

**PREACHING PEACE AND WAR
SAVONAROLA'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN THE
FLORENTINE REPUBLIC (1494-1498)**

**PREDICAR LA PAZ Y LA GUERRA
LA TEOLOGÍA POLÍTICA DE SAVONAROLA EN LA
REPÚBLICA DE FLORENCIA (1494-1498)**

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Abstract

Between 1494 and 1498, Savonarola was involved in a wide range of actions and challenges: exposition of his theological doctrine, reformist activities, moral and political preaching and prophetic announcements. Initially, much of this activity was dominated by a rhetoric of peace, an idea closely linked to the Christian and scholastic tradition. Under the auspices of Savonarola, Florence promulgated the *Legge della pace*, a law designed to moderate executive power and ensure the reconciliation of citizens. However, the severe Florentine crisis and the polarisation around his figure led Savonarola to change his discourse according to the practical needs of the moment. The scholastic notion of peace, understood as the harmonious unity of plurality, in fact allowed for a friend-foe logic; however, it was far removed from the civic-republican approach to politics.

Keywords

Savonarola; Peace; Reform; Political Theology; Florentine Republic

Resumen

Entre 1494 y 1498, Savonarola estuvo envuelto en un amplio abanico de actuaciones y desafíos: exposición de su doctrina teológica, actividades reformistas, predicación moral y política o anuncios proféticos. Inicialmente gran parte de esta actividad estuvo presidida por una retórica de la paz, una noción estrechamente vinculada a la tradición cristiana y escolástica. Bajo los auspicios de Savonarola, Florencia promulgó la *Legge della pace*, una norma dirigida a limitar el poder ejecutivo y a garantizar la reconciliación ciudadana. Sin embargo, la fuerte crisis florentina y la polarización en

torno su figura llevaron a Savonarola a cambiar su discurso en función de las necesidades prácticas del momento. La noción escolástica de paz, entendida como unidad harmónica de la pluralidad, admitía en realidad operar con una lógica amigo-enemigo, pero lejos ya de las formas cívico-republicanas de abordar la política.

Palabras clave

Savonarola; paz; reforma; teología política; República de Florencia

Hence, considering these qualities in connection with matters currently going on, I agree with the friar who said
*“Pax, pax, et non erit pax!”*¹

Savonarola’s Theological Background: Views of Peace in Augustine, Canon Law and Aquinas

The topic of peace in Italian Renaissance recalls an anecdote quoted by Burckhardt. After the massacre of 1409, when the starving populace cried to him in the streets *Pace! Pace!*, Giovanni Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, forbade under penalty of death the use of the words *pace* and *guerra* in Milan. It is said that even the priests were ordered to say *dona nobis tranquillitatem* instead of *dona nobis pacem*.² This episode illustrates the extent to which the notion of peace could be politically and ideologically charged during this period, and was a recurrent ideal of political and religious discourse among Christian thinkers, humanist writers and scholastic Aristotelians.³ Meanwhile, in Florence and

¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, ed. de B. Atkinson and D. Sices (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), “N. Machiavelli to F. Vettori [26-08-1513]”, L. 222, 257.

² See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 26.

³ At first sight, Christian and scholastic authors agree that peace and concord represent the highest value in political life. On the development of the ideal of peace, see Roland Baiton’s classical book: *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-Evaluation* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960). Baiton traces the concept from its classical and biblical origins, showing how for the Medieval period and early Renaissance the notion of peace often develops in parallel with that of crusade and just war (Baiton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 85-122). From a relative alternative viewpoint on the medieval and early modern period, Turner emphasises the rhetoric and ideological uses of the concept of peace and the importance of the question of holy war (James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200-1740* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975], 26-80). Much closer to the Savonarolian moment is Ulrich Meier’s exhaustive article on the language and rhetoric of peace in late medieval Florence, a city torn apart throughout the late Middle Ages by political factional strife and social conflict (Ulrich Meier, “*Pax et tranquillitas*. Friedensidee,

other city-states of the later XVth century, political and social peace was constantly threatened by the permanent presence of factional conflict and of external warfare. In this sense, Savonarola was forced, like many other of his contemporaries, to seek continuous compromises between his Christian doctrinal principles and the changing and conflicting political context.

The roots of Savonarola's standpoint on peace can mostly be found within the framework of Christian tradition.⁴ The Dominican background of the time included the Bible and the writings of the Ancient Fathers (especially Saint Augustine), Canon law and the Scholastic tradition, particularly Thomas Aquinas' writings.⁵ In spite of the richness of sources, Christian tradition was quite homogeneous concerning the general question of peace. Saint Augustine's paradigmatic view (developed for instance in some chapters of the XIX Book of *The City of God*) involved a kind of ontology of peace, understood as a natural impetus of all beings: "a good that is sought by all creatures".⁶ If peace implies always a kind of *tranquilitas* or *concordia* within an order, Augustine adds the notion of universal peace (*pax universalis*) identifying it with the optimum order of all things (natural and supernatural) created by God: "the peace of all things is a tranquillity of order".⁷

In Saint Augustine's onto-theology, even those who desire war, even "robbers" or the "most savage beasts", seek some sort of peace, because "not a whit is abated from the laws of most High Creator and Ruler by whom the peace of the universe is administered".⁸ Of course, Augustine distinguishes between genuine peace (i.e. *pax bonorum*, *pax Dei*) and deceitful kinds of peace (i.e. *pax iniquorum*, *pax terrena*), bearing in mind the fact that that authentic peace is such a great good, that "no other word is heard with more pleasure [...] nothing better can be found".⁹ On the other hand, according to the Bishop of Hippo, individual life in this world is always oppressed by the weight of "great and grievous

Friedenswahrung und Staatsbildung im spätmittelalterlichen Florenz", *Vorträge und Forschungen*, 49 [1996]: 489-523).

⁴ On the theological roots of the Christian peace, the monography by Joseph Comblin, *Théologie de la paix. I: Principes* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1960) continues to be useful.

⁵ On the notion of peace in the Bible, Comblin differentiates between the general meaning of peace in the Old Testament (Comblin, *Théologie de la paix*, 41-58) along with other more restricted senses, such as the "peace of the elected nation" (80-82), the "peace of the nations" (83-86), the specific connotations of peace in the Gospels (181-202) or the language of peace in Paul's epistles (213-256).

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God against the Pagans*, translated by W. C. Greene (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), XIX, 12. Latin terms are taken from Migne's edition: Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei*, in S. Aurelii Augustini *Opera Omnia*, PL. 41, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1841). On Augustine's notions of peace and war, see Roland Kany, "Augustine's Theology of Peace and the Beginning of Christian Just War Theory", in *From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics*, edited by H.G. Justenhoven and W. A. Barbieri (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 31-48.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 13.

⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 12.

⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 11.

evils”,¹⁰ while social life is likewise infested with “slights, suspicions, enmities and war”.¹¹ Indeed, in this worldly life not even the saints “are safe from the deceptions and the manifold temptations of the demons”.¹² Thus, when the saints are called blessed (*beati*) it is simply because they can obtain that certain portion of peace which is possible in this life. All Christians should know that they are like pilgrims and strangers on this *terrena civitas*. They should know that true happiness can be only founded upon the hope of salvation in the future, where awaits them “an eternal peace that no adversary can disquiet”.¹³ Accordingly, the City of God was named Jerusalem, that is, “vision of peace”.¹⁴ In any case, even if “perfect tranquillity cannot be apprehended in temporal life”,¹⁵ Augustine outlined the importance for Christians of maintaining and promoting earthly peace, “since so long as the two cities are intermingled we also profit by the peace of Babylon”.¹⁶ As we shall see below, it seems clear that Savonarola employs the Augustinian theology of the two cities, projecting it onto the factions and divisions of Florence, which may well become the new Jerusalem and the starting point of a new reform of Christianity, provided it knows how to avoid the traps and temptations of its enemies.

Gratian’s *Decree*, one of the most influential juridical-theological sources of the Middle Ages, also embraces the ideal of peace as a theological and moral aspiration. In the famous *Cause* 23 of the Second part, Gratian develops the question of war and the use of force, relying primarily on the texts of Saint Augustine. The starting point of this text is an extolment of the virtues associated with peace, as Matthew 5:9 reminds us: “*Beati enim pacifici quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur*”.¹⁷ Human peace is first and foremost desirable for the health of mortals. It is a sort of reflection of transcendent peace, the “*pax divina*” that governs the happiness of the angels. For this very reason, war must never be a voluntary enterprise, but a result of necessity.¹⁸ The peaceful man corrects what he can and drives

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 4.

¹¹ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 5.

¹² Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 10.

¹³ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 8.

¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 11.

¹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 27.

¹⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XIX, 26.

¹⁷ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Gratian, “*Decretum*”, in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol. 1, edited by E. Friedberg [Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1879], C. 23, q.1, c. 3).

¹⁸ Regarding the question of war, *Decretum* admits the apparent contradiction of war with some passages of the Gospels, but it establishes its legitimacy under precise conditions (Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 1, c. 1). Thus, following St. Isidore of Seville, just wars can be accepted by Christians when they are undertaken by a public authority in order to recover legitimate goods or to respond to an offence committed by enemies (Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 2, c. 1). In fact, wars waged against the wicked and whose ultimate purpose is to restore peace can be called *bella pacata*, that is, peaceful wars or wars of peace, without qualms (Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 1, c. 6). For the evolution and differences of the question of just war in Augustine, Gratian, decretalists and St. Thomas, see Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

away from himself what he cannot correct.¹⁹ It is this same ideal that advises tolerance of the wicked, especially if they can be corrected by severe admonishment (the text employs locutions as *benigna asperitas* and *medicinalis severitas*).²⁰ As a matter of fact, the *Decree* continues, “*malos tollerabimus pro pace*”, provided it does not corrupt the peace and unity of the church or holy matters.²¹ For this very reason, tolerance also has its limits and cannot include heretics and schismatics.²² As Augustine had claimed, the affliction that Christians experience when they see those who are lost is somehow compensated by the vision of the peace of the Church: “*Pax ecclesie mesticiam consolatur perditorum*”.²³ Gratian’s *Decretum*, in line with the rest of the Christian tradition, proclaims peace as a highly desirable ideal. Yet, as we see, it also accepts that the use of force is legitimate in the event of necessity, for instance, to fight or repress those who threaten the unity of the state or the community of the faithful. As we shall see below, Savonarola would also attempt to harmonize the ideal of civic reconciliation and universal peace and the need for justice against the iniquitous and seditious.

Thomas Aquinas, presumably a frequent reader of Savonarola,²⁴ adopted many elements of Augustine’s standpoint, reorienting some aspects of the issue in a line maybe closer to that of Savonarola. As Augustine, Aquinas accepted that all creatures naturally desire peace and that it is one of the main objectives towards which man should strive in order to fulfil his natural ends.²⁵ In human terms, peace is the fruit or act of charity, that is, the result of man’s love of God and of his neighbour.²⁶ Besides, peace is an indirect work of justice, “in so far as justice removes the obstacles of peace”.²⁷ There are vices and sins contrary to peace, such as discord (*discordia*) and contention (*contentio*); and others more serious because they are deeds, such as schism (*schisma*), quarrelling (*rixa*), war (*bellum*) and sedition (*seditio*).²⁸ While war (which Aquinas defined as fighting between two or more peoples) can be right and lawful,²⁹ sedition (consisting in the strife of one part of

¹⁹ Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 4, c. 5.

²⁰ Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 1, c. 2 and q. 4, c. 25.

²¹ Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 4, c. 4 and q. 4, c. 18.

²² Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 4, c. 40 and q. 5, c. 43.

²³ Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 23, q. 5, c. 48.

²⁴ Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, 3rd edition (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), 6-7.

²⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, edited by T. Gilby (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), II-II, q. 29, a. 2.

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 29, a. 3.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 29, a. 3.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 37.

²⁹ Aquinas also contributed to clarifying the conditions for just war. Accordingly, war was lawful first when it was waged by legitimate authority against external or internal enemies. Secondly, when it was for a just cause, that is, when those who are attacked deserved this on account of some fault. And third, when the belligerents have a worthy intention (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 40, a. 1). In any case, it has been noted that most of these arguments can be found somewhere in Augustine (see Kany, “Augustine’s Theology of Peace”, 31-47; Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, 260-261).

the state against other part) is always opposed to justice and common good. Sedition is in all cases a mortal sin.³⁰ In *De Regno*, Aquinas employed Grosseteste's Latin version of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which translated the Greek term *eûnomía* (usually rendered as 'good laws' or 'good political order') as *pax*. Accordingly, peace was defined (in *De Regno* I, 2), as the preservation of unity that enables the "welfare and safety of a multitude formed into a society". In this way, peace becomes for Aquinas "the chief concern of the ruler of a multitude".³¹ As we have seen, St. Thomas stresses the close relationship between peace, charity and justice. This is an issue that can also be traced in Savonarola, who would resort to the tension between peace, charity and justice, either to put charity before vengeance and even justice, or to remind us that peace cannot be achieved without justice.

A Theology of Peace and Reform

In line with Aquinas and Augustine, Savonarola presupposed in his preaching that peace was the natural tendency of all the beings in the world: "All things have a peace, because every form is inclined to stand in its proper place and every thing standing in its own place stands in order and not in confusion."³² Peace and order are closely related to notion of unity and indeed a harmonious unity presides over nature and can be predicated on the essence of God: "God's property is to unite disjointed things [...] Every multitude is caused by unity [...] God is maximally united and is an indivisible entity, because all that is in God is God Himself".³³ This harmonic cosmology was combined in

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 52, a. 2.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship to the King of Cyprus*, translated by G. B. Phelan (Westport: Hyperion, 1992), I, 2. On the importance of peace for Aquinas based on Aristotelian sources, see Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, 260-65.

³² "Ogni cosa si riduce ad una pace, perchè ogni forma ha inclinazione di stare nel loco proprio, e, stando così ogni cosa, sta per ordine e non per confusione" (Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, in Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo con il Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, edited by L. Firpo [Rome: Edizione Nazionale A. Belardetti, 1965], 1-428, 85). All translations from Savonarola's texts are mine.

³³ "La proprietà di Dio e unire le cose disgregate. Ogni moltitudine e causata della unità [...] e la moltitudine non si ridurrebbe a uno se non fusse unita [...] Dio è massimamente unito ed è uno ente indiviso, perchè ogni cosa è in Dio è esso Dio" (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XX [23-XII-1494], 343). See also his *Compendium philosophiae naturalis*, I, 43-45, in Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendium philosophiae naturalis*, in *Scritti filosofici*, vol. 2, edited by E. Garin and G. C. Garfagnini (Rome: Belardetti, 1982), 1-302. For Savonarola's familiarity with Aristotle's texts and the importance of these texts of philosophy in the context of Aristotelian Renaissance tradition, see Lorenza Tromboni, "Uno strumento per il predicatore: il compendio di filosofia aristotelica di Girolamo Savonarola", in *L'antichità classica nel pensiero medievale [Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale di studi della SIEPM]*, edited by A. Palazzo (Porto: FIDEM, 2011), 441-469; and Lorenza Tromboni, "La cultura filosofica di Girolamo Savonarola tra predicazione e umanesimo: Platone, Aristotele e la Sacra Scrittura", *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 29 (2019): 1-19. On the similarities between Savonarola and Ficino, especially in relation to the spiritual reform exposed by the

Savonarola's texts³⁴ with the obvious assumption that God was the cause and the aim of all created beings.³⁵

In political terms, Savonarola also assumes that peace deals with other notions such as unity, love and sympathy among the citizens: "[...] if you desire your city to become stable and adopt good reform, what aim have you in mind? [...] It is union, concord, friendship between citizens."³⁶ Political entities like Florence or the Church are conceived from an original unity and communal solidarity. Unity is the point of departure of the political entities, although under the Trinitarian and organicist paradigm it includes a functional plurality. In any case, from this original agreement and unity, political bodies can suffer a slow degradation towards dysfunctional particularism. According to Savonarola, weakness of human nature and the natural passing of time are the main natural causes of the transition from the original oneness into fragmentation or discord.³⁷ Time and human ambition tend to undermine the original unity of cities and kingdoms, opening up the possibility of confrontation, division and internal war. This is why, for Savonarola, the original form must from time to time be reintegrated and reformed. Florence, as well as the Italian Church, suffered a process of degradation from an original unity (*prima forma*) to a subsequent series of divisions (schisms in the case of the Church). Savonarola advocates for the need to reform the Church (and Florence) as the only way of restoring the unity of Christianity and the vigour and health of Italy.³⁸ Reformation becomes a necessary instrument for the revitalisation of the political and religious bodies. This seems to be a remarkable and original contribution by Savonarola to the Thomist tradition to which his thought belongs. A few years later, Machiavelli would present a similar principle³⁹ (in this case of more Galenian resonances) according to which mixed bodies, such as cities or religious institutions, should be periodically purged and returned towards their principles in order to be revitalised and rearranged. In the case of political bodies, just as time was a natural and corrosive factor, for Savonarola, tyranny is the most disintegrative human threat to the life of political units. Emphasising some remarks by

Platonic humanist in *De Christiana religione* and his *Praedicationes*, see Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2-1498* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 369 *et seq.*

³⁴ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIII [14-XII-1494], 221. This idea (*universum est perfectum*) is also expressed in earlier writings such as his *Compendium philosophiae naturalis*, 9.

³⁵ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XV [23-XII-1494], 252.

³⁶ "[...] a volere posare la tua città e riformarla bene, che fine hai tu nella mente tua? [...] è la unione, la concordia, la amicizia intra è cittadini di quella" (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIV [15-XII-1494], 243-244).

³⁷ See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XV [23-XII-1494], 352.

³⁸ See for instance Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIV [15-XII-1494]. This whole sermon, like many others, is particularly concerned with Church and spiritual reformation of Christianity.

³⁹ See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, translated by J. Conaway Bondanella and P. Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), III, i, 374-378.

Aquinas,⁴⁰ tyranny is defined by the Savonarola⁴¹ as sedition and division in itself. In fact, the only remedy against tyranny would be a profound reform and restoration of unity.

Political Balances in Florence

Savonarola's political interventions in Florence developed during republican restoration from 1494 to 1498, after the fall of the Medicean regime.⁴² The main institutional structures created by the Medici (the Councils of the *Settanta*, the *Dieci* and the *Otto di Balìa*) were abolished shortly after their departure from the city, in December 1494, and an agreement was reached to restore the *Commune* and the Council of the *Popolo*. However, in spite of the consensus around institutional restoration, the institutional design of the new republican regime generated controversy and partisanship.⁴³

Among the numerous polemics, there were at least two interconnected questions to be urgently resolved. On the one hand, new Florentine rulers had to decide what to do with those who had been in office during the previous Medici regime and who now intended to retain their political and institutional power. On the other hand, many men that deprived of power during the Medicean period were now requesting a role in Florentine politics. Particularly delicate was the problem related to the citizens who had been exiled by the Medici after 1434 and who were now demanding full citizenship and political rights or even compensations or revenge.

Furthermore, the conflict related to the Medici's opponents and supporters overlapped with another trouble. It was the discussion about how to organise the Florentine Republic. The main dichotomy at this time was the choice between a popular

⁴⁰ Aquinas establishes that sedition against a tyrannical government is not properly such "unless indeed the tyrant's rule be disturbed so inordinately that his subjects suffer greater harm from the consequent disturbance than from the tyrant's government"; besides, tyranny is itself "guilty of sedition, since it encourages discord and sedition among his subjects" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 52, a. 2).

⁴¹ On this important question in some Savonarola's writings, see Lorenza Tromboni, "Note sulla figura del tiranno nelle compilazioni filosofiche di Girolamo Savonarola", in *La compilación del saber en la Edad Media*, edited by M. J. Muñoz, P. Cañizares and C. Martín (Porto: FIDEM, 2013), 533-555.

⁴² On the influence of Savonarola's preaching and prophetic activity on Florentine public opinion from 1494 onwards, see Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 99 *et seq.*

⁴³ On the question of recurrent conflict in Florence, see Francesco Bruni, *La città divisa: le parti e il bene comune da Dante a Guicciardini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003). On the political and social conflicts in Savonarola's republic, a highly remarkable work is the first volume of Guido Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche nella Repubblica Fiorentina dal 1494 al 1512*, 3 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1992). See also Giorgio Cadoni, *Lotte politiche e riforme istituzionali a Firenze tra il 1494 e il 1502* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1999).

republic (perceived as a continuation of the primeval Florentine republic) and an aristocratic republic (perceived in general as an implantation of the Venetian model).

At least two moments can be distinguished with regard to Savonarola's attitude toward the internal conflict on the Florentine Republic. Around 1494 (when the revolt against the Medici took place and the Great Council was created), Savonarola's emphasis was on reconciliation, concord and the recovery of internal peace. In his opinion, the Medicean despotic regime, unlike the republican nature of the Florentine people, had been a time of degradation and disintegration. Now it was the moment for reformation, that is, the moment to recover lost unity.⁴⁴ However, this process of restoration should not be achieved through a bloody or punitive policy, but through Christian mercy and charity. For example, in his 1494 preaching on *Aggeo*, Savonarola asks insistently for the restoration of unity in Florence, emphasising the moment of reconciliation and forgiveness. It was the moment for achieving the *pace universal* (recalling the expression used by Saint Augustine): "The first thing you must achieve is universal peace with all the citizens; and all those old things should be forgiven and put behind you. This is the command I have to issue and command you in the name of God: forgive everyone".⁴⁵

Savonarola then mentions some conditions necessary for the restoration of this calm Florentine unity. Firstly, the most important thing is the restoration of Christian values and the original Christian system of life. At this time, moral and religious regeneration was the main topic of his preaching. The degeneration of Christian virtues and the disregard for religious observances were the very causes of the Italian and Florentine troubles. In *Aggeo*, it was repetitively noted that the causes of Italian and Florentine problems were related to the moral dissolution of customs. One could say that the preaching of this moment represents a reduction from politics to morality and moral theology, with the reiterative link between divine cult and political success: "Florence, if you wish your government too become steady and strong and also long-lasting, you must return to God and to the good life, otherwise you will fall".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Savonarola continuously links reform of the Church with the strength and good health of the city, as is apparent in Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XII [12-XII-1494].

⁴⁵ "E in prima e la prima cosa che voi dovete fare sia una pace universale con tutti i cittadini; e tutte le cose vecchie siano perdonate e scancellate, e così vi dico e vi comando per parte di Dio: perdonate a ciascuno" (Savonarola: *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIII [14-XII-1494], 221). In the *Compendio di Rivelazione* the ideal of making the *pace universale* is also clearly expressed (see Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di Rivelazione, in Compendio di Rivelazione e Dialogus de veritate prophetica*, edited by A. Crucitti [Rome: Belardetti, 1974], 1-125, 8-9). Martines has stressed Savonarola's insistence on "mercy, civic peace and unity" during this period (Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 67).

⁴⁶ "Firenze, se tu vuoi che il tuo governo sia stabile e forte e che duri assai, bisogna che tu ti riduca a Dio e al ben vivere, altrimenti tu rovinerai" (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIII [14-XII-1494], 219).

At this time, Savonarola placed the emphasis on the practice of Christian values such as charity, mercy (love of others, through which passes the logic of reconciliation), simplicity, humility, and repentance. One of the political effects of Christian life should be that citizens would live virtuously and would place common good above their private interests. Moreover, God's inspiration should show the way to find institutional and political solutions that at that moment Savonarola was unable to define more specifically, although the form of Venetian government seems to him the most appropriate.⁴⁷

A second element necessary in order to achieve a prosperous political regime in Florence depended, according to the Savonarola, on establishing a policy aimed at preventing a despotic or tyrannical regime in Florence, because tyranny, as mentioned above, was the main evil threatening Florence.

Regarding the nature of the republic which best suited Florence, an important difference between the early and later Savonarola can be outlined. As I have already suggested, the main alternative for contemporaries was between establishing a sort of popular republic (*governo largo*) that included all the guild members, or rather an aristocratic republic (*governo stretto*), that is, a regime with a narrow social base following the pattern of Venice. At this point, Savonarola proposed, although never categorically, the convenience of a mixed government, a notion usually employed to describe the Venetian pattern. This mixed government was traditionally presented as the solution for the lack of stability and, as stated by Aristotle, a remedy for avoiding extremes.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Serenissima Republic of Venice embodied the ideal of a stable and lasting republic, a perfect balance between the social and political parts of the state; an image that for the aristocratic party of Florence acquired an almost mythical meaning. In fact, the constitution of the Florentine Republic of 1494 was seen by its supporters as a balance or mixture of democracy (*Consiglio Grande*), aristocracy (*Consiglio dei Richiesti* or the Eighty), and monarchy (*Gonfaloniere*), resembling to some extent the Venetian regime.

In that period, Savonarola distinguished between monarchy, tyranny and republic, but not between popular and aristocratic republic. The natural condition of the Florentine people rendered a positive monarchy impossible. Therefore, in his view, Florence had to reconstruct an exemplary republic, possibly like that of Venice, which had demonstrated its effective suitability. Thus, Savonarola faced the question of the nature of the republic (aristocratic or democratic) with a prudent ambiguity, taking as a model the mixed regime of Venice, but removing some elements, such as, for instance, the position of the Doge.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIII [14-XII-1494], 228.

⁴⁸ See Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), IV, 1295a-b. In these passages, Aristotle praises the stability and balance of cities with a mixed form of constitution, where middle-class citizens predominate. Polybius' passages on the mixed government, much quoted from the 16th century onwards, appear to have been beyond Savonarola's reach (see Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche*, vol. 1, 345).

⁴⁹ See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIII [14-XII-1494], 226.

Meanwhile, in 1494, the aristocratic party agreed on the establishment of the Great Council as a first step towards the mixed regime, while the second step should be the establishment of a small powerful senate. However, the Council of the Eighty, which was intended to be an imitation of the Venetian Council of the *Pregadi*, was finally much more limited in political competencies than the Venetian one. Basically, the Eighty controlled the election of ambassadors and commissaries, and its members had to be elected every six months by the Great Council. In this way, the Florentine aristocratic group quickly developed a strong disaffection for the Great Council which they regarded as plebeian, politically ineffective and contrary to their interests.

According to the aristocratic party, the *provvisione* of 22-23 December and the creation of the *Consiglio Maggiore* really produced a popular republic, a *vivere popolare*. This was possibly the case. Felix Gilbert, for instance, has recalled the difficulty of knowing “whether the departures from the Venetian model were due to a lack of knowledge of Venice, to recognition of the impossibility of transferring Venetian institutions to Florence, or to an unwillingness to follow foreign examples”.⁵⁰ The fact was that the *popolani* and the middle strata (*uomini di mezzo*) realized their power and numerical preponderance in the *Consiglio Maggiore* and progressively imposed their political agenda to accede to the offices (*onori*) and to minimize their own tax charges (*oneri*), all of this against the interests of the *uomini principali* and the aristocratic group.⁵¹

The Law of Peace and Appeal. Limiting Sovereign Power

A crucial event in 1495 contributes to understanding of the Savonarola’s political evolution and later failure. At this time, he insisted on the need for the introduction of the *Legge della pace e dell’appello delle sei fave* (Law of appeal to the Six Beans), a rule aimed to limit the excessive judicial power of the *Signoria*. In order to better understand this issue, it has to be remembered that the *Signoria* (composed of one *Gonfaloniere* and eight *priori*) could decide on life and properties regarding any political or ordinary crime with six votes of the nine members of the council. The new appellate law introduced the possibility of reviewing the sentences of the *Signoria* by a bigger council elected by the Great Council. The Law of the Six Beans meant a limitation of the power of the new executive (the *Signoria*), preventing political abuse and particularly any revenge against the Medicean supporters. The passing of the law (19 March 1495) was seen as Savonarola’s

⁵⁰ Felix Gilbert, “The Venetian Constitution in Florentine Political Thought”, in *Florentine Studies. Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, edited by N. Rubinstein (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 463-500, 481. On the later creation of the lifetime Gonfalonier that recalled the figure of the Doge, Gilbert adds: “The constitutional innovation of 1502 was the election of a *Gonfaloniere a vita*. Instead of getting a Council of *Pregadi* the Florentines got a Doge” (Gilbert, “The Venetian Constitution”, 484).

⁵¹ See Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche*, vol. 1, 1 *et seq.*

personal success, and he presented it as an important instrument to consolidate the process of peace.⁵²

The strengthening of *Consiglio Maggiore* combined with the Law of appeal to the Six Beans has led some scholars to remark on the historical originality of the Savonarolan movement in terms of democracy and republican rule of law. For instance, according to Guidobaldo Guidi, “for the first time in Europe the typical factional and class political struggles were replaced by political movements [*correnti politiche*]”.⁵³ Savonarola’s partisans could be members of the lower, middle or upper class, some of them were moderate Medicean, some of them noble anti-Medicean, some of them openly partisans of a popular republic. On the other hand, political decisions and discussions were carried out in the *Consiglio Maggiore* without following a closed factional or class-struggle pattern. In other words, decisions adopted by the *Consiglio Maggiore* did not mean the suppression of the defeated ideas nor the coercion of their supporters. Other scholars, such as Pampaloni, have made similar remarks to those of Guidi.⁵⁴ Regardless of the relevance of this historical moment (maybe idealised by Guidi’s account),⁵⁵ the fact is that in a couple of years this apparent institutional consensus was to change dramatically.

A main factor in this change had to do with increasing hostility towards the political institutions of the Republic and against the figure of the Savonarola. First, the ever-increasing hostility of Alexander VI in relation to Savonarola’s criticism of the Curia. In fact, the Pope exerted progressive pressure on the Florentine authorities who protected Savonarola from Rome’s demands. Second, among the aristocratic group, Savonarola was seen more and more as an instrument of the middle and lower class against their interests. In addition, a certain number of citizens belonging to the middle strata assumed

⁵² See Savonarola, *Compendio di Rivelazione*, 58. On Savonarola’s personal battle for the appeal law, see Martines, *Fire in the City*, 81.

⁵³ Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche*, vol. 1, 289 *et seq.*

⁵⁴ Pampaloni draws an analogy between the Savonarolan movement and modern political parties (See Guido Pampaloni, “Il movimento piagnone secondo la lista del 1497”, in *Studies on Machiavelli* [Florence: Sansoni, 1972], 337-347). An assertion somewhat called into question throughout Polizzotto’s book (Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994]). Martines has also approached this issue, pointing out the terminological distinctions between *intelligenze* and *sette* (equivalents to organized group parties) and *correnti* (informal political currents), but without making a clear statement about the nature of Savonarola’s political movement (see Martines, *Fire in the City*, 77-78, 179).

⁵⁵ Guidi assumed that the Florentine regime of 1494 represented an anticipation of liberal political culture (see Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche*, vol. 1, 4, 9, 25 *et passim*), terms that sounds a little anachronistic. More recently Garfagnini has spoken of the Savonarolan commitment to build a “true democracy” (Gian Carlo Carfagnini, “Per un governo del popolo’: Bartolomeo Scala e Girolamo Savonarola”, in *Politica in Toscana da Dante a Guicciardini* [*Atti del Convegno, Firenze, 7-8 maggio 2014*], edited by G. C. Carfagnini [Florence: Polistampa, 2017], 119-141, 133). In contrast to these viewpoints, for a scholar such as Cordero, the Savonarolan republic was oligarchic and scarcely democratic (but, I add, compared with what?). See Francesco Cordero, *Savonarola*, 4 vols. (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1986-1988), vol. 2, 53 *et seq.*

that Savonarola (because of his quarrel with the Pope, his increasing pro-popular orientation and his religious radicalism) was damaging Florentine interests. In fact, a coalition that included the Pope, many partisans of the Medici (the *palleschi, bigi*) and active antagonists of the friar (*arrabiati, compagnacci*) was rapidly consolidating against Savonarola and against his followers and supporters.

If Florentine nobles perceived that the Great Council was becoming the main instrument of popular classes' strategy against their interests, Savonarola's writings of the time focused on the unequivocal importance of this institution for the salvation and renovation of Florence. In his *Tratatto circa il regimento di Firenze*, it is stated that everyone must believe that the Great Council and the new civil regime were ordered by God.⁵⁶ In this manner, these belated texts offer the clear impression of a change of orientation in favour of middle and popular class interests⁵⁷ and an obvious indifference with respect to the aristocratic group requests.

In Savonarola's texts of this later period, there was no longer any defence of the Venetian model. In February 1496, Savonarola made an initial distinction between the aristocratic government of Venice and the *civile* and *politico* government of Florence.⁵⁸ Two years later, in his *Tratatto circa il regimento di Firenze*, he rejects any compromise whatsoever with an *ottimati* regime for Florence: "Moreover, if we look carefully at the Florentine people, we understand that not only are they not suited to a princely government, but they are not suited to an aristocratic government either".⁵⁹

In short, at the height of 1498, Savonarola ignored the possibility of an aristocratic oriented republic for Florence. The Venetian mixed regime ideal seems to have been completely forgotten and Florence was destined to be a popular republic.

⁵⁶ Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, in Savonarola, Girolamo, *Prediche sopra Aggeo con il Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, edited by L. Firpo (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1965), 434-527, 187.

⁵⁷ The popular classes should be identified here with middle and lower-middle class, not with the *plebe*, that is, the lower classes. According to Savonarola, this group ought to be out of the *Consiglio Grande*. See Savonarola, *Tratatto circa il regimento di Firenze*, 202.

⁵⁸ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, edited by P. Ghiglieri (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1971-1972), Pred. II [18-2-1496], 65.

⁵⁹ "Se poi osserviamo con maggiore attenzione il popolo fiorentino, comprenderemo che non solo non gli si addice il governo di un principe, ma neppure quello degli Ottimati, e questo a causa delle sue consuetudini, importanti quanto il suo temperamento naturale" (Savonarola, *Tratatto circa il regimento di Firenze*, 176). The same idea in other passages: Savonarola, *Tratatto circa il regimento di Firenze*, 202 et passim.

Breaking the Peace. Identifying the Irreconcilable Enemy

A decisive event related to the Law of Appeal of the Six Beans determined Savonarola's political fortune. This episode was the focus of Machiavelli's attention in a much-quoted passage from his *Discourses*. In August 1497, a conspiracy of the *palleschi* against the Gonfalonier Francesco Valori was uncovered. The five pro-Medicean conspirators⁶⁰ were sentenced to death. They appealed to the Law of the Six Beans, which, as we have already seen, was a law personally sponsored by Savonarola. Their request was totally ignored by the Gonfalonier.⁶¹ Everybody in the city expectantly awaited Savonarola's reaction. The latter knew that his response could have a decisive impact on his public image in Florence. In the end, a cold silence was his only reply. According to Machiavelli, this fact was seen by many as an unmistakable sign of his political and partisan ambitions. Machiavelli's words are very eloquent:

This diminished the friar's reputation more than any other incident, for if the right of appeal was useful, it should have been observed, and if it was not useful, he should not have caused it to be passed successfully. This incident was remarked upon all the more because in so many of the sermons that the friar delivered after this law had been broken, he never either condemned those who had broken it or excused them—like a man who was unwilling to condemn something that he wanted, as if it were something that turned out to suit his purposes, but who was likewise unable to excuse it. This incident, revealing the friar's ambitious and partisan nature, deprived him of his reputation and brought him much blame.⁶²

Even as sympathetic a biographer of Savonarola as Ridolfi admitted his surprise at the Friar's unexpected coldness after knowing the death sentence of the convicts.⁶³ Recently, Carfagnini has excused Savonarola on the basis of a technical question: the appeal was processed with a formal defect because it should have been addressed to the Council of Eighty and not to the General Council.⁶⁴ But in the face of a fundamental political question such as the right to appeal a death sentence (bearing in mind that Savonarola was the principal inspirer and supporter of this right), technical details seem of less relevance. Weinstein has probably offered us a concise and sharp assessment of

⁶⁰ A number of other citizens were arrested or questioned. Those sentenced to death were Bernardo del Nero, Niccolò Ridolfi, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, Giannozzo Pucci e Giovanni Cambi. Some of them, as Francesco Guicciardini recalls, were reputable citizens (*capi de la città nostra*). For instance, Bernardo del Nero had just occupied the position of Gonfalonier of Justice and had held multiple magistracies in Florence. See Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine dal 1378 al 1509*, edited by R. Palmarocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1931), 142-45.

⁶¹ For a proficient summary of the conspiracy and the verdict against those involved, see Joseph Schnitzer, *Savonarola: Ein Kulturbild aus der Zeit der Renaissance*, 2 vols. (München: Reinhardt, 1924), vol. 1, 449-453. Guicciardini dedicates a whole chapter of his *Storie fiorentine* to the event (Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, XV, 137-147).

⁶² Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I, xlv, 199.

⁶³ Ridolfi, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, 310-312.

⁶⁴ Gian Carfagnini, "Per un governo del Popolo", 138.

the case: “His failure to use his influence on behalf of an appeal was not only a serious mistake of judgment, it was a moral lapse”.⁶⁵ Actually, it seems that Savonarola not only did not support the possible appeal, but even conveyed through his collaborators that God wanted justice in this case.⁶⁶

The logic of reconciliation to integrate the different political factions, reiterated by Savonarola between 1494 and 1496, seems to have changed from 1497 onwards into one of exclusion of the *palleschi*, the *arrabbiati* and other hostile groups. Long gone were the days when peace was preferred to justice⁶⁷ and mercy to slaughter: “*Misericordiam volo et not sacrificium*”.⁶⁸ Now, opposing forces are often presented by the Savonarola as irreconcilable. In fact, he prepares his people for battle against their enemies and attempts to explain the changes in his preaching by blaming the enemies: because they did not want mercy, the *iustizia* and the *potenza* shall rise upon them.⁶⁹ Finally, war is unavoidable: “You see we will make war. Sometimes some are upset by the contradiction of war. Christ waged war, the apostles and all the saints waged war; we also want to be always at war until the end of our life. War, war!”⁷⁰

A few months before the conspiracy against Valori, in a sermon of 1497, the enemies were compared with Goliath, and Savonarola’s supporters with David.⁷¹ The imminent *pace universale* had been transformed into the peace of the elected nation. The world was an inevitable battle between good and evil.⁷² Those who were with Savonarola and supported the Great Council were on the side of good and God. Those who disapproved of him were on the side of wicked and were against Florence's interests. In the midst of challenging tribulations (“I can no longer see the port and there is no way I can go

⁶⁵ David Weinstein, *Savonarola. The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 243. Weinstein stresses, as I have done above, Savonarola's personal and central commitment to the Law of Appeal: “He had spent a good deal of political capital to secure that right of appeal, arguing that there could be no liberation from the past without it, no civic peace, no universal renewal, and the passage of the Law of Appeal on 19 March 1495, had been a signal personal victory. Nothing in the new republic, not even the Great Council, bore so distinctive a Savonarolan stamp” (Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 243).

⁶⁶ Schnitzer, *Savonarola*, vol. 1, 452.

⁶⁷ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. XIV [15-XII-1494], 213.

⁶⁸ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, Pred. IV [9-XI-1494], 75.

⁶⁹ See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, Pred. IX [8-II-1497], vol. 1, 136.

⁷⁰ “Vedi che faremo guerra. Qualche volta alcuna si turba per la contradizione della guerra. Cristo ha fatto guerra, li apostoli e tutti li santi hanno fatto guerra; noi volgiamo stare anche noi sempre in guerra insino al fine della vita nostra. Guerra, guerra!” (Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, 2 vols., edited by di R. Ridolfi [Rome: A. Belardetti, 1955], Pred. XXXVI [8-III-1497], vol. 2, 132-133). On the concept of war in Savonarola’s preaching, see Jean-Claude Zancarini, “Far guerra con la pace nel croce: la guerra nelle prediche di Girolamo Savonarola”, in *Savonarola: democrazia, tirannide, profezia* [Atti del terzo seminario di studi, Pistoia, 23-24 maggio 1997], edited by G. C. Carfagnini (Florence: SISMEL, 1998), 43-51.

⁷¹ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, Pred. IX [8-II-1497], I, 130-131.

⁷² This point is also remarked by Machiavelli in his famous letter to Riccardo Becchi, in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, “N. Machiavelli to R. Becchi [09-03-1498]”, L. 3, 8-10.

back”),⁷³ Savonarola demands of God the arrival of a “new time”: “And truly I beseech you to initiate a new time and that this may be the beginning of great things”.⁷⁴ Thus, Florence (the new Jerusalem) seemed to be close to entering into a chiliastic time: “And I tell you that there was never a happier and more glorious time than this one and we want to do great and glorious things, and it will be God who will do them for the consolation of the good”.⁷⁵ A lot of the preaching of 1498 (such as his comments on the *Exodus*) were tinged with this prophetic character.⁷⁶ There, Savonarola presented himself as a new Moses, while his followers were like the Hebrew people. The Dominican was taking them to the Promised Land, in spite of the hostility of their enemies, who were assimilated to the Egyptians. However, the New Jerusalem could not progress without first defeating the spiritual enemies (the Pope and the scribes and Pharisees, as he calls them) and the earthly enemies (the *arrabiati*, the *compagnacci*). These adversaries (from both Rome and Florence) were contrary to the *ben vivere* and enemies of the Lord: they were all “vicious and turned towards sin, as all devils, rotten and bestial”.⁷⁷ Savonarola’s recurrent appeal to the friend-enemy logic added dangerous risks to his words and actions. As Weinstein points out, Savonarola became an exalted and often aggressive preacher, combining a “fusion of patriotic chauvinism, popular republicanism, and apocalyptic renewal”.⁷⁸

In spite of this striking change in his policy and strategy for Florence, Savonarola always presupposed the same theology of unity and peace in a harmonic and fully ordered cosmos. All the time, politics were framed by an identical theological programme. The supernatural and mystical goal (a perfect Christian order for Florence) remained identical, even if there might be dramatic differences in worldly terms. Like St. Augustine, Savonarola could continue to praise the *pax bonorum* or the *pax Dei*, rejecting the *pax iniquorum*. Obviously, the ideal of the *pax universalis* now had a more restricted meaning. The reference or sense of the notion of totality could be changed. In 1495, Florence seemed to be the reference point for this totality. In 1497, however, it did not include those citizens who took a stand against Savonarola and Valori. As we have seen in Gratian’s *Decree*, those who corrupt peace and unity cannot be tolerated.

⁷³ “Io non veggio più il porto, en non posso tornare addietro” (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l’Esodo*, Pred. I [11-II-1498], I, 4).

⁷⁴ “E sì, ti prego, ora, che tu cominci un nuovo tempo, e questo sia principio di gran cose” (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l’Esodo*, Pred. I [11-II- 1498], I, 5).

⁷⁵ “E dicoti che non fu mai il più glorioso tempo nè il più felice di questo, e vogliamo far cose gloriose e cose grandi, e Dio sarà quello che le farà a consolazione de’ buoni” (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l’Esodo*, Pred. I [11-II-1498], I, 7).

⁷⁶ On Savonarola’s prophetic activity and eschatological preaching, see Schnitzer, *Savonarola*, vol. 2, 632-658, who, perhaps a little too generously, ascribes to the Dominican friar a complete subjective sincerity with regard to his prophetic activity (Schnitzer, *Savonarola*, vol. 2, 657-658).

⁷⁷ “viziosi e rinvolti ne’ peccati, qual tutti diavoli e qual mezzi e qual bestie” (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l’Esodo*, Pred. I [11-II- 1498], I, 25).

⁷⁸ Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 217.

This changing strategy had a clearly negative effect in terms of public exposure.⁷⁹ The progressive adjustments in his reformist proposals and in his prophetic promises and apocalyptic menaces did not help much.⁸⁰ In his *Prediche sopra l'Esodo*, Savonarola seemed to have a direct line to God, whom he often asked to enlighten him and whose advice did not take long to arrive: “Do not fear, fainthearted, for the Lord is with you. This is the answer we had from heaven this morning”.⁸¹ Many other examples could be given. It was unavoidable that this alleged familiarity and daily conversation with God increased suspicions of many Florentines, who had already been complaining about accommodative adjustments in Savonarola’s words and actions.

In conclusion, Savonarola’s apparent inconsistencies were the effect of mixing three fields of action that very difficult to harmonise (political action, moral theology and prophecy). On the one hand, a political context like the one in which Savonarola had to live, requires flexible attitudes, open to different courses of action (from the policy of reconciliation and pacification in 1494 to the discursive strategies typical of the friend/enemy logic around 1496-98). On the other hand, moral and theological reformist rhetoric demands the preaching of clear and systematic doctrine, relatively independent of the changing circumstances of local politics. Finally, prophetic discourse needs to be, at least to a certain point, disconnected from human costs and beyond the reach of logic reasoning. It seems clear that the three fields can be harmonised in certain circumstances. However, can all three coincide in the same person in a context of severe crisis and conflict without any reduction of credibility? As Weinstein has pointed out, Savonarola put “himself at the center of the apocalyptic drama”.⁸² As a political guide, as a moral and reformist preacher and as an inspired prophet, Savonarola became a leading character in very different fields at the same time. Unbelieving citizens, Medicean partisans and aristocratic circles, found the opportune moment to increase their hostility against the friar, obliging him to pay the costs of contradictions and inconsistency, whether true or apparent.

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⁷⁹According to Cordero, Savonarola’s changes of strategy are a proof of his “pure political calculus” (Cordero, *Savonarola*, II, 18). However, as Guidi suggests, it seems that his opportunism, if it can be called that, was not only in his personal interest (Guidi, *Lotte, pensiero e istituzione politiche*, I, 343 *et seq.*).

⁸⁰A good description of the strategic alternation of prophetic menaces and promises by David Weinstein, “Hagiography, Demonology, Biography: Savonarola Studies Today”, *The Journal of Modern History* 63/3 (1991): 483-503, 490-492.

⁸¹ “[...] non abbiate paura, pusillamini, il signore e conesso voi. Questa è la risposta, queste parole avemo dal Cielo, questa mattina” (Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l'Esodo*, Pred. I [11-II-1498], I, 6).

⁸² Weinstein, *Savonarola*, 136.

