

Girolamo Savonarola

1. Extracts from Renovation Sermon (Psalms, Sermon II)¹

Octave of the Epiphany

Delivered 13 January 1495

*Ecce gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter.*²

Opening of the sermon

Our intention this morning is to repeat all that we have said and preached in Florence over these past years about the renewal of the Church, which will happen all at once and soon. We will go through this repetition so that those who have not heard [these things] in the past may understand and know that [this] renewal must certainly occur and soon. And may those who have heard it before and believe be confirmed this morning [in their belief]; may those who have not believed or do not believe be converted; and may those who will not believe, ever obstinate as they are, at least be left blankly confounded by the reasons we shall adduce.

[*Girolamo explains that astrology is false since only God can know and see future events or those whom God chooses to share this information with.*]

“Come now, brother, what do you mean by this? Where did you get these things which you have predicted here for four years?” I do not need to tell you this, because the mind is not disposed to understand it. I have shared it with some of my friends, one or at most two. But I want to tell you that you must believe, for I am not mad, and I do not exert myself for no reason. In the past, I, too, would laugh at such things, but God allowed this [to happen] to me so that I would feel compassion for you when you disbelieved like this. But, truly, you ought to believe, because you have already seen a great many of the things I have preached here verified, and I tell you that the rest will also be verified, and not one iota will be lacking; I am more certain of this than you are that two and two make four, more certain than I am that I touch the wood of this pulpit, because this light is more certain than the sense of touch. But I want you to know that this light still does not justify me; Balaam, who prophesied, was nonetheless a sinner and wrongdoer even though he had this light of prophecy [Num. 22:32–33]. I say to you, Florence, that this light has been given me for your sake, not mine, for this light does not make a man pleasing to God. I also want you to know that I began to see these things more than fifteen, maybe twenty years ago, but I began to speak of them only in the last ten years; first in Brescia, when I preached there, I said some things; later God allowed me to come to Florence, which is the navel of Italy, so that you might give notice of them to all the other cities of Italy.

But you, Florence, have heard with your ears not me, but God. Other [cities] of Italy have heard only from what others have said, so you will have no excuse, Florence, if you are not converted; believe me, Florence, it is not I, but God, Who says these things. This is understandable because you have seen this nation, which was headed down an evil path, turn back to penitence; do not suppose that such an effect could be brought about by a poor little friar if God had not

¹ Extracts from Savonarola, Girolamo. Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490 – 1498 (eds. D. Beebe et al.), 2006.

² “Behold, the sword of the Lord [will be] over the earth soon and swiftly”

worked in him. Believe, then, Florence, and be converted; do not think that your scourge has passed away, for I see the sword turning back.

Girolamo's 10 reasons why the renewal of the Church is coming

Let us now begin with the reasons I have been citing for many years gone by, which demonstrate and prove the [coming] renewal of the Church. Some reasons are probable, and, so, they can be contradicted. Others are demonstrable and, so, cannot be contradicted because they are founded upon Holy Scripture. Those which I will tell you are all demonstrable, all founded on Holy Scripture. The first is *propter pollutionem praelatorum*.³ When you see a good head, you say that the body is well; when the head is bad, woe to the body. So, when God allows ambition, lechery, and other vices to be [found] in the head of government, believe that God's scourge is near. I [will] prove it to you: go, read IV Kings about Sedecias' end, where it says: *Dominus irascebatur contra Jerusalem*⁴ [IV Reg. 24:20]. *Item*, in I Kings, where it says that God allowed David [sic; Saul?] to sin in order to punish the people. One reads the same about Manasses [IV Reg. 24:3]. So, when you see God permitting the heads of the Church to overflow with wickedness and simony, say that the scourge of the people draws near. I do not say that it *is* [now] in the heads of the Church; I say *when* you see it.

The second is *propter absumptionem*⁵ of the good and the just. Whenever God takes away the holy and the good, say that the scourge is near. This can be proved: when God wanted to send the Flood, He removed Noe and his family [Gen. 6]. *Item*, He rescued Lot from Sodom when He wanted to burn it [Gen. 19]. Consider how many men can be found nowadays whom you can call just and good, and so, say that the scourge is near and that the wrath and the sword of God has moved.

The third is *propter exclusionem iustorum*.⁶ When you see that a lord or leader of government does not want the good and the just near him, but banishes them because he does not want the truth to be told, say that God's scourge is near.

The fourth is *propter desiderium iustorum*.⁷ When you see that all men of good life desire and call for the scourge, believe that it has to come soon. Look today and see if everyone cries out for the scourge; believe me, Florence, your punishment would already have come if it were not for the prayers and devotions of the good; believe me that today you would be a wasteland.

The fifth is *propter obstinationem peccatorum*.⁸ When sinners are obstinate and do not want to be converted to God and neither value nor appreciate those who call them to the good way, but always go from bad to worse and are obstinate in their vices, say that God is angry. This reason and the two preceding can be proved by what God did to Jerusalem, when He sent so many prophets and holy men to try to convert that people, but they remained obstinate and hunted down the prophets and stoned them, while all the good seemed to be crying out for the scourge. Likewise, many miracles were sent to Pharaoh, but He remained obstinate [Ex. 7–10]. And so, Florence, expect the scourge, since you know how long you have been told to be converted, and

³ "On account of the uncleanness of prelates."

⁴ "The Lord was enraged against Jerusalem."

⁵ "On account of the removal."

⁶ "On account of the exclusion of the just."

⁷ "On account of the desire of the just."

⁸ "On account of the obstinacy of sinners."

yet you have remained obstinate. And you, Rome, Rome! You, too, have been told, and yet you remain in your obstinacy, and so expect the wrath of God.

The sixth is *propter multitudinem peccatorum*.⁹ Because of David's pride the plague was sent [II Reg. 24]. Consider whether Rome is full of pride, lust, avarice, and simony! Consider whether her sins are continually multiplied, and say, therefore, that the scourge is near, and the renewal of the Church is near.

The seventh is *propter exclusionem virtutum primarum, scilicet charitatis et fidei*.¹⁰ In the time of the early Church, no one lived without complete faith and complete charity. Consider how much of these are in the world today. You, Florence, want to look after your ambition instead, and everyone promotes himself. Believe that you have no remedy but penance, for the scourge of God is near.

The eighth is *propter negationem credendorum*.¹¹ Consider that today it seems that no one believes and has faith any more, and everyone, in effect, says, "So what?" When you see this, say that the scourge is near.

The ninth is *propter perditum cultum divinum*.¹² Go, see what is done in God's churches and with what devotion people attend. Today divine worship has run to ruin! You will say, "Oh, there are so many religious and so many priests, more than there have ever been before! Would that we had fewer!" O clergy, clergy, *propter te orta est haec tempestas!*¹³ [approximates Ion. 1:12] You are the cause of all this wickedness! And yet, everyone thinks himself blessed if he has a priest in the house. But I tell you that the time will come, and soon, when they will say, "Blessed is that house without a tonsure in it!"

The tenth is *propter universalem opinionem*.¹⁴ See, everyone seems to be preaching and waiting for the scourge and tribulations, and everyone seems to feel it would be just that punishment for such great iniquity should come. The abbot Joachim [da Fiore]¹⁵ and many others preach and announce that this scourge has to come at this time. These are the reasons why I have preached to you about the renewal of the Church. Now let us talk about symbols which demonstrate it.

Savonarola speaks of his prophetic visions

I saw, through the power of the imagination, a black cross above Babylonian Rome, on which was written: *Ira Domini*,¹⁶ and upon it there rained swords, knives, lances, and every [other sort of] weapon, a storm of hail and stones, and long, awesome streaks of lightning in dark and murky skies. And I saw another cross, of gold, which stretched from heaven to earth above Jerusalem, on which was written: *Misericordia Dei*¹⁷, and here the skies were calm, limpid, and clear as could be; wherefore, on account of this vision, I tell you that the Church

⁹ "On account of a multitude of sinners"

¹⁰ "On account of disregard for the primary virtues, that is, charity and faith."

¹¹ "On account of the denial of belief."

¹² "On account of the decay of divine worship."

¹³ "Because of you this storm has arisen!"

¹⁴ "On account of universal opinion."

¹⁵ Cistercian mystic, whose prophecies were condemned in 1256 by Pope Alexander IV, largely because of their appropriation by the radical Franciscan Spirituals.

¹⁶ "The wrath of the Lord."

¹⁷ "The mercy of God."

of God must be renewed, and soon, for God is angry, and afterward the infidels have to be converted, and this will be soon.¹⁸

I will explicate it for you. The sword which quivered—I must say this to you, Florence—is that of the king of France, which is appearing all over Italy. The angels with the red cross, the white stoles, and the chalice are the preachers who announce this scourge to you; they give you the red cross to kiss—that is, martyrdom—so that you might bear up under this scourge which has to come during the renewal of the Church. The stole signifies the purification of her [the Church's] conscience, cleansing her of every vice, so that she may be white with purity. The chalice, full to the top with good wine, signifies the passion of which everyone ought to drink; those who have taken the stoles and cleansed their consciences will drink the sweet wine, that is, they will feel only a little of this scourge, which is signified by the sweet wine at the top of the chalice, that is, they will be the first to be scourged, but it will be sweet because they will bear it patiently, and if they die, they will go to eternal life. Those others drink the very bitter dregs under duress because it will seem bitter to them, as it surely is. This sword has not yet turned its point downward, even though it has appeared throughout all Italy, because God still awaits your repentance. Be converted, Florence, for there is no other remedy for us but penitence. Clothe yourselves with the white stole while you have time; do not wait any longer, for later there will be no room for penitence.

Closing of the sermon

I am not saying by this, nor have I ever told you, that God speaks to me; I say neither yes nor no; you are so far from the faith that you do not believe; you would sooner believe in some devil who spoke with men and foretold future things. You are devoid of sense and outside [the bounds] of the faith. Tell me, if you believe that Christ became incarnate through the Virgin and that He was crucified, which is more difficult to believe than [what I say], you should also believe this, which is easier, that is, that Christ speaks to men. Moreover, if you are a Christian, you must believe that the Church has to be renewed. Daniel says that the Antichrist has to come and has to persecute the Christians in Jerusalem; it follows that there must be Christians there; therefore, those who are there must be baptized. But to effect this, there is a need for other men than those the Church has today. Therefore, the Church has to be renewed so that men may become good and go there to convert the infidels to Christianity. Go and read the Fathers on that passage in the Gospel of Matthew where He [Christ] says: "*Evangelium hoc praedicabitur in toto mundo et tunc erit consummatio*" [Matt. 24:14]. Believe me, Florence! You simply must believe me because, from all that I have told you, you have not seen a single iota lacking up to now, and in the future as well, you will see nothing fail.

I predicted, quite a few years ago, the death of Lorenzo de' Medici and the death of Pope Innocent. *Item*, [I predicted] the turn of events here now in Florence concerning this recent change of government. *Item*, I said that on the day when the king of France should arrive in Pisa, there would be a renovation in the government here. I did not say these things up here publicly, but I said them to some who are here at this sermon—I have witnesses here in Florence.

I know that this morning I am crazy et *quod omnia haec insipientia dico* [II Cor. 11:21], but I want you to know that this light does not make me just; rather, if I am humble and have charity, I will be made just. And this light has not been given to me for my own sake, nor on account of my

¹⁸ This vision (datable to Good Friday 1492) and the following are all repeated in slightly altered form and in a different order in Savonarola's *Compendium of Revelations*.

merit, but for you, Florence. And so, Florence, this morning I have told you these things so openly, having been inspired by God to say them to you in this way, so that you might know the whole and have no excuse later when the scourge comes and cannot then say, "I did not know." I could not say it more clearly, and I am aware that I shall be considered crazy this morning, for many have come here to point at me. If you say that I am crazy, I will have patience. I have spoken to you in this way because God wanted me to speak to you so.

...

I have declared to you: *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter*. Believe me that God's dagger will strike, and soon. And do not make a jest of this *cito*;¹⁹ do not say that it is one of these Apocalyptic *citos*, which take hundreds of years to occur. Believe me, it will be soon. Believing does you no harm; rather, it helps you in that it makes you turn to penitence and makes you walk in the way of God. Not believing could harm you and does you no good, so believe that the time is near. One cannot say exactly when, for God does not allow it, in order that His chosen ones may be always in fear and in faith and in charity, and keep always in the way of God. This is why I have not told you of a set time, so that you might always do penance and make yourselves pleasing to God, because if, for example, I were to say to men, "The tribulation will come within ten years," everyone would say, "I can still wait a bit to be converted." It would be tantamount to giving license to evildoing in the meantime, which would be detrimental. Therefore, God does not want a fixed time to be preached. So, I say this: now is the time for penance. Do not make a jest of this *cito*, for I tell you: if you do not do what I have told you, woe to Florence, woe to the people, woe to the great and the small!

Finally, I will conclude: I have been crazy this morning, this is what you will say, and I knew you would say it before I came up here. God willed it so, yet I say—and take this as my conclusion—that God has prepared a great dinner for all Italy, but all the dishes are bitter. I have given only the salad, which was a bit of bitter lettuce. Understand me well, Florence: all the other dishes are yet to come, and they are all bitter and plentiful, for it is a grand dinner. Thus, I conclude, and keep it in mind that Italy is now on the verge of her tribulations. O Italy, and princes of Italy, and prelates of the Church, the wrath of God is upon you, and you have no remedy but to be converted! *et a sancuario meo incipiam*²⁰ [Ezech. 9:6]. O Italy, O Florence, *propter peccata tua venient tibi adversa! Oh, nobiles, oh, potentes, oh, plebei, manus Domini est supra vos, et non resistet potentia, sapientia, vel fuga!*²¹ And it will come about not because you do not know how things have been ordered. O princes of Italy, flee the land of the North; do penance while the sword is not yet out of its sheath, and while it is not yet bloodied, flee from Rome! O Florence, flee from Florence, that is, flee from sin through penitence and flee from the wicked!

This is the conclusion. I have said all these things for reasons both divine and human, with moderation and tempering my tongue. I have begged you; I cannot command you, for I am not your lord, but your father. Do it, Florence; I pray to God for you, that He may enlighten you, *Cui est gloria et imperium per infinita saecula saeculorum*. Amen.²²

¹⁹ "Soon."

²⁰ "And I will come forth from My sanctuary." The verb in the Vulgate is the imperative plural, *incipite*, because this is God's instruction to the "men" He sends to destroy all who do not have a tau (Greek T, symbolic of the Cross) on their foreheads.

²¹ "On account of your sins adversity will come upon you! O nobles, O princes, O commoners, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and power cannot resist it, nor wisdom, nor flight!"

²² "To Whom is glory and power forever and ever. Amen."