documenti vari intorno al B. Bernardino Tomitano da Feltre* (Rome, 1966), ad indicem.

² M. Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. i, p. 61. For Ponzzone's feud with Savonarola, C. Cannarozzi, 'Il pensiero di fra Mariano da Firenze', *Studi Francescani*, xxvi (1929), pp. 125–32 (not referred to by Ridolfi or Weinstein who accept Parenti's pro-Savonarolan version).

³ L. Miss. 206 bis, ff. 143t–4, 17 June 1497, to *Magistris intratarum extraordinariarum*. Ponzzone died in Rome in 1499.

⁴ For whom see *DBI*, vol. xvi (Rome, 1973), pp. 347–9. His undated letter of condolence to Ludovico Sforza on the death of Beatrice, written in Venice on his return from the eastern Mediterranean, claims a certain closeness with both of them: Cart. Sf. 1137, folder for Jan. 1497.

persons' in the dominion, and that only his overthrow by the French in 1499 halted the plan. The measures sanctioned by the Duke in many religious houses go some way to justify the claim, at least as a general aspiration if not as a precisely articulated programme.¹ Ludovico Sforza had always taken a passionate interest in sermons and theological debate, and seems to have given an equally warm welcome to every style of preacher.² But again it was the Observants who were most favoured, both at court and when the Duke intervened in the selection of preachers for the churches of the dominion. The appointment of preachers was a sensitive area, partly because it afforded cover for the infighting of local parties. But it also gave the Duke an opportunity to express his sense of responsibility for the spiritual as well as the physical well-being of his subjects. At the beginning of 1499, when the local authorities protested that the monopoly granted for many years past to the Franciscan Observants in the pulpit of the Greater Church at Caravaggio infringed 'the liberty of their Church', the government replied that the Duke had acted simply 'to make better provision for the safety of your souls', and not because he wished to interfere with the freedom of the Church.³ It was not always easy to see where duty ended and encroachment began.

It seems, then, that the death of Beatrice intensified an innate susceptibility in Ludovico Sforza to the teachings of the Church, and an already well-developed inclination to support the work of those elements in the Church that were most actively and directly striving to contribute to the improvement of the

¹ Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), pp. 351–62. E. Cattaneo in *Storia di Milano*, vol. ix (Milan, 1961), pp. 574–692, *passim*. Matteo Bandello, *Novelle*, lib. iii. no. 19, ed. Brognoligo, vol. iv (Bari, 1911), p. 247, quoted by Cattaneo, p. 585 n. 6.

² e.g. P. Ghinzoni, 'Podromo della Riforma', *ASL*, xiii (1886), p. 87; Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), pp. 356–7, 358–9; ed. V. Meneghin, *Documenti vari*, (Rome, 1966), p. 180 doc. 118. For the traditional story of his reception of Bernardino da Feltre, L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, vol. xv (Rome, 1736), p. 5.

³ L. Miss. 207, ff. 235 (25 Nov. 1498, to the *Commissario*), 313t–14 (16 Jan. 1499, to the *communiti*): 'non è facta per alterare la libertate sua . . . Nostra intentione non è impedire la libertà de dicta vostra ciesa.' Conflicts over allocation of the pulpit went back well before 1483: 'Per obviare ad omne alteratione potesse nascere tra li homini de quella nostra terra per casone de predicatori gli habiano ad predicare come per altri tempi è nasciuta . . .': L. Miss. 157, f. 113&t, to *Commissario* and Podestà, 13 Feb. 1483, and ff. 121t, 126, 130&t.

spiritual and material condition of the people.¹ Certain reservations have to be made. 'The safety of our state' always came first in the priorities of a prince. There were the inevitable practical dilemmas of power. The threat of arbitrary treatment could often be the quickest way of bringing recalcitrant ecclesiastics to heel. Even among the Observants, some of the leading figures found themselves banned at one time or another from the dominions of the Sforza: the Franciscan Michele Carcano in the 1470s, the Dominican Angelo da Chivasso for a brief time in 1481.² It seemed uncertain in 1491 whether Bernardino da Feltre would be allowed to come and preach in Milan, and when he did arrive at the end of the year he was accused of upsetting the people, but Ludovico after hearing him preach for two hours declared himself well satisfied.³ Even in March 1498 the Vicar General of the Franciscan Observants, Gerolamo Tornielli, was forbidden to set foot in the dominion, for no reason given other than 'because we will not tolerate him', but this may have been no more than a customary way of bringing pressure to bear for the quick settlement of a minor difference, for the Chapter of the Order duly met in Milan a few months later, to the Duke's great satisfaction.⁴ In an atmosphere that encouraged authoritarian attitudes, the Duke expected due obedience in return for his support and favour.

When the Archbishop of Milan lay dying at the beginning of October 1497, Ludovico set out to secure the succession to the Metropolitan see for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, Beatrice's brother, a young man not quite 18 years old. The appointment had unfortunate consequences for the spiritual well-being of the diocese. It is difficult at first sight to understand how it can have seemed compatible with the impulse towards reform of the

¹ See above, p. 438 n. 1. For the spiritual and social climate of the time, G. Barbieri, *Bernardino da Feltre nella storia sociale del Rinascimento* (Milan, 1962), and A. Noto, *Origine del Luogo Pio della Carità* (Milan, 1962). For a less favourable view of Bernardino da Feltre, Matteo Bandello, *Novelle*, lib. iii no. 10 (ed. Brognoligo, vol. iv, pp. 183-9); and no. 14, pp. 205-9, for another Dominican comment on the style of the Franciscans.

² *DBI*, vol. xix (Rome, 1976), pp. 742-4 for Carcano. M. Sevesi, 'Beato Michele Carcano: documenti inediti', *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, xxxiii (1940), pp. 405-8, docs. 16-21, for Angelo da Chivasso.

³ L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, vol. xiv (Rome, 1735), pp. 516-17; ed. V. Meneghin, *Documenti vari*, pp. 163 doc. 107, 164 n. 2, 178-88 docs. 117-24.

⁴ Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), p. 358 and n. 46. Tornielli too was a champion of the Monti: P. Compostella, *Il Monte di Pietà*, vol. i (Milan, 1966), pp. 23-4; V. Meneghin, *Bernardino da Feltre* (Vicenza, 1974), ad indicem.

clergy, and one wonders what Ludovico's spiritual advisers can have thought or said about it. A Canon Regular at Verona, outside the dominion, horrified at so blatantly unsuitable an appointment, wrote in protest to the Duke. Ludovico, aware perhaps that some valid grounds for criticism existed, authorized a reply, seeking to explain and justify his action, in measured and reasoned and quite unauthoritarian terms. The arguments seem superficial today, and begged large questions at the time. Even if, as the letter suggests, Ippolito d'Este already displayed those natural qualities that were to earn him the praise of the literary men of the time, of Ariosto and Castiglione and Luigi da Porto, he seems to have given little real ground for supposing that they were likely to be effectively deployed 'for the fulfilment of divine worship'. Nor did the fact that he was a Cardinal give any very certain guarantee of the due performance of his diocesan duties.¹ Had this appointment been promised to Beatrice, and was this another offering to her memory? If it really left no burden on Ludovico's conscience, it was probably because he accepted a limited concept of the functions and responsibilities of an Archbishop that was certainly widely held in the fifteenth century though it was far from universal. The duties of spiritual leader and governor could be delegated to suitable subordinates, leaving the Cardinal Archbishop free to play the part of an ecclesiastical politician and statesman. But in this case one can perhaps see too a confirmation of Ludovico's wish to assume a larger directing part for himself, in the confidence that he himself could direct the Church in his own dominions to its best advantage through a complaisant Archbishop and his subordinates.²

One cannot expect that men and women will always act in a consistent way. Cecilia Ady, in her elegant and learned lecture on the morals and manners of the Quattrocento, delivered to this Academy 37 years ago, quoted Castiglione's maxim that 'devotion to God is the duty of all and especially of princes', and added the rider that 'the first duty of the man of the Renaissance was to himself'.³ She knew Ludovico Sforza well, and saw him

¹ P. Ghinzoni, 'Altre notizie su don Celso Maffei da Verona', *ASL*, x (1883), pp. 86-7. Marcora, *MSDM*, iv (1957), pp. 369-70.

² Marcora, *MSDM*, v (1958), especially pp. 342-4. E. Cattaneo in *Storia di Milano*, vol. ix (Milan, 1961), pp. 527-31.

³ *Ante*, vol. xxviii (1942), p. 188, and (for Ludovico Sforza) p. 189. And in general, for Ludovico and Beatrice, C. M. Ady, *History of Milan under the Sforza* (London, 1907).

as a pattern of the Renaissance prince. The measures for the exculpation of the Duke's conscience that we have examined were certainly consistent in purpose, and their message was unmistakably that his first duty was to himself. The ruler's responsibility before God for the well-being of his subjects was a commonplace in the language of the Duke's chancellery, and there is no reason to doubt Ludovico's good intentions in the field of government. But the unedifying aspects of the morals and manners of the Quattrocento that passed under his review in 1497 alarmed him, so far as our evidence takes us, only out of fear that he might be held to account for the sins of others. His wife's death clearly made a powerful impact on a nature already quite sensitively attuned to the demands of conscience, but the area of government in which the demand was met was so carefully limited as to raise serious doubts about a spiritual change of heart at any but a rather superficial level. Given the constraints of the political environment, it would perhaps be unreasonable to expect more. With all his enthusiasm for radical preachers and all his anxiety over the burdens on his conscience, Ludovico Sforza had neither the courage nor the originality to escape from the cocoon of custom that drained so much of the content out of the religious life of the fifteenth century.

We have gone a long way round and arrived at a rather negative conclusion. But travelling hopefully in the wake of Ludovico's conscience, observing the fears and aspirations that marked its progress and the compromises that attended its discharge, we may perhaps have seen a little more of the pattern of habits and ways of thought which helped to shape the character of the rule of princes in Italy during the Renaissance.