REJECT AENEAS, ACCEPT PIUS

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SELECTED LETTERS OF

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)

INTRODUCED & TRANSLATED BY

Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, and Philip Krey

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For Margaret, René, and Carol

Ubi caritas et amor;
Ubi caritas deus ibi est.
—Eighth-century Latin hymn

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FOREWORD

The letter was the Renaissance humanists' favorite mode of literary expression, and Pius II was a master of the genre. Some humanists, such as Petrarch and Erasmus, practiced the genre mainly as a means of private communication and literary expression, some as the way they earned their daily bread (Renaissance bureaucracies and the households of high lay and ecclesiastical officials could not do without humanist secretaries), and some as gifted switch-hitters who moved with seemingly effortless ease between official correspondence and the writing of letters of high literary and intellectual significance (the many illustrious papal secretaries and the great series of Florentine chancellors immediately come to mind). We can comfortably place Pius II in the last category. Pius, however, was unique in the Renaissance in how he parlayed his literary talents as a humanist secretary to reach not just a position of influence but the very pinnacle of power as pope.

The letters translated in this book are, to be sure, invaluable documents for understanding contemporary men, events, and institutions. Very early on, as the humble Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Pius already found himself a participant in some of the most important developments of his time. But the letters are also remarkably revealing in how they allow us to follow the evolution of Pius from an ambitious young littérateur given to amorous affairs to the pope who would give his last dying breath attempting to rally Latin Christendom to the cause of recovering Constantinople and stemming the advance of the Ottoman Turks. No life can really be measured until it is over; but a little more than a year before he died, Pius himself wrote a fitting epitaph to his personal voyage: "Reject Aeneas; accept Pius." So the translators were right to make the letter in which this exhortation appears the last in the collection and to choose it as their title.

Pius wrote and spoke Latin with consummate facility. But since the end of the Renaissance, fewer and fewer educated persons understand his Latin, let alone share in that facility. Today Renaissance Latin texts are closed books to all

but a small band of specialists unless we publish them anew in translation. Consequently, as someone much concerned with the dissemination and study of Renaissance Latin texts because of my position as the executive director of the Renaissance Society of America, I heartily applaud the willingness of Thomas Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, and Philip Krey to undertake the arduous task of translating Pius and providing the requisite historical annotation. I myself learned from their translation as well as from their introduction, notes, and comments on the letters. Once works survived only if they were recopied. In modern times, we edit and print texts of the past. But in a certain sense, to survive these texts must also be translated and documented. Messrs. Izbicki, Christianson, and Krey have now made accessible and understandable to us a most valuable set of texts of an extraordinary Renaissance author.

John Monfasani
Executive Director
The Renaissance Society of America
March 19, 2005

PREFACE

In this collection of seventy-five letters, plus a seventy-sixth that stands apart as a historical narrative and two papal documents, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–64; elected Pope Pius II in 1458) comes vibrantly alive for the ordinary reader as seldom before. All but one are newly translated, and most are translated into English for the first time. The book is designed for the student who needs an introductory survey of papal and conciliar history during the Renaissance; for the graduate student and scholar who know the name of Pius II but little of his writings; and, not least, for the general reader who wishes to become acquainted with the personality and career of one of the most fascinating of all the popes.

Aeneas was deeply involved in the two major issues of his time: the establishment of the new learning (humanism) as an educational option and career path and the crisis, caused by the Great Schism in 1378, that divided ecclesiastical unity, leading to the conciliar movement and the establishment of the Renaissance papacy.

Few popes can rival Aeneas's self-revealing testimony to his personality and career, illustrating prejudices and providing lively descriptions of events and people, great and small. The letters in the first section of this volume range from brief and intimate revelations to lengthy, but no less animated, reports and position papers. They are addressed to patrons, potential patrons, and well-placed friends, stating his opinions, relating news, and asking favors. They trace the changes in his political and ecclesiastical allegiance that parallel his evolution from worldly humanist poet to learned prelate and from participant at the Council of Basel, where he was actively engaged in the election of an antipope, to advocate for the papacy and eventually pope.

Also included are letters concerned with love, literature, and the busy secretary's desire for leisure. Prominent among Aeneas's subjects are his desire to purchase a Bible at a reasonable price, his effort to obtain a copy of Leonardo Bruni's translation of Aristotle's *Politics,* an account of his fathering an illegiti-

mate child, and his explanation of why he composed a love letter for the duke of Tyrol. Without these less political letters, a portrait of Aeneas would be incomplete and lifeless.

The last sections contain Aeneas's revised history of the Council of Basel, a treatise-length letter written after the council's dissolution, and two papal documents, *Execrabilis,* the first papal condemnation of appeals from the Roman pontiff to a general council, and *In minoribus,* on the errors of his youth, addressed to critics at the University of Cologne.

Whatever their merits, the considerable authority of his revisionist statements about the Council of Basel has lent great weight to the negative modern view of late medieval reform councils, while his sensitivity to, and candid acknowledgement of, the errors of his youth set him apart from his contemporaries who changed sides without offering much in the way of apologies.

As might be expected from a team of authors whose chief scholarly interests are late medieval conciliarism and its sources in the Bible, ecclesiology, and political theory, we began with the intent of selecting those letters that best illustrated Aeneas's move from champion of councils to a pope who condemned them. But as we proceeded we were pleased to discover a very human—and a very complex—person with a fertile humanist imagination that informs every page of this rich and varied collection. Our fond hope is that the reader will share in our delight.

The initial translations were done by one member of the team, Thomas M. Izbicki. All three members, however, participated in all facets of the project, and all owe many debts to colleagues and friends for their assistance. Alex Crouch and the late Dr. Charles Van Buskirk helped in the early stages, which began humbly some years ago. Along the way Professor Daniel Nodes and David Marshall checked several difficult passages. Kim Breighner, as always, provided technical help, including the combination of multiple files into a single whole. Readers for the publisher, the Catholic University of America Press, as well as Professor Emily O'Brien took their tasks with utmost seriousness and made significant contributions to our final revisions. And the director of the press, David J. McGonagle, has shown us every kindness, together with invaluable guidance, and well deserves our warmest gratitude.

To all we are deeply grateful, but as we complete this work we refer to the words of Aeneas himself: "[I]f it has any fault, you can ascribe it more to the translator than to the orator" (no. 49).

Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, Philip Krey,
Eastertide 2005

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

Translations, for the most part, are based on the letters as they are printed in the edition of Rudolf Wolkan:

Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini, ed. Rudolf Wolkan, in *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum,* ser. 2, vols. 61, 62, 67, 68 (Vienna, 1909–18).

In certain places, we have had to do conjectural emendations of Wolkan's texts, and these we explain in the footnotes.

Aeneas's own style evolved over time, becoming less difficult to translate; but his many erudite references and his comments on the contemporary scene remain challenging to render into English. In translating these texts we have tried to retain Aeneas's formality of address to superiors, as well as his more pungent comments on persons and events. We also have striven to give the reader a taste of the author's complex style.

The late Professor Heiko Oberman kindly permitted us to adapt the texts of papal documents originally published in:

Gabriel Biel, *Defensorium obedientiae apostolicae et alia documenta,* ed. and trans. Heiko A. Oberman, Daniel E. Zerfoss, and William J. Courtenay (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

CITATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Biblical citations are from the Douai-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate.

CIC	*Corpus iuris canonici,* ed. Emil Friedberg, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1879; repr., Graz, 1955).
COD	*Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta,* 3rd ed., ed. Giuseppi Albergo et al. (Bologna, 1973).
Commentaries	*The Commentaries of Pius II,* ed. and trans. Florence Gragg, intro. Leona Gabel, *Smith College Studies* 22, 25, 30, 35, 43 (1936–57).
Mansi	*Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio,* 53 vols., ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi (Paris, 1901–27; repr., Graz, 1960–61).
Memoirs	*Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II: An Abridgment,* ed. and trans. Florence Gragg, intro. Leona Gabel (New York, 1959).
Opera	*Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei senensis . . . opera quae extant omnia* (Basel, 1571; repr., Frankfurt, 1967).
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus* [*Patrologia latina*], 221 vols., ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–1903).
Wolkan	*Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini,* ed. Rudolf Wolkan, in *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum,* ser. 2, vols. 61, 62, 67, 68 (Vienna, 1909–18). Cited as Wolkan I for vols. 61 and 62, beginning in 1431; Wolkan II for vol. 67, beginning in 1447; and Wolkan III for vol. 68, beginning in 1451.

INTRODUCTION

From Private Person to Posterity

We who have written this brief history should not compose a long preface.

—Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (no. 76)

In the first of several frescoes in the library of Siena Cathedral, we see the young Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–64; pope after 1458). Originally a small-town boy from Corsignano, he is elaborately dressed and mounted on a handsome steed, ready to set forth on a great and lifelong adventure that will eventually lead him to the pinnacle of power as Pope Pius II. In the background we also see the cardinal who has just engaged his services as secretary and the ship they are to board for the journey northward to the Council of Basel (1431–49), while, ominously, a storm is brewing in the distance. Francesco Todeschini, Aeneas's nephew who became a cardinal by his uncle's appointment and later Pius III, was primarily responsible for the library, which the gifted painter Pinturicchio decorated as part of a larger campaign by Aeneas's extended family to preserve and enhance the Piccolomini image.[1] And thus begins our story of a pilgrim's progress and the historical portrait he and his progeny wished to leave to posterity.[2]

Aeneas's journey started in Siena one day in the winter of 1431–32 when a passing cardinal, Domenico Capranica, engaged the young humanist to accompany him to Basel.[3] As the adventure unfolded, it took Aeneas from humble beginnings to the heights of ecclesiastical power and authority, but not before he had undergone a long apprenticeship, first at the council and then at the imperial court. Once ordained, he became bishop of Trieste in 1447 and Siena in

1. On the fresco cycle, see dell'Era, *Piccolomini Library.* On Aeneas and the promotion of his family's interests, see Hilary, "The Nepotism of Pope Pius II."

2. Aeneas's story is most accessible to English-speaking readers in three agreeably written biographies, all of which make use of Rudolph Wolkan's edition of the letters: Boulting, *Aeneas Silvius*; Ady, *Pius II*; and Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara.* Other important twentieth-century contributions include Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini,* although he takes a less than positive view of conciliarism; Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Papst Pius II,* with selected texts; and idem, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung*; Veit, *Pensiero e vita religiosa*; Maffei, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini*; Naville, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini*; and Corbo, *Pio II Piccolomini.*

3. Aeneas tells his own story in the autobiographical *Commentaries* up to June 1464, the year of his death. Recent critical editions are *Pii II Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus suis contingerunt*; *I Commentarii*; *Pii Secundi pontiicis maximi "Commentarii"* ; and *Commentarii rerum memorabilium,* which is still in progress. An English translation, *The Commentaries of Pius II,* is hereafter cited as *Commentaries.* The same team also published a convenient abridgment entitled *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope,* cited hereafter as *Memoirs.* The beginning of Aeneas's journey to Basel is described in *Commentaries,* 12–15; *Memoirs,* 30–31.

1450, was named a cardinal in 1456 and elected pope in 1458. Yet, more than anything else, his dalliance with conciliarism, the movement that attempted to limit the authority of the pope in relation to the universal church represented in a general council, would create considerable embarrassment when at long last he was ordained and became a prelate.

The journey from conciliarism to papalism remains one of the most debated questions of Aeneas's life and career, invigorating scholarly debate today as it did among his contemporaries: How and why did the young secretary, who began as a staunch supporter of the council and its reforms, come to abandon the cause? How and why, starting in the mid-1440s, did he move toward a position of neutrality between council and pope and eventually throw in his lot with the papacy itself, rising to become not only a pope but a pope determined to reject all appeals to a council over the papacy?

It is not that we lack the resources to attempt an answer. On the contrary, their very abundance is the problem. Aeneas was remarkably prolific by any standard; his corpus of treatises, histories, geographies, poetry, biographical sketches, and a novella, in addition to official documents and a lengthy memoir—not to mention the letters themselves—ranks among the most comprehensive and self-revealing literary heritages in the history of the papacy. Perhaps, ironically, it is this abundance that over the years has made him susceptible to a wide spectrum of criticism. Such criticism reflects a complex person who was often astute, sometimes naive and self-serving, and always prone to take what was offered him and live life to the fullest. Even more to the point, when he appears to be most self-revealing, he is often exasperatingly elusive, hidden behind his sources and his undoubted eloquence.

Some have credited Aeneas with a vision for church and society but maintained that its major manifestation, a crusade, was dangerously outmoded. Others have simply concluded that however much we wish to force him into one or another preconceived category, he is in the final analysis an enigma. The traditional solution, based on the harsh judgments of some of his own contemporaries, as well as his nineteenth-century German biographer,[4] has characterized him as an opportunist whose "pen was for hire" to the highest bidder, a humanist whose political and religious convictions did not go deep enough to sustain a steady course, and thus he followed whatever party seemed to be in

4. Voigt, *Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini.* Two other nineteenth-century studies are Weiss, *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini*; and Creighton, *Historical Essays and Reviews,* 55–106. In contrast to Voigt's generally negative evaluation, see Buyken, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini.*

the ascendant at a given moment, with concern for little more than his own self-preservation and advancement.[5]

A different perspective on Aeneas is suggested both by more recent scholarship and a closer reading of the letters translated here. While not completely dismissing his self-aggrandizing motives, this perspective attempts to detect greater philosophical consistency in the person and his career, even in his so-called conversion, by exploring his concept of "reliable discernment" and the application of this principle to achieve freedom for the papacy, harmony in Christendom, and a united front against internal dissent and external threat, especially from incursions by the Turks. Only against this background does his need to make dramatic revisions to his past come most clearly into view.

Another question remains. Aeneas enjoys at least two distinct and sometimes seemingly separate identities: on the one hand, the late medieval political theorist in matters of ecclesiastical and secular governance; on the other, the Renaissance humanist and man of letters, traveler, diarist, orator, and polemicist. By offering a more personal and immediate view, the letters in this collection acquaint us both with Aeneas the theoretician beyond the more familiar tracts of his early career and with Aeneas the humanist beyond his autobiographical *Commentaries,* which describe his youth and middle years but do so only from his later papal perspective.

Whatever we may conclude about his character and career goals, Aeneas's letters are some of the best, and often the only, biographical sources we have to illustrate the stages of his development and the major transformations in his thought. The primary purpose of this volume is to allow Aeneas to speak for himself and to provide context for selected letters from a remarkable correspondence that is often neglected and until now has been nearly unavailable to English-speaking readers. Each letter may be read for its own interest, but taken as a whole they cover the course of his career from the Council of Basel to his election as bishop, together with those later documents in which he felt compelled to revise or explain his past conduct and beg his readers to "Reject Aeneas; accept Pius."[6]

Viewed as a whole, Aeneas's correspondence reveals four recurring and

5. Various interpretations are surveyed by Rowe, "The Tragedy of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini." For a recent discussion of the key issues, see Izbicki, "Reject Aeneas."

6. *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini,* ed. Wolkan (cited hereafter as Wolkan I for vols. 61 and 62, beginning in 1431; Wolkan II for vol. 67, beginning in 1447; and Wolkan III for vol. 68, beginning in 1451). Few of these letters have appeared in English translation. See *Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini.*

comprehensive themes that constitute the central components of his career. In the first place, Aeneas would like us to think that his journey to Rome was marked by a conversion of the Damascus road type—he cites this parallel on more than one occasion. But change came gradually and by small steps, sometimes by fits and starts. Aeneas was not among those described by William James as "twice born" persons to whom a new direction comes in a flash, as when the scales fall suddenly from one's eyes.[7] To extend the biblical image, the poet is closer to a Johannine type—one who evolved slowly, but who nevertheless thought it prudent to jettison significant baggage as he developed. While coming to terms with himself and his career in the light of a destiny that was not entirely of his own making, he won through to a growing vision of a unified and harmonious world that reflected a more unified self. Still, over the course of his life, Aeneas could not eradicate a darker side filled with doubt and anxiety, focused especially on his past.

The second theme is a desire for the unity and harmony of the Christian commonwealth *(respublica christiana),* promoted and guaranteed jointly by church and empire. During the various stages of his life, Aeneas may have thought that the way to achieve his ideal was located now in the council, now in the emperor, and finally in the papacy, but the search itself remained constant. Yet, the outcome was not inevitable, and the choices he made were not about abstract alternatives. They reflected real issues in his life and in the fifteenth century.

Closely related is a third conviction that the truest means to determine who should lead in the achievement of his ideal was the one who discerns better and thus gains the most authority, as he says in a letter to Hartung von Kappel (no. 23). In the end, he found this reliability of discernment most clearly in the papacy during his own pontificate. This is a major theme of his last major writing, the *Commentaries,* which, in addition to shaping his biography along epic lines, laid claim to a superior judgment in political matters, justifying even the most expedient decision by its practicality.[8]

Informing all else is a final theme, his formation and self-understanding as a fifteenth-century humanist.[9] *Humanism* is a modern term used to describe

7. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience.*

8. We are grateful to Emily O'Brien for sharing her unpublished paper, "A Dialogue with Conciliarism,"which elaborates on the idea of discernment. See also idem, "The Anatomy of an Apology."

9. In a vast literature, one should especially note the widely influential definition of humanism by Paul Oskar Kristeller, who proposes that, rather than a series of philosophical principles, the hu-

the program of the *studia humanitatis* which, during the Renaissance, had developed a strong literary emphasis on the study of Latin, and sometimes Greek, texts dealing with grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. These skills could be useful not only to the teacher and the civic leader but also to the military commander, the ambassador, and even the merchant.[10] Together with an insatiable curiosity and a restless desire to learn and instruct, Aeneas imbibed this "new learning." It is apparent in his appreciation for the natural world and antiquity, especially authors like Cicero who encouraged both letter writing and the virtue of civic duty. But Aeneas's appropriation of the program went well beyond the insertion of a classical reference here and there. His humanism remained holistic. He looked at and worked through all his experiences, observations, and convictions through a humanist lens.[11]

These convictions extended to his personal interest in collecting books and manuscripts, the encouragement of classical learning, and dedication to the education of the young, but most of all they are manifested in his insatiable desire to write letters. Thanks especially to Petrarch's rediscovery of the letters from Cicero to Atticus and his *familiares,* the classical genre of letter writing had taken on new life.[12] Whether private scholars or civic leaders, humanists like Aeneas saw that the letter could serve both personal and political needs. Some, again like Aeneas, combined the two. While they used their talents as secretaries to popes or emperors, or even as chancellors of Florence, they still found time to create a literary and erudite personal correspondence.

All found the letter a useful tool. It could seek patronage and cement friendships. It could argue for a particular position. It could attempt to justify a decision once it was made. It could project a public persona, even in letters ostensibly for private circulation within a narrow circle. And it could encourage the writer, including those whose letters invited public scrutiny, to search for an identity as a figure of virtue and civic stature.[13] Ideally, this pursuit would lead

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manists shared an interest in the rhetorical tradition of classical antiquity. See, for example, Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* and "Humanism." For a discussion of major issues in Renaissance studies today, see Bouwsma, "The Renaissance Discovery of Human Creativity." On humanism and Christianity, see Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness.*

10. Margolin, *Humanism in Europe at the Time of the Renaissance,* 61–62.

11. For a brief but helpful treatment of Aeneas and humanism, see Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung,* chap. 1; and the works in n. 2, especially Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini;* Maffei, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini;* and Corbo, *Pio II Piccolomini.*

12. On Petrarch, see Trapp, *Studies of Petrarch*; Mann, *Petrarch*; and Bishop, *Petrarch and His World.*

13. Musumeci, "L'epistolario di Enea Silvio Piccolomini."

to a harmonious integration of the self—an ideal that Aeneas perhaps projected onto his objective of unity and harmony in Christendom during his later years. Thus, the act of letter writing became an act of self-fashioning.[14]

Furthermore, Aeneas's correspondence coincides with, and probably contributed to, the rise in importance of public intellectuals such as Jean Gerson and Nicholas of Cusa in northern Europe and the development of new literary formats such as the tract, treatise, and open letter to publicize their thoughts on matters of current political, ecclesiastical, and spiritual interest.[15] Pervading and uniting all these strands, however, was a commitment to shaping and expressing a moral philosophy. While humanism cannot be boiled down to a single philosophical school, many humanists, Aeneas included, found in the ancients ideas about personal and social morality important both for the sake of their own souls and for the health of the civic realm.

There is no more impressive evidence of Aeneas's love of the letter than the observation that many of his most familiar works in several literary forms originally began as letters. Over the course of time, because of their length and intrinsic interest, they came to be identified as separate works, including a novella *(The Two Lovers),* natural history *(The Nature and Care of Horses),* a description of court life *(The Miseries of the Courtiers),* political theory *(The Origin and Authority of the Roman Empire),* pedagogical theory *(On the Education of Children),* and history *(Commentary on the Proceedings of Basel).*[16]

On the most obvious level of this art, one would expect to find numerous classical allusions in his correspondence, but one of Aeneas's gifts was his flexibility. He would tailor his words to his audience and his assignment. For example, one can observe a distinction between his letters about events and those longer missives that argue a position. In the former, seen especially in his early career, he gives a straightforward report together with his observations and occasionally recommendations.

14. Martels, "Pope Pius II and the Idea of Appropriate Thematisation of the Self." This theme is also discussed in studies of other leading humanist men of letters: Petrarch in the books mentioned in n. 12; Alberti in Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti*; and Erasmus in Jardine, *Erasmus.*

15. On Gerson, see Hobbins, "The Schoolman as Public Intellectual." On Cusanus, see Bellitto, Izbicki, and Christianson, *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa.*

16. *De duobus amantibus Eurialus et Lucretia:* Wolkan I, pp. 353–93, no. 152 (1444); *De natura et cura equorum:* Wolkan I, pp. 395–424, no. 154 (1444); *De curialium miseriis:* Wolkan I, pp. 453–87, no. 166 (1444); *De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani:* Wolkan II, pp. 6–24, no. 3 (1446); *De liberorum educatione:* Wolkan II, pp. 103–58, no. 40 (1450); *De rebus basiliae gestis commentarius:* Wolkan II, pp. 164–278, no. 44 (1450).

Beginning in 1443 with the letter to Hartung von Kappel on the authority of councils over popes (no. 23), the letters of the second type appear, replete with references to the authors of classical antiquity, the early church fathers, and medieval theologians and poets—although, it must be added, he rarely treats them with any depth. His favorites, in addition to Cicero, appear to be Homer, Terence, and Virgil, among the ancients. Among early and medieval Christian authors he is familiar with Basil, Lactantius, and Augustine as well as Thomas Aquinas, Boccaccio, Dante, and especially Bernard of Clairvaux. For canon law Aeneas demonstrates familiarity with Gratian and those who provided glosses on his famous collection of canons known as the *Decretum;* and in church history he is acquainted with Isidore of Seville and the history of the early councils. In the Bible he prefers the New Testament and references all four Gospels and Acts, together with Romans, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Peter.[17]

Aeneas's prose is marked by energy, color, elegance, and occasional wit, but by his own estimate even his allusions to antiquity and appearance of spontaneity remain secondary to a concern for eloquence, by which he meant to communicate plainly enough for his audience to grasp his message.

> I speak directly and clearly since I reject purple prose. I do not strain to express myself because I do not handle matters beyond my reach. I know what I know and feel that the man who understands himself well can make others understand what one has to say. . . . I avoid a knotty style and long periodic sentences. If I use elegant words I try to make them fit into their context; in any case, I do not ransack my dictionary but use those that come to mind. My one goal is to be understood.[18]

One thing is certain: the poet who became Pius was rarely dull.

From Corsignano to Council

How Aeneas came to use his talents in the shaping of his distinct persona has much to do with his upbringing and education. He was born into a noble and once-wealthy family on St. Luke's Day, October 18, 1405.[19] In one of his many wordplays, he maintained that the family name referred to the small

17. Although this is not an exhaustive list, one also finds references to Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Quintilian, Livy, Hesiod, Juvenal, Ovid, Ennius, Suetonius, Solinus, Horace, Macrobius, Leo I, Psalms, Wisdom, and I Kings.

18. Wolkan II, pp. 41–42, no. 10 (1446) (trans. Baca, *Selected Letters,* 47–48).

19. *Commentaries,* 6–7; *Memoirs,* 29.

stature of the Piccolomini family *(parvorum hominum)*. His grandfather, exiled from Siena in 1385 as a nobleman held suspect by the city's oligarchs, came to settle on the family estate at Corsignano. Although today the town, thanks to its most famous son, is a planned Renaissance community known as Pienza, at the time a modest farm was all that remained of the estate. Aeneas's father, Silvio, and mother, Vittoria Fortiguerri, also from an impoverished noble family, had many children, but only Aeneas and two sisters survived. They remained close. One of them, Laodamia, became the mother of Francesco, the future Pius III.

Aeneas first studied in his hometown, where he learned Latin from his parish priest. Some critics have complained that Aeneas never could write "really pure Latin,"[20] and even today his syntax can prove exasperating to those who attempt to render his prose into English. Yet one still has to admire a facility that was serviceable enough to support an astonishing correspondence in addition to a career as secretary and literary luminary.

When Aeneas was eighteen, he moved to Siena—a big city for the farm boy from Corsignano.[21] Siena was soon to become the center of widespread attention when an important council of the church migrated there from Pavia, where it had opened in 1423, the same year that Aeneas left home. The Council of Pavia-Siena, as it is known, was called by Pope Martin V who, however reluctant, felt compelled to comply with the decree *Frequens* promulgated by the Council of Constance (1414–18) in order to guarantee regular assemblies and continuing attention to reform. Nevertheless, claiming that the council was poorly attended, Martin dissolved the assembly at Siena before any significant reform decrees could be enacted.[22]

Aeneas came to Siena, however, not to attend the council but to enter the city's *studium generale*. The modern reader would like to know a great deal more about these days of study in Siena—the books he read, the lectures he heard, the ideas that excited him—especially because Aeneas emerges from this period as a devout humanist who rose to a position of prominence as a literary figure long before he became pope. Yet his *Commentaries* dispatch this formative period with a single laconic sentence: "He began to study under the gram-

20. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 36.

21. *Commentaries,* 8–9; *Memoirs,* 30.

22. Brandmüller, *Das Konzil von Pavia-Siena.* See also Miethke and Weinrich, *Quellen zur Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der grossen Konzilien des 15. Jahrhunderts.* On Martin's charge that the council was poorly attended, see Miller, "Participation at the Council of Pavia-Siena."

marians, then became an eager follower of poets and orators, and finally applied himself to civil law."[23]

Despite its brevity, Aeneas's description contains two important terms, *grammarians* and *orators.* They link his education to Renaissance humanism, which many consider one of the few curricular revolutions in history—ranking with the establishment of the Western system in Greece and Rome and the fundamental revisions under Christian influence in the early Middle Ages.[24] Humanists demanded a major shift within this tradition. In place of dialectic, the "yes and no" *(sic et non)* method that was fundamental to medieval scholastic education, humanists put the emphasis on grammar (the art of reading and interpreting texts) and on rhetoric (the art of eloquent and persuasive discourse). The ancient texts that inspired these liberal arts were not the works of the Greek philosophers but those of the Latin historians, poets, and especially orators such as Cicero.[25]

Unlike those in Padua, Florence, or Rome, Siena's *studium generale* was not a pioneer in liberal studies. Yet it held much in common with them and other, lesser-known schools. All shared an educational model based on an intense response to classical literature, history, and moral philosophy.[26] The ideal for this model—one that appealed to the elite of the Italian city-states—was set out in a number of treatises on education. The first and perhaps finest among them was *On Noble Customs and Liberal Studies of Adolescence (De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adulescentiae),* written in 1402 or 1403 by Pier Paolo Vergerio, who advocated humanistic studies as a means to instill character, teach eloquence, and produce a capable citizenry.[27]

Some years later, in 1444, Aeneas wrote a treatise-length letter, *On the Education of Children (De liberorum educatione),* in which he follows Vergerio except in two instances. The younger poet stressed the importance of writing in a legible hand and, albeit only briefly, encouraged Christian catechesis: specifically instruction in the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Prologue to St. John's Gospel, the Apostles' Creed, and the Commandments, as well as the capital

23. *Commentries,* 8–9; *Memoirs,* 30.

24. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy,* 110. As Grendler reminds us, "curriculum revolutions are rare occurrences."

25. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements,* 1:156. See also Gray, "Renaissance Humanism."

26. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy,* 122.

27. Ibid., 117–19. See Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises,* which translates four of the most important authors of the period: Vergerio, Leonardo Bruni, Battista Guarino, and Aeneas.

sins, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the works of mercy.[28] Assuming that his later work reflects his school years in Siena, Aeneas was formed by the basic elements of Vergerio's humanist pedagogy.

As with the specific content of his education, the poet was also reticent about his teachers. His kinsman Gregorio Lolli, known as Goro, tells us that Antonio da Arezzo taught him grammar and Mattia Lupi of San Gimignano and Giovanni da Spoleto did the same for rhetoric.[29] Aeneas says nothing about them or any of his teachers, with the single significant exception of Mariano Sozzini, his teacher in law. What Aeneas praised in Sozzini not only reveals his admiration for a great teacher but suggests what captured the young scholar's imagination.

In a letter to the imperial chancellor Kaspar Schlick some years later, Aeneas affectionately recalled this distinguished jurist, devoted humanist, and wide-ranging scholar whose small stature was similar to that of the Piccolomini.[30] Under Sozzini's gifted guidance, Aeneas says that he absorbed the great heritage of classical literature—the grammarians, poets, orators, historians, moral philosophers, and letter writers—and began the practice of writing and speaking in the elegant style of the new learning. Aeneas especially praised Sozzini's richness of conversation, admiring also his learning in philosophy, geometry, arithmetic, and agriculture in addition to his physical fitness, including a gift for the art of boxing.[31]

In short, the goal of Sozzini's teaching was that of all the liberal arts: to involve the entire self in the development of virtue, for which reason humanist education pursued moral philosophy and history along with eloquence. Vergerio's description of a liberally educated person suits Sozzini and his gifted pupil remarkably well. "We call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man, those studies by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom. That education which calls forth, trains and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind which ennoble men, and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue alone."[32]

28. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy,* 324, 333. Aeneas's letter is in Wolkan II, pp. 103–58, no. 40 (1450).

29. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 37.

30. Wolkan I, pp. 393–95, no. 153 (1444); Piccolomini, *De viris illustribus,* 41–42. See also Nardi, *Mariano Sozzini*; Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 37–39.

31. Aeneas showed his own interest in the outdoors, giving advice on equine husbandry in a letter known as *On the Nature and Care of Horses (De natura et cura equorum)* in Wolkan I, pp. 395–424, no. 154 (1444).

32. Quoted in Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements,* 1:157. Brief summaries of

The lasting influence of another figure from his student days in Siena is less clear. Already a famous preacher, Bernardino of Siena was invited by city officials to bring calm amid factional strife. He began a preaching mission in May 1425. Forty-five of his sermons are still extant. Siena's populace had heard a number of preachers during these years, especially from the three orders most dedicated to reaching ordinary people—Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians. They often stressed the contrast between material goods and the rewards of eternity, but Bernardino, a Franciscan Observant, used visual aids to drive home the point. He illustrated the contrast between good and bad societies by pointing to the frescoes painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the town hall, and invited all, both men and women, to the public square for a "burning of the vanities," including excessive dress, ornaments, and cosmetics.[33] Much later Aeneas drew a warm picture of Bernardino, relating that the preacher's eloquence led him to consider joining the Franciscans, but that his friends dissuaded him.[34] This youthful conversion is not confirmed in Aeneas's early letters, and it remains uncertain whether the great preacher had the kind of influence on him that his humanist teachers had.

Beginning about 1425, Aeneas turned to the study of civil law, like many talented young men of his day. It was a good choice for someone of humble means who had an ambition for advancement, but Aeneas found no lasting satisfaction in the subject. So he determined to take his chances with the skills of his pen.[35] These skills, together with his amorous inclinations, were exercised in the poetry he wrote during these years, such as the cycle of love poems entitled *Cynthia,* although not much of this work has survived.[36]

Little, likewise, has survived to inform us about his life during the years 1429–31, a period of wandering for Aeneas. Travel, when the young are seeking clarity about their identity and vocation, was as salutary in Aeneas's day as it is in our own but, unfortunately, his itinerary remains a mystery. Evidence sug-

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Aeneas's rhetorical talents can be found in Baca, "The *Art of Rhetoric*"; and O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome,* 80–81.

33. Polecritti, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy*; Izbicki, "Pyres of Vanities"; Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*; Debby, *Renaissance Florence.*

34. Aeneas, *De viris illustribus,* 37–41.

35. Kisch, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini und die Jurisprudenz,* argues that while Aeneas had a thorough grounding in the field, his distaste for law and lawyers arose from the contrast he felt between classicism and the condition of jurisprudence in his own time; but see also Strnad, "Der 'Jurist' Enea Silvio Piccolomini."

36. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 48. An edition of the work is in *Atti Academia Lincei,* edited by Giuseppe Cugnoni.

gests that visited such places as Padua and Ferrara, both famous centers of learning, and probably delighted in the sights, the company of other young humanists, and the opportunity to hone his skills.[37]

A final enigma from this period is his relationship with the humanist scholar and controversialist Francesco Filelfo.[38] Appointed to a chair at Florence in 1429, he was forced to flee in 1434, after which he spent much time and energy in a literary war with his former humanist friends and employers. After Aeneas's death in 1464, Filelfo complained that he had not received sufficient credit for his contributions to the pope's education and early career, but while Aeneas apparently met and studied with Filfelfo in Florence, his writings on the subject are silent.[39]

From Council to Scotland (and Back Again)

Whatever the itinerary of these wanderings, Aeneas was now ready to grasp any opportunity that presented itself. And soon it did. By a fateful turn of fortune, Aeneas was back in Siena in 1431 when the cardinal of Fermo, Domenico Capranica, paused on his journey to the Council of Basel.[40] There the cardinal planned to appeal his case against Pope Eugenius IV, successor to Martin V, who had refused to recognize his title.[41] First, however, he needed to hire qualified secretaries.[42] Among them was one whose name would appear frequently in Aeneas's correspondence, Piero da Noceto. Both Aeneas and Piero embraced the life of professional men of letters who were ready to advance their patron's interests—but both, when the patron ran short of funds, found that they had to seek new employment, a necessity Aeneas discovered more than once in his early career. Although Piero became a lifelong friend, some tense moments were caused by Aeneas's continued attachment to Basel after Piero settled in Rome and served in the papal household.[43]

37. Wolkan I, pp. 2–3, no. 2 (1431).

38. See Robin, "A Reassessment of the Character of Francesco Filelfo"; and idem, "Humanist Politics or Vergilian Poets?"

39. Ady, *Pius II,* 22–24; Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 49–50.

40. *Commentaries,* 10–13; *Memoirs,* 30–31.

41. See Gill, *Eugenius IV*; and a brief sketch, "Pope Eugenius IV," in idem, *Personalities of the Council of Florence,* 35–44. See also Diener and Schwarz, "Das Itinerar Papst Eugens IV."

42. *Commentaries,* 10–11; *Memoirs,* 30.

43. Partner, *The Pope's Men,* 242–43.

A new world was about to open for the young poet, and Pinturicchio's scenic portrayal perfectly captures the excitement of the moment, as does Aeneas's first letter (no. 1), where we meet the eager traveler, conscious that he is setting out toward new horizons and eager to record everything he observes. This letter already witnesses to the characteristics that make Aeneas an attractive correspondent: boundless energy, intense curiosity about people and places, a hunger to express himself in writing, and pleasure in the sound of his own voice. He also shows an unmistakable tendency—to a greater or lesser extent—to embellish his recollections as time passed. Even the events recounted in this early letter are recast some thirty years later when he wrote the *Commentaries.* Among other things, the storm that the cardinal's party encountered when they took ship became, in the *Commentaries,* so strong that it blew them nearly to Africa.[44] Further embellishment was not needed, however, either for the welcome they received from officials in Genoa nor the sights and sounds of the great seaport, which moved him to write the first of many sketches of persons and places.[45]

The viewer may also see a second, more ominous, meaning in Pinturicchio's depiction of the approaching storm, one that implied stormy days ahead at the Council of Basel. The assembly had become the focus of what we now call conciliarism, the monumental effort to regularize a general council as representative of the universal church and in certain cases superior to a pope and able to depose him. The movement drew its urgency from the Great Schism, when, for nearly forty years beginning in 1378, two and then three rival popes contended for primacy. The Council of Constance finally healed the schism when it elected Martin V as an uncontested pope. In the process it also enacted two decrees that epitomized conciliar theory. The first, *Haec sancta,* declared that in matters of unity, heresy, and reform all Christians must obey a council, "even a pope." The second, *Frequens,* already invoked in the calling of the Council of Pavia-Siena, provided for the regular meetings of these assemblies—eventually every ten years.[46]

As members slowly made their way to Basel, however, the newly elected pope, Eugenius IV, became fearful of the council's intentions. Citing the limited membership and the safety of the roads, he proposed transferring or closing

44. *Commentaries,* 10–13; *Memoirs,* 30–31.

45. Wolkan I, pp. 7–11, no. 6 (1432).

46. A useful guide to the major issues, with a comprehensive bibliography, is Helmrath, *Das Basler Konzil.*

the council, but his intransigence had the opposite effect. It stiffened resistance and perhaps even encouraged larger numbers to attend. It also brought church reform and conciliar theory into direct conflict with a pope who, unlike the rivals during the Great Schism, was undoubted and without competitors.[47]

When Capranica's party entered Basel after crossing the Alps by the St. Gotthard Pass, Aeneas discovered that the cardinal was no longer able to support a large household. The secretary was compelled to find other patrons.[48] He also exercised his talent and training by sending his first reports back to his adopted home, Siena (no. 2). Most notably, he revealed his admiration for the council's president and papal legate, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini.[49] There is far less ambiguity over Cesarini's influence on the young secretary than about Filelfo's or even Bernardino's. Although a Roman by birth, he and Aeneas had much in common. Both were from modestly endowed families of noble heritage, both studied law and earned their reputations by apprenticing in lands north of the Alps, and both dedicated their lives to defense of church and empire.

After an abortive crusade against the Hussites on the borders of Bohemia, Cesarini rapidly became the master of affairs in the council. Military disaster made him more concerned with the Hussite threat and the need for reform than with papal fears about the assembly. He cajoled the prelates to attend, helped organize the assembly by committees rather than "nations," invited the Hussites to dialogue, presided over the discussions with uncommon diplomacy, and, when needed, added the relaxed charm of his personal interventions. When trouble brewed with Rome, he charted a careful course between open rejection of the pope and capitulation to the council's dissolution until he succeeded in obtaining the pontiff's reluctant recognition of Basel's legitimacy. In the midst of all this, he offered a comprehensive reform program to the assembly and welcomed a Greek delegation as a prelude to union negotiations between Greek and Latin churches.

Yet Cesarini failed to hold the splintering and sometimes raucous assembly together when the majority, suspicious of the pope's intensions, refused to

47. Oakley summarizes a generation of productive research on the conciliar movement in *The Conciliarist Tradition.* Modern studies on the roots of conciliarism in medieval canon law began with Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory.* For discussions of the issues involved in the movement and their development, see Oakley, *Council over Pope?*; Crowder, *Unity, Heresy, and Reform,* with documents; Black, *Council and Commune*; Burns and Izbicki, *Conciliarism and Papalism*; and Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee des lateinischen Mittelalters.*

48. *Commentaries,* 12–13; *Memoirs,* 31.

49. See Christianson, *Cesarini*; and idem, "Cusanus, Cesarini, and the Crisis of Conciliarism."

agree with Rome on a site for a union council. He finally left Basel in 1438 to take an active part in the Council of Ferrara-Florence, and then returned to his earlier dedication, the defense of Christendom. He died on the battlefield of Varna while leading a crusade against the Ottoman Turks. Aeneas's correspondence—both with and about the cardinal, before and after his death—indicates that of all the many candidates in the secretary's life, Cesarini most completely captured his imagination and served as model and inspiration in his pursuit of a united church and the defense of Christendom, eventually contributing to his own abortive crusade at Ancona.

Aeneas's letters to Siena also indicate that he was awed by the number of prelates present in the assembly, including cardinals, abbots, and bishops, many of whom were ready to take on the pope if necessary. Basel was already embroiled in controversy when Aeneas arrived. Although Eugenius had attempted to dissolve or transfer the council, the fathers were in no mood to cooperate. In April 1432 they summoned the pope to appear in person or through representatives, and in September they threatened to condemn him for contumacy if he did not make the effort. Although Aeneas was relatively new to the business of the council, and starstruck by its leading participants, these great controversies gave him his first lessons in the need for unity in Christendom.

Later in the same year he added the necessity of harmony. The occasion was the progress of the council's diplomatic efforts to pacify the Hussites, who had rebelled against church and empire after the deaths of John Hus and Jerome of Prague at the Council of Constance. The Hussite war wagons and marching song, "You Warriors of God," were the scourges of Catholics in lands bordering Bohemia and beyond (nos. 3, 4). Remarkably, despite protestations from Rome, Cesarini and the council agreed to invite a Hussite delegation to come to Basel to discuss their demands, summarized in the "Four Articles." Even more remarkably, they accepted.[50]

Early in January 1433, Aeneas witnessed and later reported the entrance of the Hussite delegation into Basel. People filled the streets and climbed walls and rooftops to catch a glimpse of these militants who had struck fear into the heart of Europe. The vivid impression of this event, together with his increasing involvement in the affairs of Bohemia and Hungary over the years, eventu-

50. For general background, see Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia*; and Graus, "The Crisis of the Middle Ages and the Hussites." For the debates at Basel, see Christianson, "The Hussites Arrive," in *Cesarini,* 70–91; and Jacob, "The Bohemians at the Council of Basel."

ally led the secretary to write one of his historical geographies, *History of Bohemia (Historia Bohemica)*.[51]

The secretary also sent a report to Siena on how the council wished to gain control of a key city, Avignon. While this effort may not seem the equal of controversies over papal dissolution or pacifying the heretics, it does reveal Aeneas's growing confidence as a political figure. For the first time he took the initiative to offer advice as well as observations, instructing his readers on the ways they should receive the council's envoys to Italy (no. 5).

One assumes that sometime during this year he met Nicholas of Cusa, the brilliant young lawyer and author of *The Catholic Concordance*. In this conciliar masterpiece Cusanus combined the hierarchical conceptions of the early medieval philosopher known as Pseudo-Dionysius with a legacy of authoritative texts in canon law in order to present an argument for balancing hierarchy and consent in the governance of church and empire.[52] Cusanus arrived in Basel during 1433 as an advocate in a disputed election to the archbishopric of Trier. Although Aeneas and Cusanus divided for a time after 1437 when Cusanus left the council and became what Aeneas called the "Hercules of the Eugenians," Pope Pius II eventually came to consider Cardinal Cusanus an ally, trusting him enough to place the oversight of Rome into his hands when the pope left the city to rally forces for a crusade.[53]

Meanwhile, the poet found a rapid succession of positions with patrons who required him to travel widely, including back-and-forth journeys across the Alps and an eventful mission to England and Scotland. First, he took service with the bishop of Freising, who brought Aeneas to the Diet of Frankfurt, and then as secretary to the bishop of Novara, who sent him to Milan (no. 6). Here, it was rumored, the bishop and his powerful duke, Filippo Maria Visconti, were involved in an attempt to kidnap the pope. Nothing came of the plot,

51. In *Aeneae Sylvii Piccolominei senensis . . . opera quae extant omnia,* 81–143 (hereafter cited as *Opera*). See Smahel, "Enea Silvio Piccolomini and His *Historia Bohemica*." Contacts and interviews that Aeneas made at Basel also informed his major works *Europe* (1458) and *Asia* (1461), completed later; see Hyland, "John-Jerome of Prague."

52. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*. For introductory essays on Cusanus's life and thought, with an extensive bibliography in English, see Bellitto, Izbicki, and Christianson, *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa*.

53. Watanabe, "Authority and Consent in Church Government." See also Baum, "Nikolaus von Kues und Enea Silvio Piccolomini—Eine Humanistenfreundschaft?"; Meuthen, "Pius II. und Nikolaus von Kues"; and Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung,* esp. 132–35.

but Aeneas's association with the alleged conspirators did not enhance his reputation in Rome.[54] If this were not enough, he discovered when he returned to Basel in 1434 that he had been defamed before Siena's government. He vigorously defended himself and, as if to prove his value, continued to send the news of the day. This included reports that Eugenius was in full flight from Rome because the populace had risen in revolt, and that Cesarini was having a difficult time steering a moderate course in a council suddenly emboldened by the pope's misfortune (no. 7).

Furthermore, Aeneas announced that the Battle of Lipany in May had accomplished what crusading forces could not: the defeat of one Hussite faction, consisting of radical Taborites and Orphans, by another, led by the more moderate Utraquists. The way was now open for the council—thanks originally to a suggestion from Nicholas of Cusa—to grant the Hussites the practice of Utraquism, the offering of both bread and wine to the faithful during communion.[55] Ironically, the treaty signed at Jihlava (Iglau) in July 1436 was abrogated by Aeneas himself thirty years later when he became pope.[56]

A letter addressed to Cesarini in July 1434, was more than an ordinary letter.[57] It presented another of Aeneas's "city sketches," a picturesque and detailed description of Basel that he intended as an introduction to some future history of the council. He never got around to finishing this work, but, in another sense, he never stopped writing about the assembly. From these early reports sent to Siena through his narrative of the election of the council's pope to the later revisions of these earlier histories and his final retraction bulls, Basel was never far from his mind nor his pen.

The council, too, was changing. By 1435 the man who had brought him to Basel, Cardinal Capranica, had decided to leave (no. 8), but Aeneas soon found employment with Niccolò Albergati, a distinguished cardinal who remained close to Eugenius. As the cardinal's secretary—a position to which he was recommended by Piero da Noceto—Aeneas met Tomasso Parentucelli, the future Nicholas V. Aeneas left Basel with the cardinal in 1435, not to return until the next year. They headed for France, where Albergati was to chair the Congress of Arras in an attempt to settle the Hundred Years' War between England and

54. *Commentaries,* 14–15; *Memoirs,* 31.

55. Christianson, "Cusanus, Concord, and Conflict"; Landi, "Niccolò Cusano."

56. Aeneas (*Memoirs,* 57) reports that he twice visited the Taborites, "the worst of all heretics in Bohemia." See Kaminsky, "Pius Aeneas among the Taborites."

57. Wolkan I, pp. 28–38, no. 16 (1434).

France. During the journey he and his party stopped at Ripaille on the pleasant shores of Lake Geneva where the duke-turned-hermit, Amadeus VIII of Savoy, had established a retreat.[58]

Aeneas did not stay in Arras long enough to witness the signing of an accord in September 1435 because Albergati sent him on a secret mission to King James I of Scotland. This mission turned out to involve considerable risk and a number of adventures, including an amorous one, and these provide us with some of the most vivid reading in the *Commentaries.*[59] Aeneas's nephew, Pius III, and the Piccolomini family felt that the meeting between the envoy and the king merited a second fresco by Pinturicchio in the library of Siena Cathedral in which the artist attempts to balance the indoor event with an imagined Scottish landscape. Yet, despite his entertaining descriptions of his sojourn in Scotland, Aeneas never divulged the purpose of his mission. Perhaps Albergati sought to urge the king to put military pressure on England so that, involved in a war on two fronts, it would more readily agree to negotiate with the French.

When he returned to Basel again, Aeneas found the assembly in the midst of great turmoil. The issue was the site for a council of union with the Greek church. At once the secretary began a series of letters pleading with Siena to volunteer and offer the necessary funds to become the host city. He noted that the council fathers were divided not only on where the new assembly should be held but also on whether, to meet their financial needs, they should issue an indulgence in the council's own name without recourse to the pope (nos. 9, 10).

Many members were opposed to any location in Italy for fear that Eugenius would control the council. Instead, Avignon began to emerge as the favorite site. Siena, meanwhile, could not meet the demand for the required 70,000 ducats. So, at Cesarini's prompting, Aeneas offered his maiden speech to the assembly, an oration of two hours, praising the city of Pavia (no. 11). The young man was pleased with the results, and the speech was later printed among his orations.[60] Emerging now as a major figure in the assembly, he was offered a lucrative benefice by the archbishop of Milan.

Before he could visit Milan, however, he had to admit to Siena that Avignon was the council's choice (no. 12). A two-thirds majority voted for the city on

58. *Commentaries,* 14–17; *Memoirs,* 31.

59. *Commentaries,* 16–21; *Memoirs,* 32–36. See Ady, "Pius II and His Experiences of England, Scotland, and the English."

60. *Commentaries,* 30–33; *Memoirs,* 37. Piccolomini, *Orationes,* 1:5ff. This oration and others by Aeneas are discussed in O'Malley, *Praise and Blame,* 80–81.

December 5, 1436, over strong objections from Cesarini and a dwindling papal party. But Aeneas was on the road again, this time to visit the church of San Lorenzo in Milan in his role as its new provost. Because the chapter protested against the lay status of Aeneas, in violation of Basel's own decree on elections, the secretary had to go before the council to obtain a waiver.[61] He finally took possession of his benefice and returned to Basel in April 1437 in time to observe the tumultuous climax to the controversy over the site of a union council. On May 7 the two parties, according to Aeneas's often-quoted description, seemed like two armies dressing for battle as they donned their vestments and read their separate decrees at opposite ends of the cathedral. The dual invocations of the Holy Spirit seemed wholly inappropriate to a solemn assembly of the whole Christian world, as did the laughter that accompanied the clashing sounds of two Te Deums (no. 13).

Undeterred, Aeneas confidently began to take strides into the wider world, reflecting his growing conviction that only firm leadership in the empire could achieve unity and concord in Christendom. His letter of appeal to the aged and ailing Emperor Sigismund demonstrates this boldness. It was intended to rouse support for the council from an emperor who was once the stalwart of Constance and for a time a participant in Basel. The letter was never acknowledged, but Aeneas's vigorous defense of Basel's decision to cancel the annates, a controversial papal tax on benefices,[62] indicates that he remained fully committed to the council and all its works and ways (no. 14).

In contrast, his mentor Cesarini and a minority party continued to oppose any actions against the pope, who had finally acknowledged the legitimacy of the council. But Cesarini could not stop a summons to Eugenius in July,1437 that commanded the pope to appear. By now the pope had begun to recover from his humiliating flight from Rome. As a sign of this recovery he had already initiated an offensive against the council as early as 1436 with a *Self-Defense (Libellus apologeticus)* that warned the princes against Basel's radical tendencies.[63] Now he was emboldened to issue a dissolution bull in September that promised a council of union in Italy.[64]

61. *Commentaries,* 33–37; *Memoirs,* 37–38.

62. Christianson, "Annates and Reform at the Council of Basel."

63. On the papal campaign against the Basel assembly, see Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* 27–34. Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (Johannes de Turrecremata), the staunchest proponent of this policy and articulate defender of the papacy, set a precedent for Pius II; see Izbicki, *Protector of the Faith.*

64. Gill, *The Council of Florence.* Gill's position on Basel is less favorable than Stieber's.

Cesarini held out for a time, but his persuasive powers no longer had much effect, and as the assembly moved toward suspending the pope from office, the president addressed it for the last time on December 20. In early January 1438, Aeneas reported that Cesarini was prepared to ride out of Basel, but even as he did he continued to plead the cause of peace and offered money and horses to support all who would accompany him (no. 15). Aeneas, however, remained.

From Council to Chancery

The future might have been less turbulent had Aeneas accepted Cesarini's offer, but the poet had set his course with the council. He remained through the fateful events of 1438–39 when the Council of Ferrara opened (soon moved to Florence to avoid the plague), and when the fathers at Basel proceeded to depose Eugenius. Aeneas remained in part because he had become an integral part of the council's bureaucracy. From his early days he had found a place among the conciliar secretaries, with whom he seems to have enjoyed life to the fullest.[65] With his gift for elegant prose, he rose steadily through all the clerical ranks in the council, beginning as a simple *scriptor,* then as a supervisor of *scriptores,* and finally as *abbreviator major.* His primary role was to draft the council's letters and documents, but he later claimed that he often presided over the Deputation on Faith, one of the four main committees in the council, and even sat on the Committee of Twelve, which coordinated the business of the others. We have only Aeneas's word for this.[66]

In the broader world of affairs, events began to unfold over which he had no control but which would help dictate papal policy for years to come, right up to his own tenure as Pius II. Between the time that Eugenius ordered the transfer of the council from Basel to Ferrara in September 1437 and the official opening of the new assembly in January 1438, Sigismund died. The imperial electors met in Frankfurt and, rather than endorse either of the two competing councils, issued a declaration of neutrality on March 27, 1438. The next day they elected Albert II, duke of Austria, as Sigismund's successor. Although Albert's reign was short, it marked the beginning of over three hundred years of Hapsburg rule.[67]

65. See Ady, *Pius II,* 72; Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 69–70.
66. *Commentaries,* 32–33; *Memoirs,* 37.
67. Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* chap. 5.

Exactly a year later, in March 1439, the electors met at Mainz and confirmed the policy of neutrality. Although they accepted twenty-six of the reform decrees promulgated by the Council of Basel—a decision later dubbed the Acceptation of Mainz—they refused to accept any decrees aimed at Eugenius personally. In a similar fashion and in the same year, Charles VII of France issued the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges—pragmatic because, while it sanctioned a large number of Basel's reforms, it, too, refused to endorse either side.[68]

Battle lines were now drawn and would remain fairly fixed for over a decade. While the majority at Basel rejected the pope's order to move, and Eugenius engaged in a propaganda campaign against the council, France and the empire officially refused to take sides. Amid these turbulent times Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini groped his way to prominence by moving across the spectrum from council to neutral empire to the Eugenian camp.

During this time the number of Aeneas's letters drops off. This was in part because he was working on a book and in part because a virulent plague broke out in Basel in the summer of 1439, striking fear into the council and bringing death to many of its leaders. Aeneas himself became so ill that he asked for the sacrament of Extreme Unction. When he recovered, he was astonished to find that the duke of Milan had used the premature report of Aeneas's death to reassign his benefice at San Lorenzo. The poet would try unsuccessfully for years to get it back. The council, however, quickly saw to his needs by providing him with a canonry in Trent. The chapter in Trent, however, repeating the Milanese story, objected to a lay canon in violation of the council's own decree on free capitular elections. They chose another, and Aeneas was compelled to intervene and persuade the chapter to oust his rival.[69]

Despite these pressing needs outside the assembly, Aeneas was in Basel when,in June 1439, the fathers deposed Eugenius for his crimes, plunging the church into schism once again. As the council prepared to choose a successor, Aeneas described the selection of those who would serve as electors (no. 16), Having emerged from the shadows to become a person of stature in the council, he was named in October as master of ceremonies for the conclave. He felt sufficiently satisfied with his status as a layman in the office, he later claimed, that he turned down the advice of several members to seek ordination.[70] On November 6 the master of ceremonies had the duty and privilege of announc-

68. Toews, "Pope Eugenius IV and the Concordat of Vienna," 179–82.
69. *Commentaries,* 42–43; *Memoirs,* 38–39.
70. *Commentaries,* 42–45; *Memoirs,* 39–40.

ing the election of someone known to him, Amadeus VIII of Savoy (no. 17). It was also Aeneas who brought the news to the hermit-duke at his retreat in Ripaille. Amadeus took the name Felix V and appointed Aeneas a papal secretary.[71]

Deeply involved in the proceedings, the secretary firmly defended the propriety and legitimacy of the council's electoral process when he wrote to the archbishop of Milan (where Aeneas still considered himself the legitimate provost of San Lorenzo). "[W]e have a pope," he declared, and boasted that since Amadeus had lands on both sides of the Alps, "[a]ll Italy will tremble, believe me; he will not leave Gabriel [Eugenius's given name] a secure little corner" (no. 18).

How much these events surrounding the deposition and election impressed Aeneas is clear from the very productive period that followed in 1440. To begin, his letter describing the coronation of Pope Felix on July 24, 1440 testifies to his awareness that he was a witness to historic events. Furthermore, it was addressed to Juan de Segovia, the Spanish canonist, conciliar theorist, and much-admired historian of the council.[72] Despite Aeneas's inclination to show Felix and his coronation in the best light, he was not reticent about relating a humorous and self-deprecating incident. The choir for the proceedings, of which he was a member, produced more discord than harmony and became the subject of considerable gossip (no. 19). His favorable sketch of Felix stands in striking contrast to the unflattering picture in the *Commentaries* in which the new pope, freshly shorn of a hermit's beard, revealed slanting eyes and flabby cheeks, and "looked like a very ugly monkey."[73]

The secretary's description of the coronation complements, and was occasionally published with, his first major historical work, also written in 1440. Entitled *Two Books of Commentaries on the Proceedings of the Council of Basel (De gestis concilii Basiliensis commentariorum libri II),* it gives a firsthand, detailed, and entirely favorable account of the whole affair: book I recounts the final debates leading to the deposition of Eugenius, while book II describes the election of Felix.[74] This was the work that Aeneas felt compelled to revise—one could

71. *Commentaries,* 44–45; *Memoirs,* 40. See Stieber, "Amédée VIII–Félix V et le concile de Bâle."

72. For the attention that Segovia paid to Islam—a subject that also concerned Aeneas as pope—see Mann, "Truth and Consequences."

73. *Memoirs,* 223–24. See also Piccolomini,, *De viris illustribus,* 74–79.

74. Piccolomini, *De gestis concilii Basiliensis commentariorum libri II.* Hay and Smith's edition contains an English translation. The work would linger in European memory despite Aeneas's later attempts to reverse himself. Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition,* notes that "successive editions of

even say revoke—when he became a bishop, and so he published an alternate version of the same events known as the *Commentary on the Proceedings of Basel (De rebus basiliae gestis commentarius)* (no. 76).

Another pro-conciliar work in 1440 would cause him still further embarrassment. In response to questions addressed by the archbishop of Cologne, the university faculty in that city expressed the opinion that, unless the pope had properly transferred it, the Council of Basel was legitimate. To Aeneas, for whom Eugenius's actions were no longer valid, this was hardly a ringing endorsement. Consequently he wrote *The Book of Dialogues concerning the Authority of a General Council and the Proceedings of the Council of Basel (Libellus dialogorum de auctoritate generalium conciliorum et gestis basileensium)* to persuade the university that Basel's legitimacy was based on principle, not the questionable actions of a now-deposed pope.[75] The dialogue, set along the Rhine River a short distance from Basel, imagines a chance reunion between Nicholas of Cusa, defending papal authority, and Stefano Caccia of Novara, representing the council. Cusanus dismisses "[t]hat silly and execrable Baslean crowd that boasts of being led by the Holy Spirit, but does not hold the faith," to which Stefano retorts: "You seem a different man than you were at Basel, for then who extolled the authority of general councils more than you? Who assailed the parties of Eugenius more strongly than you?"[76]

To some, the work appears to be curiously eclectic and diffuse because some of the dialogues do not involve Cusanus and Stefano, but Aeneas himself and the French scholar Martin Lefranc. On closer reading, however, these friendly conversations supplement the conflict between Nicholas and Stefano and underline the importance of civic engagement, moral responsibility, and eloquence—all topics of interest to humanists, and especially to those engaged in the search for the true pope.[77]

Cusanus had preceded Cesarini by a few weeks in his departure from Basel,

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Foxe's *Book of Martyrs,* with its lengthy extracts from Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's *De gestis concilii Basiliensis,* can only have reinforced . . . familiarity" (229) with the story of a pope's deposition by a representative body of the universal church.

75. Piccolomini, *Libellus dialogorum de auctoritate generalium conciliorum et gestis basileensium.* See Iaria, "Diffusione e ricezione del "*Libellus dialogorum*" di Enea Silvio Piccolomini"; and Totaro, "Gli scritti di Enea Silvio Piccolomini sul Concilio."

76. Piccolomini, *Libellus dialogorum,* 706–7.

77. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 74, overstates the case when she says that only the first of the dialogues addresses conciliar authority and that it clarifies Aeneas's growing anti-Basel sentiments. Cf. Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung,* 132–35.

carrying the minority decree supporting the council of union to Eugenius. The pope then assigned Nicholas to accompany a papal mission to Constantinople that would bring the Greek delegation to Ferrara. In contrast to Aeneas, who took pains to explain the conciliar transgressions of his youth, Cusanus seldom discussed his journey to the papal side, but the publication of the *Dialogues* was too much for him. He responded to Aeneas and the followers of Felix V, referred to only by the ducal name of Amadeus, with his own *Dialogue Refuting the Error of the Amadeists (Dialogus concludens Amedistarum errorem),* written in April or May of 1441.[78]

The fame of Aeneas's works in support of the Council of Basel put him in a position to make a significant change in his life, although this change did not become apparent all at once. King Albert died suddenly in October 1439 without an heir. Although his widow was pregnant, the electors were not inclined to sustain a long interim, and in April 1440 they elected a cousin, Frederick of Styria, who became Frederick III. Because he was only in his twenties, Frederick had the potential for a very long tenure, and despite other shortcomings, this turned out to be the case. He served until 1493, the longest reign of all the Hapsburgs. During many of these already difficult years, Albert's son, known as Ladislas Postumus, became a diplomatic thorn in Frederick's side.[79]

Aeneas's career took a dramatic turn when the assembly at Basel sent him with a delegation to Frankfurt in July 1442. Here the new king (and future emperor) crowned him as the imperial poet laureate.[80] To Aeneas it was a singular honor, and Pinturicchio and the Piccolomini family later selected it as the third event worthy of portrayal in the Siena Cathedral library. They had good reason for this: Petrarch had held the title, but this was the first time the ceremony took place in Germany. Other than prestige, however, and the opportunity to call himself "Aeneas Sylvius, poet" (for example, no. 21), it gained him little except a citation, an embroidered gown, and the privilege of lecturing in public.

Fortunately, Frederick had further plans for the poet. During the king's visit to Basel in November 1442, when he acquainted himself with the conflict between pope and council and affirmed the German policy of neutrality, he offered Aeneas the post of secretary in the imperial chancery at Wiener-Neustadt. When the king left Basel, Aeneas left with him.[81]

78. The text is in Nicolas of Cusa, *Der Dialogus concludens Amedistarum errorem ex gestis et doctrina concilii Basiliensis.* See also Meuthen and Hallauer, *Acta Cusana,* no. 600.

79. For background on the period from Frederick's election to the Concordat of Vienna, see Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* 203–30.

80. *Commentaries,* 44–47; *Memoirs,* 40.

81. *Commentaries,* 44–45; *Memoirs,* 40.

From Chancery to Chancellor's Favorite

Except for the less than perfect working conditions and the thorough disdain he felt toward his superior, a Bavarian named Wilhelm Tacz, Aeneas says little in his *Commentaries* about this period of apprenticeship in the chancery or his menial status—a lacuna that further illustrates why the letters are necessary for a full portrait of the future pope. We know from other sources that some secretaries held legal degrees and that others, like Aeneas, were law school dropouts.[82] Many patrons with an interest in the new learning, especially in good speech and good letters, created opportunities for educated young men of modest means. But what prompted the king to confer the honorific title of poet laureate on Aeneas, and then offer him a fairly routine job in the chancery, was the court's need to prepare documents and draft official correspondence—skills that Aeneas possessed in abundance.

The households, or *familiae,* that kings, popes, and other powerful men maintained were expected to observe a strict hierarchy and carry out a number of duties. These duties could range from service as stable hands to chaplains and chamberlains, but educated and literate young men often served as secretaries. Both employers and familiae could benefit from the association. Despite Aeneas's frequent complaints, the pay was generally good, and with some luck promotion to higher office was within reach. Secretaries could become trusted agents in sensitive affairs and even gain access to their lord's presence. In all cases, they were expected to support and defend their master's policies and resist those who opposed him.[83]

Thus, when Aeneas began his new career in Frederick's chancery in the winter of 1442–43 and signed himself "Aeneas Sylvius, poet and imperial secretary,"[84] he improved his chances for influence and advancement. This should not imply, however, that he had turned his back on Basel or conciliarism. His strongest statement in support of the movement still lay ahead in a letter to Hartung von Kappel. At the same time, his conviction that the emperor, working together with the council, was destined to lead the Christian commonwealth out of its current crisis predated his arrival at the imperial court and is

82. Partner, *The Pope's Men,* 86–89. See also Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries*; Ianziti, *Humanistic Historiography under the Sforzas*:; and Simonetta, *Rinascimento segreto.*

83. Trapp, "The Poet Laureate." See also D'Amico, "Curial Households and the Humanists," in idem, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome,* 38–60; and Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia.*

84. Wolkan I, pp. 124–25, no. 43 (1442).

expressed, however naively, in his letter to Emperor Sigismund. Nevertheless, under the influence of his duties in Wiener-Neustadt, and especially his gradual involvement in the diplomacy of King Frederick and his chancellor Kaspar Schlick, Aeneas began to balance his views. Eventually, he would transfer his hopes for the united Christendom from a general council to king and empire and finally give up on Basel altogether.[85]

The costs of his move to the chancery in creature comforts, however, were high. In the first place, he was afflicted with a case of homesickness for Italy, the open country, and clean air (no. 20). He disliked the cramped and often acrimonious conditions of the chancery. "There is, believe me," he declared, "no more hard-hearted camp than the court of a prince."[86] Conditions in the chancery were hardly ideal, but as so often in his writings, these descriptions follow classical models. The best known of these complaints is a letter to Johann von Eich, dated November 30, 1444, and often referred to under the title *The Miseries of the Courtiers (De curialium miseriis)*.[87] Aeneas borrowed heavily from the Roman poet Juvenal to rehearse a long list of grievances: tight quarters in the workplace, bad food, poor lodgings, long hours, and low pay. In addition, he despaired for the lack of learning, the pleasures of free-thinking, and the chance to converse with kindred spirits. Such conditions made Aeneas, both as Italian and as humanist, long even more for home (nos. 45, 59).

Nevertheless, the secretary sensed that connections to Kaspar Schlick, the gifted and influential chancellor who served three emperors as administrator, adviser, soldier, and diplomat, might make up for other discomforts in the chancery. The chancellor was the son of a cloth merchant, but his mother was Italian, and at one time he had stayed with Aeneas's relatives in Siena. As model, mentor, and promoter of Aeneas's career, Schlick was the only figure who could equal Cesarini. For his part, Aeneas caught Schlick's attention because he often drafted the chancellor's letters, especially during 1443–44.[88] In due course, Schlick gave the secretary wide, but not unlimited, latitude. "You may draft this

85. Rowe, "The Tragedy of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini," 292.

86. Wolkan I, pp. 196–98, no. 82 (1443).

87. Wolkan I, pp. 453–87, no. 166 (1444) (trans. Mustard, *Aeneae Silvii De curialium miseriis epistola*). See Sidwell, "Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's *De curialium miseriis* and Peter of Blois"; idem, "Il *De curialium miseriis* di Enea Silvio Piccolomini et il *De mercede conductis* di Luciano"; and Paparelli, "Il *De curialium miseriis.*"

88. Aeneas consciously sought to attract the chancellor's notice in two literary works, a poem and an essay: Wolkan I, pp. 121–25, nos. 42, 43 (1442).

more elegantly," Schlick wrote in the margin of one of the letters, "but do not alter its sense."[89]

Aeneas's own letters from this period reflected the imperial policy of neutrality, and, although it was popular neither with Rome nor with the majority in Basel, he staunchly defended Frederick's proposal that a "third council," preferably on German soil, would heal the current schism between the two competing councils, Basel and Florence, by incorporating the remnants of both (no. 21).[90] Yet, despite his new position and the expectation that he would uphold king and empire, the poet did not cut off his contacts with Italy, especially since he refused to give up on his benefice in Milan (no. 22).

Once Aeneas had settled into his duties, the year 1443 became one of the most active, as well as productive, in his early career. By the time the year ended he had become Schlick's point man in a controversy that would help separate the chancellor and Germany from Basel, admitted to having a son out of wedlock, struggled to regain his benefice in Milan, attempted to encourage the new learning, and heard of a crusade against the Ottoman Turks led by Cardinal Cesarini. First, however, with an eye to catching the chancellor's attention and perhaps the king's, Aeneas began a serious project, probably in February or March of 1443. Known as the *Pentalogue (Pentalogus),* it takes the form of a conversation among a group of five persons—the king, the chancellor, the bishop of Freising (a former employer), the bishop of Chiemsee (an intimate), and Aeneas himself.[91] The main topic was the importance of study in the humanities for those in positions of leadership. To keep the work up-to-date and relevant to his employer's interests, the author included a section in which the group discussed the king's proposal for a third council.

Not without lasting consequences, Aeneas also sat down to write a treatise-length letter that is often overlooked. It is addressed to Hartung von Kappel, a lawyer and fellow secretary (no. 23). While both shared a similar stance on neutrality, Aeneas suddenly found himself at odds with Hartung and other members of the chancery. According to Aeneas's account, he and Hartung were chatting in the hall one day when a third, unnamed person arrived and "converted a quiet and pleasant conversation into a garrulous and gloomy debate." Aeneas,

89. Ady, *Pius II,* 79 n. 1; *Memoirs,* 41.

90. Bäumer, "Eugen IV und der Plan eines 'Dritten Konzils' zur Beilegung des Basler Schismas."

91. Piccolomini, *Pentalogus de rebus ecclesiae et imperii.* See Toews, "The View of Empire in Aeneas Sylvius," 475–78.

astonished by the acrimonious charges made against councils, found himself defending their authority over a pope.

In the letter to Hartung, partly a gesture toward restoring goodwill, all discussion of imperial neutrality vanishes after the first page, and Council of Basel is never mentioned by name. Instead, the secretary lays out a theoretical justification for the primacy of councils based on what we might call Aeneas's principle of the greater reliability of discernment. "In all affairs," he writes, "the opinion of whoever discerns better and has gained the most authority must be preferred." Persons who urge the pope otherwise are flatterers who "assume . . . the appearance of a polyp which changes color to the appearance of the soil beneath it." Although trained in legal studies, Aeneas relies little on a weighty tradition of texts from canon law, as Nicholas of Cusa had done with such brilliance in his *Catholic Concordance,* and Panormitanus (Nicholas de Tudeschis) had done in his heavily documented *Quoniam veritas.*[92] Instead, Aeneas draws his central notions from a common stock of conciliar arguments, together with two favorite sources, antiquity and the Bible, but he combines and presents all these in his own unmistakably personal style.[93]

Despite his numerous objections to the conditions under which he lived and worked, Aeneas held the office of imperial secretary and the title of poet laureate in high esteem. He reassured his friends in the Roman curia that he had found a safe haven from "the storm in the church" (no. 24) and threw himself into a campaign to win England for the policy of neutrality. He even offered himself as a mediator (no. 25).[94]

His correspondence in 1443 also reveals his dedication to humanist studies and a love for book hunting. The new learning was especially needed in Germany which, in his estimate, was a cultural backwater. In a letter to the archbishop of Milan he explained that he signed himself "poet," not only because the king willed it but because the title might promote greater attention to learning. He was sufficiently successful in his efforts that, even in his own lifetime, some considered him the apostle of German humanism.[95]

92. See Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance;* Panormitanus (Nicholas de Tudeschis), *Quoniam veritas.* Panormitanus offers another case study of Aeneas's revisionism. Compare the comments in the *Commentary on the Proceedings of Basel* (no. 76), with those of an earlier letter that reflect on Panormitanus's death: Wolkan I, pp. 297–99, no. 168 (1445).

93. He especially relies on the Augustinian notion that Peter personified the whole church when he accepted the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 18:15–17), and thus the whole church is superior to any individual pontiff. On Augustine, see Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World.* See also Wolkan II, pp. 6–24, no. 3 (1446).

94. See Harvey, *England, Rome, and the Papacy.*

95. Wolkan I, pp. 119–21, no. 41 (1442). See Piccolomini, *The Tale of Two Lovers, Eurialus and*

Aeneas's role in the diffusion of humanist values during his residence in the imperial chancery is significant, but Italian humanism, like Italian jurisprudence, began to cross the Alps even earlier. One of its many routes passed through Basel, where the presence of a large council promoted a flourishing book trade.[96] Aeneas acknowledged this port of entry when he wrote to Francesco de Fusce, a Franciscan theologian in Basel whom Felix V had made a cardinal (no. 26). The secretary asked that Fusce obtain a commentary on eleven orations of Cicero by Antonio Loschi, a humanist of an older generation. Because Aeneas still found himself short of funds and thought that his tightfisted master, the king, had little interest in supporting cultural pursuits, the poet did not hesitate to ask the cardinal to send him Loschi's commentary as a gift.[97]

The letter to Cardinal Fusce was but one in a whole series concerned with learning and acquisition. An even better example of Aeneas's willingness to beg and badger for books was his effort to secure a copy of a fairly new work, Leonardo Bruni's translation of Aristotle's *Politics,* commissioned by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, and completed in 1437. Although Bruni's translation achieved a wide popularity, few if any copies were made for the defenders of conciliar supremacy in Basel. They preferred traditional legal and theological texts. Nevertheless, Aeneas was determined to have the book. He had seen an old friend, the papal secretary Giovanni Campisio, while on a mission to Vienna, and it was to him that Aeneas turned with his request. The correspondence with Campisio began in October 1443 (no. 34), just after he had obtained Loschi's commentary from Fusce in Basel, and continued through January, 1446 (no. 42).[98] During this time he also developed his own ideas on how to translate Greek texts into Latin (no. 61). Ironically, when he wrote his political treatise *On the Origin and Authority of the Roman Empire (De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani),* he made little use of the long-awaited *Politics.* Although he cited this work along with the *Nichomachean Ethics,* Cicero, not Aristotle, was the predominant influence.[99]

Lucretia, 4. On humanism north of the Alps, see Kristeller, "The European Diffusion of Italian Humanism."

96. Helmrath, "Kommunikation auf den spätmittelalterlichen Konzilien," 154–66. See also Helmrath et al., *Diffusion des Humanismus.*

97. See Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* 208–11.

98. See also Wolkan I, pp. 215–18, no. 95; pp. 278–83, no. 117; pp. 295–96, no. 126; pp. 305–9, no. 134; pp. 339–43, no. 150; pp. 450–51, no. 164; pp. 538–45, no. 185; II, pp. 4–6, no. 2. These letters date from 1443 through 1446.

99. Nederman, "Humanism and Empire."

In addition to book hunting, Aeneas was ever the curious spectator and energetic reporter, whether of major events or small talk and gossip, so he had much to record in 1443, as the new schism caused allegiances to shift inside and outside Germany. Amid other reports that attracted his attention came the news of a crusade against the Ottoman Turks, whose armies were mounting a significant threat to the Balkans. Aeneas later suggested that his enthusiasm for the crusade emerged at the time of Frederick's coronation as emperor in March 1452; and no one in his position could escape the tremors caused by the fall of Constantinople in the following year (see no. 75).[100] A letter of 1443, however, shows that he was at least aware of crusading in defense of Christendom a decade earlier. Some of his remarks were critical, but they were directed more to its leader, Cesarini, for interfering in Hungarian affairs—affairs that conflicted with the king's self-interest. If only in a negative sense, the cardinal had once again helped to set the agenda for the future pope (no. 27).

Even while he faithfully fulfilled his duties in support of his patron's policies (no. 29), Aeneas still looked after his own affairs. Since he never felt that the income from his chancery duties was sufficient, he followed the example of many others in his station. He sought to obtain one or more benefices that would provide him with a supplementary income but would not require the responsibilities of residence or pastoral duties. Unlike many other office seekers, however, Aeneas was a layman, but this did not deter him from keeping up a barrage of letters in which he tried to win back his lost provostship in San Lorenzo, Milan (no. 28) or gain some other preferment. This included a reminder to Felix V who, Aeneas boldly suggested, owed him a sign of gratitude (nos. 32, 33).

Yet another very personal affair, in 1443, prompted a lengthy, but strikingly candid, letter to his father. He had had a son by an English woman named Elizabeth while on a mission to Strasbourg. He hoped his father would accept this son as his own and perhaps even see to the child's education. "Certainly," he pleaded, with echoes from Boccaccio's *Decameron,* "you begot no son of stone or iron, being flesh yourself" (no. 30). Sad to say, Aeneas lost sight of this child; and, a year later, he was unsure whether the boy still lived (no. 53).

All this time a conflict was brewing that would eventually become a primary factor in ending Germany's, as well as Aeneas's, neutrality. While the secretary engaged in a flurry of letters on worldly events and private affairs, Kaspar

100. *Commentaries,* 126–27; *Memoirs,* 64–65.

Schlick was taking steps that concerned the promotion of his own family. The chancellor wanted to name his brother Heinrich to the bishopric of Freising, vacant since the death of Nicodemo della Scala, whom Aeneas had once served. The cathedral chapter, however, believed it had the right to name a successor and elected Johann Grünwalder, one of the cardinals appointed by Felix V. Eventually, the issue boiled down to a simple question: who would overrule the chapter's choice and fulfill the chancellor's desire, Basel or Rome?

Aeneas realized that opportunity had finally come knocking. Should he succeed in assisting his employer, he would take a long step toward meeting the goal of every overworked and underpaid secretary: to bask in the good graces of a powerful patron and perhaps take a more active role in his affairs. He went about his business with determination and lost no time in putting the case to both sides, first to the powerful cardinal of Arles and leader of Basel, Louis d'Aleman (nos. 31, 35), and then to his old friend Giovanni Campisio in Rome (no. 34). A clear sign that Aeneas's loyalty was paying off was Schlick's decision to give his secretary charge of the chancery when the chancellor went away on business, stipulating only that Aeneas report to him when he returned (no. 37).

One communication in this prolific period stands out because it hints at changes in the poet's attitude toward the assembly in Basel. It was written to the Castilian canonist and later cardinal, Juan de Carvajal. Although more austere than the personable Cardinal Cesarini, Carvajal now begins to replace the former council president as Aeneas's confidant and sponsor in the curia. As Cesarini had facilitated Aeneas's entry into the life of Basel, and Schlick into imperial politics, Carvajal would serve as go-between with Rome. For the moment, however, the poet-secretary invoked Virgil's hero and his own namesake in order to describe himself as "the armed Aeneas" ready to do battle in defense Frederick's policy of neutrality. He referred to the pope yet to be named by the king's proposed council as his "Anchises," that is, his father. In the final section of the letter he asserted a need for his own flexibility and a readiness to accept the consensus of the church. He declared, "I am doubtful, yet I have a ready spirit to obey the common opinion" (no. 36). A year later Aeneas would write to Carvajal in terms more acceptable to the Eugenian camp, and by 1446, another letter would exhort the Castilian to strive for the defeat of the conciliar cause (nos. 46, 63). These letters clearly mark the stages of Aeneas's return to the papal camp.

Just how cynical Aeneas had become toward the Council of Basel begins to appear in his report to Schlick on the progress of his brother's attempt to se-

cure the bishopric of Freising. Aeneas suggested that the chancellor might get a more favorable response from Eugenius than "the mob" at Basel (no. 37). Although this disparaging description would recur again in his later evaluations of Basel, its use here may simply imply that the chancellor had a better chance with one person than with many. Alongside such weighty affairs, Aeneas's multifaceted interests reveal themselves again when he composed an epistle on the education of children. This was a topic close to the humanist's heart, and, although the author could only touch on the matter in brief in his letter to Schlick, he gave it full treatment a few years later when he dedicated a letter to Ladislas Postumus, heir to the Hungarian throne, which became known as the treatise *On the Education of Children (De liberorum educatione)*.[101]

Similarly, when Frederick's young ward, Sigismund of Tyrol, asked Aeneas for assistance in writing an elegant love letter, he complied willingly by giving advice on love, sex, and courtship (no. 38). Sigismund does not say who had recommended the poet, but it is not hard to understand why he was chosen. Aeneas had already developed a reputation as an author of slightly ribald literature, and he was soon to reach the apex of this fame with the publication of a bawdy comedy, *Chrysis,* and a naughty little novel, *The Two Lovers, Eurialus and Lucretia (De duobus amantibus Eurialus et Lucretia)*. Dedicated to his teacher Mariano Sozzini, the story portrays the passionate love of a German knight for a lady from Siena. That Sozzini served as the model for the cuckolded husband in this affair—real or imagined—seems unlikely, but the figure of the handsome German knight may be based on Kaspar Schlick, with whom Aeneas continued to curry favor. Whatever the inspiration, the novel quickly gained in popularity. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Aeneas later tried to suppress it.[102]

Before the very busy year of 1443 came to a close, Aeneas determined once more to muster a consensus on the need for a third council, but this time with a more grandiose approach. He tried to persuade the German princes and prelates that the pursuit of individual acts of self-interest should be set aside in favor of recognizing the similarities between the imperial policy of neutrality and the French Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (no. 39).

101. Wolkan II, pp. 103–58, no. 40 (1450) (trans. Piccolomini, *Aeneae Silvii de liberorum educatione*; and Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises,* 126–259). See Baca, "The Educational Theory of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini."

102. Wolkan I, pp. 353–93, no. 152 (1444) (English translations are available by O'Brien and Bartlett [*The Two Lovers*]; Morall [*The Tale of Two Lovers, Eurialus and Lucretia*]; and Grierson [*The Tale of Two Lovers*]).

The activities and accomplishments of the old year, however, were but a prelude to the new. For Aeneas the road back to Rome would not be a short one, but once he set his course, there was no turning back. The year began with good news for the chancellor's brother, Heinrich Schlick. Eugenius IV had, at last, agreed to Heinrich's provision to the see of Freising. The fathers at Basel, on the contrary, had not. This rejection brought the chancellor, the king, and even Aeneas closer to agreement on a change of course (no. 40). The secretary was already feeling his way by renewing contact with the man who first brought him north of the Alps, Cardinal Capranica. He even asked the cardinal to commend him to the pope (no. 41).

For the moment he would go no further. Nor was he ready for ordination, as he confessed to his friend Piero da Noceto in February, because he could not trust himself to keep the vow of celibacy. He judged such a vow more appropriate to the spiritual than the political life.[103] Aeneas had at least two other incentives for his hesitance. He had not yet established a base of support in Rome, and he enjoyed a privileged place in the thick of politics, no longer as a secretary at the bottom of the ladder in the chancery but as the frequent table guest, confidant, and agent of the imperial chancellor, the king's right arm.

The two realms, personal and political, were seldom far apart in Aeneas's career. It is not surprising, then, that he quickly grasped what had to be done next: Kaspar Schlick would have to demonstrate his gratitude to the pope for the favor of bestowing the diocese of Freising on his brother (no. 42). At the same time, Aeneas himself moved a step closer to reconciliation with Rome when he told a friend in Basel that he would like to sell the post he held, if only nominally, as secretary to Felix V (no. 43).

He then drafted a second letter to Juan de Carvajal, to whom he had only recently appeared as "Aeneas armed" in his defense of neutrality. This time he dismissed the policy as a snare (no. 44). And the next month he wrote to Cesarini that he wished he could put an end to neutrality altogether, although he admitted that it would be difficult because the self-interest of so many was involved. If only harmony would return, he mused, he might have the chance to see Italy again (no. 45).

Aeneas's frustration arose from several factors, including the homesickness that had never left him. Another reason was the difficulty of securing the new benefice he had obtained in far-off Trent, and even more the ineptitude of

103. Wolkan I, pp. 294–95, no. 125 (1444).

Basel's envoy to the imperial court, the ailing Alexander of Mazovia, whom Felix V had appointed a cardinal (no. 46). When Alexander died, Aeneas wrote two letters: one a respectful obituary to which he attached a pair of humanist epigrams; the other—to Juan de Segovia in Basel—complaining of the damage the cardinal had done to the council's image among the king's counselors (nos. 47, 48).

Still another reason for Aeneas's impatience both with the council and neutrality was the still-smoldering dispute over the bishopric of Freising. The final straw was Johann Grünwalder's ill-fated attempt to argue his case before the imperial court in Wiener-Neustadt, where Frederick III was to make the final decision as to which of the two candidates, Grünwalder or Schlick's brother, should be invested with the temporalities of the see. It reminded Aeneas of the contest between Ajax and Ulysses. Grünwalder (Ajax) spoke on his own behalf, but the prize went to Schlick (Ulysses), who delivered an oration prepared by Aeneas (no. 49). While victory seemed assured in the case of Freising, the disposition of the late Cardinal Alexander's benefices raised another alarm, about which Aeneas thought it necessary to warn the fathers in Basel once again. Since they had already offended the king in the Freising dispute, he advised them that they should not stand in Frederick's way when he had his own designs on the benefices (no. 50).

The poet's growing irritation with Basel and neutrality had now become apparent, but as reports drifted back to Europe that Cesarini's crusade had met with disaster at Varna on November 10, Aeneas's letters begin to reveal a more positive sense of purpose. Aeneas was not alone in trying to suppress the rumors that Cesarini was dead, but even the thought of the cardinal's loss prompted a moving reflection on the merits of friendship. It may also have helped to confirm Aeneas's growing conviction, later mounting to a passion, that crusading was the only means to defend the faith and revivify the Christian commonwealth. From this perspective one might suspect that Aeneas's later years were the fulfillment of his mentor's lost hopes and the life he gave for the cause (no. 51).

From Chancellor's Favorite to Concordat

Following these signs of personal disorientation, Aeneas made a remarkable move. He went looking for a Bible. The request went to a civil servant,

Johann Tuschek, in Prague—a distant city, but a place where Aeneas thought he could obtain a cheap copy. Was this the search of someone discovering new depths in his career? Ordination did not come for another two years (1446), and it is not as if Aeneas, well versed in ancient literature, had never read the Bible. As in so many other places in his correspondence, some part of the author remains hidden behind the formal rhetoric of his request. Nevertheless, this was an important moment. Perhaps as a result of the news about Cesarini and the subsequent reflection on lasting values, he wanted to return to basics and add substance to his role as someone else's servant, but without surrendering his greatest gifts. " Since I am a lover of literature, I do not know how to please God other than through literary activity. Since the Bible teaches the rudiments of divine literature, I want to have a Bible" (no. 52). Unlike the long-awaited translation of Aristotle's *Politics,* Tuschek got Aeneas his Bible quickly and at a reasonable price, for which Aeneas expressed his gratitude (no. 60).

As Aeneas had little trouble combining his religious and literary interests, he had no difficulty acknowledging past errors in his moral life. Yet his father Silvio's response to Aeneas's confession about the birth of a son prompted memories about another boy, one born as a consequence of an alliance during his mission to Scotland. The thought that this child had died and his later son might have moved Aeneas not to sympathy for the children or their mothers but to pondering the Piccolomini lineage and how he might benefit it someday. The promise he made to Silvio that he would some day bring benefits to his family would have to find other means of fulfillment (no. 53). Nevertheless, what haunted Aeneas when he came to power as pope and richly rewarded his family in ways they could not have expected was not his former moral life but his return to Rome. The secretary later compared his change of direction to the story of Saul before Damascus in the Book of Acts, but the road he took would be slower and full of hazards (no. 69).

All the frustrations that contributed to his final rejection of Basel and his withdrawal from the imperial chancery—homesickness, the failure of the crusade at Varna and reported death of Cesarini, the inadequacies of Basel's diplomats, and the conflict over Heinrich Schlick and the Freising diocese—culminated in his frustration with the wrangling, to no evident gain, in the imperial diets. Since the summer of 1443 Aeneas had written letters urging the powers of Europe to support Frederick's plan for a third council that would absorb both Basel and Florence. The king also sought the support of the German princes

and planned to reach a decision at a diet scheduled to meet at Nuremberg in August 1444.[104]

The secretary, however, had grown from a mere scribe into a diplomatic agent with considerable experience in the empire—thanks to his correspondence, his contacts, and his travels—so that the confidence he once held in the king's policies now began to wear thin.[105] The benefits of neutrality, he observed, were all too apparent to the princes who could play off one pope against the other and consequently gain greater control over their own churches. Some of these princes formed a League of Electors in favor of Felix. Under these circumstances, diets had occurred with such frequency that Aeneas could pun the Latin noun *dieta,* which is feminine, saying that each diet is born pregnant with the next. He expressed a wish that a council (*concilium* is neuter) would be held to interrupt this endless succession of useless meetings.[106] In yet another version of the pun, *dieta* became sterile instead of fruitful (see no. 64).

Given the opposition of the League and the less than vigorous leadership of Frederick, it comes as no surprise that by May Aeneas had confided to Cesarini how difficult it would be "to snatch the prey from the wolf's mouth."[107] When the Diet of Nuremberg, for which he had worked long and hard, ended in what he considered petty self-seeking and made no real progress toward ending the schism, his disappointment caused him to test the waters in Rome. And when, among others, he approached Cardinal Giovanni Berardi, a fervent and (some said) unscrupulous opponent of the Council of Basel, it became clear that Aeneas was on the verge of a new beginning (no. 54).[108]

Although hopes for support for a third council from the princes were dashed, all was not lost. Frederick had one other major player who might be persuaded, and so he agreed to send a deputation to Pope Eugenius.[109] Aeneas, the king's longtime secretary, would substitute for Kaspar Schlick as the principal member. Officially, the embassy was charged with winning the pope's agreement to the proposal for a new council, but the astute Aeneas realized that, before this could happen, king and pope would have to reestablish a bond of trust after years of neutrality. And the one certain contribution to building this trust that he could offer would be his own confession, together with a plea for reconciliation. It was a risky strategy, but the reward could be great. At least

104. *Commentaries,* 48–51; *Memoirs,* 41–42.
105. Wolkan I, pp. 251–62, no. 108 (1443).
106. Wolkan II, pp. 30–33, no. 6 (1446).
107. Wolkan I, pp. 323–24, no. 142 (1444).
108. See Aeneas's portrait-sketch in *De viris illustribus,* 1–2.
109. *Commentaries,* 52–53; *Memoirs,* 42.

Aeneas had the assurance that his contacts in Rome, especially Carvajal, had paved the way for his return. The curia was also astute enough to realize that the now-famous author and respected member of the imperial court would make a worthy prize.

Aeneas set out with the delegation early in 1445, visited Siena along the way, and finally felt Italian sunshine once again. The results of the meeting with Eugenius were equally bright, although not without obstacles. Strangely enough, the letter that contains Aeneas's report does not mention the date of this audience, nor, still more curiously, his famous confession in which he sought absolution for his conciliar exploits. According to the later *Commentaries,* he invoked the names of Cesarini and others, and declared: "I was wrong (who can deny it?), but wrong in the company of men neither few nor mean. . . . [Then] I betook myself to those who were considered neutral, that I might not pass from one extreme to the other without time for reflection. . . . Now I stand before you and because I sinned in ignorance, I beg you to forgive me."[110]

Unlike the *Commentaries,* the letter is more interested in reporting that its author renewed his friendship with Piero da Noceto, reconciled with his fellow humanist and now cardinal Tommaso Parentucelli, and conferred with his confidant, Juan de Carvajal, who had also become a cardinal. In response to Aeneas's embassy, the pope designated Parentucelli and Carvajal to accompany the secretary back to Germany (no. 55).

Whether or not Aeneas's confession took place as he later reported, he meant it to dramatize a change in his life as well as in imperial policy. At the same time, it coincided with his arrival at the apex of an upward struggle in the king's service. Perhaps, as a servant of little means, there were no more fields to cultivate in the closed society of inherited status that was the imperial court. Despite these limitations, he had removed a major roadblock in the path to ending neutrality. He had renewed contact between pope and emperor. And he had won the latter's agreement to assign ambassadors for further negotiations. One more obstacle remained: the League of Electors, favorable to Felix.

Sometime in the course of their meetings, and as a result of their reconciliation, Eugenius had appointed Aeneas as a papal secretary. Unlike his post in the imperial chancery, however, this apparently was no more than an honorary title. Normally, papal secretaries, such as Aeneas's friend Piero, were required to remain near the pope with pen in hand, but about this time, perhaps beginning

110. *Memoirs,* 43. See also *Commentaries,* 54–57; and Piccolomini, *Orationes* 1:108ff.

with Aeneas himself, the papacy frequently offered the title only as an honor.[111] It was one that Aeneas richly deserved, both because he had returned his allegiance and because he had helped to defeat the Acceptation of Mainz. Although he seems never to have served in his new office, the title alone allowed him to boast: "This seems to me an extraordinary distinction and I do not know whether anyone else has ever had the good luck to be so exalted by fortune that he served as secretary to two popes, an emperor, and an antipope."[112]

Not long afterward, in May 1445, Aeneas reached another critical stage in his personal life. Just a few months earlier he had told Piero that he was not ready for ordination. Now this had changed. Those who see Aeneas as an opportunist might argue that he decided to be ordained because the bishop of Passau in Bavaria had provided him with a benefice, the church of St. Mary in Aspach, raising once again objections that he was still a layman.[113] But Aeneas had been down this road before, and Rome was willing to grant its newly won adherent the necessary dispensation. More than careerism was involved when he announced to Giovanni Campisio that he would take orders, becoming a priest (no. 56).

In the following weeks, while the results of his embassy to Rome were not yet fully known to his opponents in the League of Electors, Aeneas moved with some trepidation. He could only hint at what his mission had accomplished, and report events in such as way that he caused no offence. He even took precautions about the delivery of his messages so that their contents would not fall into the wrong hands. In an exception to this caution, he reflected on the sad certainty that Cardinal Cesarini was gone. That his passing and Aeneas's determination to seek ordination came at the same time may be more than coincidence (nos. 57, 58).

Once he had turned his face toward Rome, Aeneas began to see much of his past in a different light, and he exclaimed in exasperation to Campisio, "Oh, that I had never seen Basel! . . . Many are the reasons for which I ought to hate Basel, where I uselessly wasted time for so long." More than a repudiation of his career as a conciliar activist, this was a cry of homesickness for Italy, exacerbated by the need to keep a low profile in Wiener-Neustadt. What he lamented most was that if fate had not led him to Basel he might have obtained some re-

111. Partner, *The Pope's Men,* 70, 89–90.

112. *Commentaries,* 58–61; *Memoirs,* 44–45.

113. *Commentaries,* 32–33. On the importance of Aspach to Aeneas, see Diener, "Enea Silvio Piccolominis Weg von Basel nach Rom."

spectable post in the curia "and lived my life with you and among my other friends." (no. 59). And if he could now give vent to his despair over his days in Basel, how much more for his once-high estimate of imperial leadership in a united Christendom at peace with itself and the world?

In the two eventful years just ended, 1444 and 1445, Aeneas had experienced a transformation influenced by disappointments in both council and empire, and tempered by reflection on the meaning and direction of his life. Two works from the early months of the next year demonstrated that this transformation was neither abrupt nor a complete reversal. The first is a treatise-length letter that elevated the office and authority of the emperor to the fullest extent. Known by its opening phrase, *On the Origin and Authority of the Roman Empire (De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani),* it was completed in March 1446 and followed the *Pentalogue,* his other tract on the empire, by three years.[114] The letter has much to say about imperial power but little about papal or conciliar authority, most probably because its practical purpose was to rouse an apathetic Frederick to come out in full support of Eugenius. If the emperor could grasp the majesty and power of his office, he might share in Aeneas's sense of urgency and take action. With Cicero as his guide, Aeneas described the origin of society as a community, but concluded in un-Ciceronian fashion that an ordered society is best seen when manifested in empire and best served by a sovereign emperor whose actions "it is not permitted to protest, vilify or impugn" since there "is no one who can take cognizance of his temporal actions."[115] Some have assumed that the author meant to apply these sentiments to the papacy as well, but he is not explicit on the point.[116]

Aeneas is ambiguous about the details of another, more personal, matter. On March 6, 1446, Aeneas informed Campisio that he had been ordained a subdeacon earlier in the month. He made no reference to any plan for his further ordination to the priesthood, nor is there any mention in his later letters where or when this significant event took place. Apparently, he became a priest within the year, probably before February 1447, when he went to Rome for the second time to meet with an ailing Pope Eugenius about terminating German neutral-

114. Wolkan II, pp. 6–24, no. 3 (1446) (trans. listed in bibliography under Piccolomini, *De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani.*) The text is also in Kallen, *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini als Publizist.* See also Nederman, "Humanism and Empire"; Toews, "The View of Empire in Aeneas Sylvius," 472, 480–81; Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung,* 150–55.

115. Piccolomini, *De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani,* 105–106.

116. Cf. Ady, *Pius II,* 285; Watanabe, "Authority and Consent," 221, 223.

ity. In the meantime, he continued to sign himself as "imperial poet and imperial secretary," a further indication that his transformation was gradual and, at least in regard to the empire, did not completely throw over one alternative in favor of another.[117] Nevertheless, the letter to Campisio represents the coalescence of themes and events—the decline of Basel's influence, the near end of German neutrality, and his entrance into priestly office—that make this one of the most noteworthy intersections in his life (no. 62).

Together with an appeal to Carvajal urging him to rally support against the Council of Basel—the third in a revealing series of letters to the cardinal in which we can track Aeneas's development (no. 63)—the poet and subdeacon extended the announcement of his taking orders with letters that reflect on the implications of this decision. He ruminated especially on marriage and combined these thoughts with a metaphor about the fecundity of the imperial diets that continually seemed to give birth to one another and just as regularly caused him disappointment (no. 64).[118] Yet this disappointment did not keep him from maintaining contact with friends in Basel, especially when these contacts could help him recover his benefice in Milan (no. 65).

This is the last time we hear of the benefice, however. By the summer of 1446 Aeneas had much more to do, and the rewards of his doing it successfully would be far greater. By making overtures to Eugenius IV, Aeneas and Frederick had stolen a march on the League of Electors, who held out for Felix V. The electors had little choice but to send their own envoys to Rome, along with the delegation representing the imperial court. Among the electors' delegates was Gregor Heimburg, who became Aeneas's implacable nemesis. Aeneas, once again in the imperial delegation, returned to Frankfurt with the pope's response in September 1446, just in time to enter the diet in the distinguished company of Kaspar Schlick and the bishop of Chiemsee. Their entrance had the air of a triumphal procession, since they had finally succeeded in bringing the neutrality affair to an end by eliminating nearly all of the options for the League. Cardinal Carvajal had come to represent the pope. Gregor Heimburg spoke for the princes. Aeneas, however, later claimed to have played the crucial role in the diet by dividing the opposition and dealing with them one by one through persuasion and bargaining—and especially by bribing the archbishop of Mainz.[119]

117. See, for example, Wolkan II, pp. 40–41, no. 9 (1446).

118. On Aeneas's speeches to the diets, including the pun on *dieta,* see Helmrath, *Die Reichstagsreden des Enea Silvio Piccolomini.*

119. *Commentaries,* 39–41; *Memoirs,* 46–48; *Historia Rerum Friderici III,* 2:123–24. For an evaluation of the latter work, see Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* 440–42.

Yet Aeneas reported little of this in his correspondence. Perhaps, to put the best construction on the omission, the machinations were too sensitive to report at the time. By the end of the next year, however, he gave a lively report of the aftermath (see no. 67). Although Aeneas considered it a triumph, he had not obtained an unconditional surrender. To save face, the League set conditions. Since the frequently abrupt Pope Eugenius had deposed two of his old enemies, the archbishops of Cologne and Trier,[120] the electors demanded their restoration. In addition the pope was to adopt some of Basel's reform decrees and summon a new council.

Aeneas took to the road again at the end of 1446, bound for Rome for the third time in two years. The goal this time was to seal the fate of the League and German neutrality. Along the way Aeneas received a report about the see of Freising—an appropriate reminder of the controversy that had helped to initiate these journeys in the first place (no. 66). Aeneas's detailed and vivid account of his newest mission in the Eternal City is couched in a self-conscious sense of drama and historic occasion. The key exaction from the pope was the restoration of the archbishops of Trier and Cologne, but, as to the demand for another council, the pope offered only his word that an assembly would be held in Germany if the princes agreed. And rather than accept Basel's reform decrees, as demanded, he promised to negotiate a concordat with the German church.[121] Not always the most flexible diplomat, Eugenius had once again succeeded by granting just enough concessions to carry the day and open the way for Germany's restoration of obedience. This final triumph had taken its toll, however. Eugenius became seriously ill during the negotiations. Aeneas, the chief architect of the plan, was in the German delegation when it visited the dying pope for the last time on February 7 and, according to his later revised history, gave this valedictory: "[S]ee now that we offer you obedience . . . we recognize you as the universal and undoubted Roman pontiff" (no. 76).[122]

Eugenius died on February 23, 1447. His successor, Tommaso Parentucelli of Sarzana, about whose election the *Commentaries* give an insightful account, took the name Nicholas V. Tommaso knew Aeneas from the days when they served in the household of Cardinal Albergati, but had kept a cool distance as long as Aeneas served the policy of neutrality. When the poet first arrived in

120. *Commentaries,* 60–61; *Memoirs,* 45.

121. For the dilemmas of papal reform in this period, see Tillinghast, "An Aborted Reformation."

122. See also *Commentaries,* 70–75; *Memoirs,* 48–49.

Rome, however, he made a determined effort to restore their friendship (no. 67). Reconciliation proved to be a wise move. Nicholas rewarded Aeneas, now a successful diplomat, with the bishopric of Trieste in April, presumably not long after his ordination to the priesthood (no. 68).

From Concordat to Conclave

Aeneas's rapid rise in the hierarchy came with a price. At first, the new bishop had little time for correspondence, but in July 1447, the king sent him to the Diet of Aschaffenburg. When the diet confirmed the results of Aeneas's mission to Rome, Frederick withdrew his safe-conduct, the last vestige of German neutrality, from the Council of Basel. Aeneas then went on to Cologne to consult with the reinstated archbishop. While he was in the city he was invited to dinner by the faculty of the university. After the meal the rector, Jordan Mallant, recalled that seven years earlier the faculty's inquiry concerning the locus of supreme authority in the church had inspired the young Aeneas to write *The Book of Dialogues concerning the Authority of a General Council* with its explicit defense of conciliar authority.[123] Which Aeneas should they follow, the conciliarist or the bishop?

Many would have ignored the challenge, but Aeneas, true to his impulse to work through every thought and experience with his pen, wrote an open letter to the rector on August 13, 1447 (no. 69). This was the first of his famous "retractions." His correspondence had revealed plenty of theoretical ammunition that he could have put to use here, but instead he repeated the excuses for his change of heart from his confession to Eugenius: naive inexperience, youthful impetuousness, and above all, the example of others. And, once again, he was Saul on the road to Damascus. He had persecuted the pope, but when he had time in the imperial chancery to think more clearly, he reconsidered and saw the evil of his ways.[124]

The once-great Council of Basel, a remnant of which had moved to Lausanne, still had some fight left in it, and although Rome was engaged in negotiations to secure the abdication of Felix V, Aeneas warned Nicholas V that "we

123. See the *Proemium* to *Libellus dialogorum,* 2:691–93.

124. See Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Papst Pius II,* 156–58. On the image of "the multiheaded monster" that Aeneas uses to denigrate "the multitude" at Basel, see Tierney, *Church Law and Constitutional Thought in the Middle Ages,* ix, 253.

have a truce in war, not a peace." At the same time he urged the pope to take seriously two matters that would become important items on his agenda as Pius II: the Hussite movement in Bohemia and the Turkish threat to the Balkans (no. 70). Another of his fundamental concerns found expression in an unexpected place, a letter to Gregor Heimburg. Despite their differences they found common cause in their mutual desire to bring the new learning to Germany (no. 71). The letter also hints at the caution needed when reading Aeneas's later correspondence, such as the apologia to Jordan Mallant. The bishop's gesture of goodwill to the German humanist contrasts sharply with his portrayal of Heimburg in an unflattering light elsewhere.[125]

Nearly on his deathbed, Pope Eugenius had promised to send envoys to negotiate a concordat with the empire, rather than allow the diet to adopt Basel's reform decrees. His successor, Nicholas V, kept this promise, and in February 1448, empire and papacy signed the Concordat of Vienna. Frederick stood to gain much by the treaty. In exchange for his acknowledgement of the Roman pope, he was given direct control over appointments to several major sees and many smaller benefices.[126] The territorial princes quickly saw that they could strike their own bargains with the papacy over appointments in their own realms—about which Aeneas commented caustically some months later (no. 73).

Although the concordat bound empire and papacy more closely together, it did not bring an end to the age of reforming councils.[127] From the papacy's perspective, the conciliar movement, with its calls for regular assemblies to renew the church, its denial of the annates, its promotion of conciliar indulgences, and its establishment of a conciliar judiciary, seemed to strike at the very foundations of church government. Consequently, the popes feared the councils more than any other foe in the fifteenth century, and the concordats became a diplomatic expedient to avert the danger by dealing directly with the various European powers.[128]

The real victor in the struggle between council and pope, Hubert Jedin once remarked, was neither council nor pope, but the nation-state.[129] More

125. See *Historia Rerum Friderici III,* 123–24.

126. Toews, "Formative Forces in the Pontificate of Nicholas V"; Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV,* 304–22.

127. Minnich, "Councils of the Catholic Reformation."

128. Toews, "Pope Eugenius IV and the Concordat of Vienna." See also idem, "Dream and Reality in the Imperial Ideology of Pope Pius II."

129. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent,* 21.

precisely, the victor in Germany was the prince-elector, sovereign in his own realm. His consolidation of princely power was so firmly established by the outbreak of the Reformation that Frederick the Wise successfully protected Martin Luther for several crucial months while the world awaited the election of a new emperor.[130] As for Aeneas, the same principalities and nation-states that the papacy had perforce acknowledged in the concordats came back to haunt him as pope when his call for a crusade in the name of a universal Christendom fell on deaf ears.

For the moment, however, the Concordat of Vienna brought an end to a long and life-changing chapter in the poet's career. In its wake he wrote two different letters to his onetime opponent and current confidant, Juan de Carvajal: a description of an imaginary visit to purgatory, and a newly revised history of Basel. In the first, written in October 1449, Aeneas revealed that he was ready to take stock, to look back on who had led him to where he was and where he was going. The immediate occasion was the death in July of his old patron, Kaspar Schlick. "I am not yet fifty," he wrote to Carvajal, " and yet I know more people among the dead than the living." The result was one of the most imaginative letters in the whole remarkable series (no. 72).

After reflecting on human mortality and the pleasure of being alive, Aeneas reported a dream he had had three days before. The model for this dream-revelation is not classical literature, but a medieval master, Dante.[131] "I had entered a forest overshadowed by living trees," he tells us, whereupon he recognized Chancellor Schlick, who would serve as his guide—his Statius, if not his Virgil. When Aeneas asked the reason for a judiciary "of venerable appearance" among the illustrious dead, Schlick began to describe the sad state of Europe they were to adjudicate, but Aeneas interrupted this long diatribe to ask about a specific individual, Cardinal Cesarini. "[A]fter he fell in Hungary," Schlick replied, "he went straight to heaven and possesses simply those joys which Christ's joyful witnesses enjoy, on account of his spilled blood."

After the rout of the crusading host at Varna, Cesarini had undergone a final

130. Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany,* 321, 374; Rowe, "The Tragedy of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini,"297. In general see Schulze, *Fürsten und Reformation*; and Thomson, *Popes and Princes.*

131. Aeneas did not simply copy his model, however. For example, the surroundings are more reminiscent of the Valley of the Negligent Rulers, part of the Ante-Purgatory in canto 7 of the *Purgatorio.* Moreover, the judicial role of the "men of venerable appearance" is more properly one for the angel at the gate of purgatory proper, assigning fitting punishments to the recently deceased. Cf. Aeneas's *Dialogus de somnio quodam*; and Wolkan I, pp. 343–53, no. 151 (1444).

transformation in Aeneas's estimation, from idealized mentor to misguided leader to martyr. But this intriguing letter not only paid tribute to the men most responsible for his rise to prominence, the metaphor of a dream-revelation allowed him to articulate two of the central convictions that dominated the remainder of his life: the sad state of Christendom and confirmation of Cesarini's immediate elevation to a higher realm after dying in a crusade. Almost two decades after the young humanist arrived in Basel, he could now see his mission and an older generation of patrons sub specie aeternitatis.

Aeneas next looked back on the Council of Basel. In the second work addressed to Carvajal he offered a revised history of the assembly entitled *Commentary on the Proceedings of Basel (De rebus basiliae gestis commentarius)* (no. 76). Although in preparation for some time (see no. 73), it was not completed until the Jubilee year of 1450, one year after the council had finally dissolved itself, and two years after the Concordat of Vienna. Aeneas also had personal reasons for celebration. This was the year of his transfer to the bishopric of Siena, his adopted hometown.[132]

The title of the *Commentary* can lead to some confusion. It reflects, even mirrors, the title of his earlier, pro-conciliar history, *Two Books of Commentaries on the Proceedings of the Council of Basel (De gestis concilii Basiliensis commentariorum libri II)*. Whatever Aeneas's intent about the titles, he clearly expects that the later work will supplant the earlier one. Even more apparent than in the "retraction epistle" to Jordan Mallant, his revisions were part of his overall aim to leave a final testament to future generations.

Although persons, places, and major events remain the same in the *Commentary* as in the earlier work, Aeneas not only offered a complete reevaluation of his previous perspective, he also added new details and even changed facts and descriptions. Immediately noticeable is the withdrawal of the title "council" from Basel. More subtle is the device of placing the most damaging criticisms, especially of distinguished persons, into the mouths of others. Furthermore, and most notably, in his attempt to discredit the council's ability to exercise reliable discernment, he charged that the assembly was flooded with priests and professors, that votes counted more than the voice of bishops, and that the French supported reform only because they wanted the papacy to return to Avignon where they could control it.

When not engaged in revising his own past, Aeneas remained an active au-

132. *Commentaries,* 96–99; *Memoirs,* 55–56.

thor and diplomat.[133] Once the Concordat of Vienna supplanted the Acceptation of Mainz and German neutrality, the way was open for Frederick III to realize his long-delayed desire to be crowned emperor in Rome. In the same year as the Jubilee, decreed by Pope Nicholas in part to celebrate the close of Basel and the restoration of German allegiance, the king assigned Aeneas the dual tasks of working out the details of both his coronation and his betrothal to Leonora of Portugal, a niece of King Alfonso of Aragon.[134] The couple met for the first time amid considerable pageantry outside the gates of Siena in February 1452. The event was celebrated by Pinturicchio's handsome portrayal in the library of Siena Cathedral. The royal couple joins hands to receive a blessing from Bishop Aeneas while a distinguished company surrounds them and Siena gleams in the background. In contrast, the picturesque formalities of the Frederick's coronation, as Aeneas likely understood, meant little without the respect and support of the emperor's subjects. Only five months later he found himself surrounded in Wiener-Neustadt by a force of Austrians demanding to take charge of his ward, the young prince Ladislas Postumus, and that Frederick negotiate with them at a future diet.[135]

This diet was held in Vienna in December 1452. Aeneas, representing Frederick, delivered one of his most forceful orations, *Against the Austrians (Adversus Austriales)*. In addition to its eloquence, the speech contained the most sweeping charges against the Council of Basel he had yet uttered. Apparently he did not think it enough to condemn the assembly because it was flooded with ordinary priests. Now he added the astonishing charge that "among the bishops and fathers at Basel we saw cooks and stablemen judging the affairs of the world." To clinch the decision whether this undiscerning rabble should have any weight in the Christian world, he asked: "Who would credit their words and actions with the authority of law?"[136]

Even while he continued to reshape his historical legacy, the experience with the two succeeding diets of Regensburg and Frankfurt provided final confirmation of his suspicions, already apparent during the last years he served in the chancery, that Frederick III was far too lethargic to rouse Christendom to action. He could not have reached this conclusion at a worse time. News ar-

133. For brief descriptions of other works that Aeneas wrote in the period before his election as pope, see Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 106–7, 263–64; and Ady, *Pius II,* 349–51.

134. *Commentaries,* 94–95, 114–17; *Memoirs,* 54, 62.

135. *Commentaries,* 122–23; *Memoirs,* 64.

136. Piccolomini, *Orationes,* 1:231.

rived with the new year of 1453 that Constantinople had fallen to the Turks. He poured out his feelings about its loss, both strategic and artistic, to Nicholas of Cusa, from whom Aeneas could expect a sympathetic response because Cusanus had become acquainted with the treasures of Byzantium while residing in the city (no. 75).

Yet Aeneas, not one to remain idle even in the worst of circumstances, made an effort to rally the princes to action at both diets, even though the emperor did not bother to attend in person. The bishop took particular pride in his two-hour, pro-crusading speech at Frankfurt in the following year, during which "not once did anyone clear his throat, or take his eyes from the speaker." Although he maintained that "the old enthusiasm for war suddenly revived in all," he failed in the end to move the diet to decisive action.[137]

Pope Nicholas, too, proved less determined than Aeneas had hoped. In a letter to the pope, a friend and colleague who likewise had a reputation for humanism, the poet's sympathies and his grasp of European affairs are mingled together. "But what is this frightening news just now brought from Constantinople? My hand quivers as I write this and my soul shudders. My bitterness forbids me from keeping silent but my grief will not let me speak. Alas, miserable Christianity! . . . This is the second death of Homer, the second demise of Plato."[138]

Besides lamenting the staggering loss of Byzantine glories, he expressed anxiety over the imminent threat to Hungary and Austria, and implored Nicholas to use all his powers to persuade the princes of Europe to join a crusade. Yet, although the pope issued a call on September 30 for a holy war against the Turks, he seemed powerless to succeed. Despairing of Frederick and disappointed in Nicholas, but still convinced that the papacy could lead a unified Christendom, Aeneas's smoldering passion for the crusade would have to bide its time.

The reward for his service to pope and emperor in the form of a cardinal's hat had to wait as well, at least until the death of Nicholas V and the election of Alfonso Borgia as Calixtus III. The new pope elevated Aeneas to the cardinalate in December 1456, and just two years later, when Calixtus died in August 1458, Aeneas found himself a candidate for the Chair of Peter. In a later candid ac-

137. He blamed this failure on the death of Nicholas V during the following summer just when troops were expected to assemble: *Commentaries,* 74–75; *Memoirs,* 64–68. See also his *Historia de Ratisponensi dieta* in *Orationes* 3:1–85.

138. Wolkan III, pp. 189–202, no. 109 (1453). See also Wolkan III, pp. 229–31, no. 126 (1453).

count of the conclave, Aeneas delighted in telling the famous anecdote about how his rivals frequently campaigned in the privies. A fit place, he remarks, for such a "foul covenant" and, he implies, a sharp contrast to the victorious candidate, himself, who was elected on August 19. His choice of name, Pius II, contained one of his best puns. It referred not only to a predecessor, as tradition required, but to Virgil's hero, the "pious Aeneas."[139] This famous play on the dual nature of his name, personal and regal, can be taken in two ways: on the "Pius" side, to represent his spiritual journey from council to pope and on the "Aeneas" side, the worldly youth he felt compelled to explain.

From Conclave to Crusade

The new pope, who had been a connoisseur of books and a judicious collector with an eye toward value, did not significantly add to the Vatican Library established by Nicholas V, nor did he erect major monuments in Rome.[140] One should balance this apparent disinterest, however, with his determined concentration on the specific policies he considered most significant for Christendom and his own legacy. These priorities were first a crusade and then the rebuilding of Corsignano, his hometown. For this project he engaged a pupil of Alberti, the architect Bernardo Rossellino, to reshape the town into a harmonious reflection of an ideal city. Renamed Pienza in his honor, it was the first example of Renaissance town planning.[141] Furthermore, while he may not have become a great patron of other humanists, he turned out a remarkable string of literary works during his papal tenure. Among other writings, he finished the *History of Bohemia,* wrote *Europe, Asia,* and an epitome of Biondo's *Decades,*[142] as well as his own speeches for the Congress of Mantua and thirteen books of the *Commentaries.*

But it was unity within Christendom and a crusade against the Turks that

139. *Commentaries,* 176–99; *Memoirs,* 79–88.

140. The nineteenth-century historian Palacký, *Geschichte von Böhmen,* 235, concluded that Aeneas's humanism was only skin deep, but see Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 163, 166. See also Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini;* O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome;* and D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome.*

141. Mack, *Pienza.*

142. *Historia Bohemica,* in *Opera,* 81–143; *De Europa,* in ibid., 387–471; *Asia,* in ibid., 281–386; and *Abbreviatio* of Biondo's *Decades,* in ibid., 144–281. See also the modern edition of *De Europa*; and Baldi, "Enea Silvio Piccolomini e il *De Europa.*"

most occupied him—and that proved to be the most daunting tasks of his papacy.[143] Since he believed he could achieve the former only by resorting to the latter, Pius readied himself for a test of arms. His predecessors in the papacy had seemed simply incapable of the venture, and he had learned from bitter experience that he could not count on the emperor. Instead he would have to take on the role of Christian warrior and fire the imagination of Europe against the Islamic horde. He wrote: "Pope Pius was afraid of this poison and decided to take steps to prevent its worming its way further, but . . . the conquest of the Turks seemed to him a task not for this or that realm, but for all Christendom."[144] His solution: to summon a congress—he was careful not to call it a council—to meet at Mantua in June 1459.[145]

The mere desire for peace and unity, however, could not overcome selfish interests or the constant, health-draining pressure of particular quarrels that beset him from many sides. In one especially significant case, the contest over succession to the archbishopric of Mainz, Pius demanded an enormous payment of annates to the curia from the eventual victor, Diether von Isenberg. Diether refused and felt he had no other recourse than to appeal to a future council. And Diether was not alone. Gregor Heimburg threatened to make a similar appeal, as did the French envoys and Duke Sigismund, deeply involved in a conflict with Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa over reform in the Tyrol. In swift reaction, and in an effort to thwart all those opposed to the pope's plans, Pius promulgated the bull *Execrabilis.*[146] Published near the close of the Congress of Mantua in January 1460, it was the first official condemnation of appeals from pope to council (no. 77).

Late in the following year, with the prospect of a crusade before him, the pope composed a letter to Mehmed II, known as the Conqueror *(Epistula ad Mahumetam)*. He recommended that the sultan accept baptism so that both Christians and Muslims would acknowledge him as emperor of the East. Whether Mehmed received this optimistic proposal, or whether it was sent at all, the letter invites comparison with other efforts at bridging the hostilities, especially the forward-looking proposals for serious study and dialogue put

143. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages,* 99–100.

144. *Memoirs,* 92.

145. *Memoirs,* bk. 3. See Calzona et al., *Il sogno di Pio II.*; Abulafia, "Ferrante I of Naples, Pope Pius II, and the Congress of Mantua"; Russell, *Diplomats at Work,* 51–93; and Picotti, *La Dieta di Mantova.*

146. Rigby, "Diether von Isenburg"; Biel, *Defensorium obedientiae apostolicae,* 16–41.

forward by Juan de Segovia. On another level, however, Aeneas's letter, like many others in his collection, is an exercise in self-fashioning, in this case as a visionary for world peace.[147]

While Pius hoped that *Execrabilis* would deal the deathblow to the conciliar movement and pave the way for a crusade, others demanded that he explain how the decree could be promulgated by the same person who had embraced the Council of Basel. As these charges indicate, the errors that dogged Aeneas in his later years were not the moral indiscretions of a dashing young secretary, although they were numerous enough, and not even his adherence to German neutrality, which he had successfully buried. What was held against him was treachery to the cause of Basel, abandoning what he had said in *The Book of Dialogues concerning the Authority of a General Council* and the letter to Hartung von Kappel. German polemicists in particular never forgave him these inconsistencies.

In response Pius began a public relations campaign that he considered crucial both to clear his name and to gain support for his drive to mount a crusade against the Turks. Once more an action by the University of Cologne—this time appealing to a future general council—prompted the first work in this campaign; and once more the university added bite to its petition by citing Aeneas's own *Book of Dialogues.* Thus, on April 26, 1463, Pius published a "retraction bull," *In minoribus* (no. 78). Pius had sent his earlier "retraction letter" to the rector of the university, Jordan Mallant (see no. 69), but the bull he addressed to the entire faculty. He compares this new apologia to Augustine's *Retractions* and recites the now-familiar errors of his youth, but the heart of the pope's argument expresses his view of authority within Christendom by appealing to the model of antiquity. Why, he asked, was the Savior born during the *pax Romana* under Caesar Augustus unless he wanted to reveal his preference for monarchy?[148] Unlike his revised history of the Council of Basel, however, the pope's emphasis is less on the council than on the young Aeneas. Not only did he see himself as one led astray by his vices and by more eminent men,

147. *Opera,* 872–904. An English translation is in *Epistula ad Mahometam II.* See also Baca, "On the Sources of Pius II's *Epistula ad Mahometam II*"; Bisaha, "Pope Pius II's Letter to Sultan Mehmed II"; and *Il corano e la tiara.*In general, see Izbicki, "The Possibility of Dialogue with Islam in the Fifteenth Century"; Biechler, "A New Face toward Islam"; and Nederman, *Worlds of Difference.*

148. In addition, he includes historical references to the controversial bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII, as well as the tract on papal leadership, *On Consideration (De consideratione),* written by St. Bernard of Clairvaux for Pope Eugenius III.

he argued that the change in his convictions was the result of growth toward maturity and discernment. The climax came in an impassioned plea: "Reject Aeneas; accept Pius."

With *In minoribus* we have completed a circle. The same university that had requested *The Book of Dialogues,* one of his first major works as a conciliarist in 1440, also necessitated his last word on the subject as a papalist in 1463. Pius thought he had saved the church from the divisive tendencies of the reforming councils, but even he could observe that the conciliar ideal would not simply go away. So, in 1462, he concentrated his efforts on the second work in his late literary campaign, the *Commentaries (Commentarii),* which engaged him until he reached book XIII in June 1464. Their verve, wit, and descriptive power, together with his comprehensive experience in European affairs over three decades, make these memoirs compelling reading even today. For Aeneas this was also a final effort to tidy up the record and imitate Virgil by recasting the story of his life in epic terms.[149]

Although in deteriorating health, the pope went to Ancona to lead the crusade in person. The scene is captured by Pinturicchio in a last, poignant fresco in Siena Cathedral that takes the viewer back to the first in the series and to another, happier journey to Basel. Pius died in Ancona on August 14, 1464, awaiting ships and troops that never came. Nicholas of Cusa died at Todi just three days earlier while hurrying to the pope's side. In view of the general European disinterest in the crusade, Cusanus's faithfulness was a final tribute from a one-time opponent. The two old warriors, both of whom had begun as champions of unity at Basel, had, like their mentor Cardinal Cesarini, ended their lives away from Rome pursuing another ideal, a crusade in defense of Christendom.[150]

Only a decade after the pope's death, a collection of his letters appeared in print for the first time. Even in his lifetime, some of these letters were already in demand, probably as models of good style more than as sources of historical information. Collecting started even earlier. Aeneas reported in 1444 that a fellow secretary in the imperial chancery, Wenzel von Bochow, was engaged in

149. See Seeber, *Enea Vergilianus*; Gaeta, *Il primo libro dei "Commentarii" di Pio II*; and Totaro, *Pio II nei suoi "Commentarii."*

150. While Nicholas became one of Pius's most trusted cardinals, the two were not without occasional disagreement, as for instance in regard to the pope's demand for payment from Diether von Isenberg. This and Pius's intention to name several new cardinals drew an angry and tearful response from Nicholas, which Aeneas reports in *Memoirs,* 228.

copying parts of the poet's correspondence.[151] Aeneas himself collected some of the early letters, and although he did not publish them, a manuscript with his own corrections dated 1447 survives.[152] In a letter of 1450 to the Polish cardinal, Zbigniew Olesnicki, who had urged him to undertake such an effort, Aeneas complained that an unnamed perpetrator had released a batch of his letters without his permission. Then he added: "The book, however, has two gatherings of twenty leaves. Imagine how many letters it contains which, when I read them, make me ashamed of myself, and, by any agreement, I would not give such examples of ineptitude to the light of day, unless your authority, to which I can deny nothing, compelled me" (no. 74).

After Aeneas's death, one of his staff of secretaries, Agostino Patrizi, was taken on by Aeneas's nephew, Cardinal Francesco Todeschini, the future Pius III. With support from the family, whose long-term goal was to enhance the Piccolomini name, it may have been Cardinal Todeschini, assisted by Patrizi, who saw to the printing of Aeneas's letters in the 1470s. The family also withheld certain of Aeneas's works that might tarnish his reputation. The *Commentaries,* for example, were finally released by another relative, Francesco Bandini Piccolomini, archbishop of Siena, only in a censored version and only in the late sixteenth century.[153]

The letters, some of them widely scattered, also languished until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the indefatigable Rudolph Wolkan of Vienna, working in German and Italian archives, began to publish by far the most extensive collection of letters yet assembled, covering the years 1431 to 1454. Whereas Aeneas's nineteenth-century biographer, Georg Voigt, had 559 letters at his disposal from the years before Aeneas became Pius II, Wolkan published 1263.[154]

Aeneas's reputation as pope and historian continue to draw mixed reactions. He might be accused of muddling through his papacy because he simul-

151. Wolkan I, pp. 316–17, no. 138 (1444).

152. Ady, *Pius II*, 108; Wolkan I, pp. xvi–xvii.

153. A very early (1496) edition of several letters appeared as *Epistolae familiares.* On the collection and its printing, including the significant role of Aeneas's family, see especially Clough, "The Chancery Letter-Files of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini." See also Strnad, "Studia piccolomineana"; Wasner, "Piccolominibriefe"; Pérouse, *De epistolis Aeneae Sylvii Piccolomini*; Petersohn, "Die Erstausgaben der Kommentare Papst Pius II"; and Iaria, "Tra Basilea e Vienna."

154. Voigt, "Die Briefe des Aeneas Silvius." Wolkan, "Die Briefe des Aeneas Silvius vor seiner Erhebung auf den päpstlichen Stuhl." But see also Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara,* 265, for even further letters that remain in manuscript.

taneously held on to an outdated, medieval concept of the Christian commonwealth and a dedication to the new learning.[155] Such an interpretation, however, reflects modern presuppositions shaped by the emergence of secular societies and a narrow view of Renaissance humanism. There was no single, uniquely Renaissance philosophy to which Aeneas or any of his contemporaries adhered. Instead he was both humanist and universalist together. His vision of Christendom was grounded in the communal nature of human beings, formed by the Genesis account of Eden and confirmed by Cicero. But whereas for the Roman Cicero the need for community justified the civic institutions of city-republics, for Aeneas, thinking sub specie aeternitatis, the communal instinct demanded a universal Christian society marked by common consensus. Thus, contrary to those who would too easily project rigid lines of demarcation, Aeneas illustrates the need to keep flexible the historical boundaries between Middle Ages and Renaissance and between universalism and individualism.[156]

Nevertheless, his concept of Christendom could no longer completely square with the social and political transformation of the fifteenth century. This transformation was reluctantly acknowledged by the need of the papacy to sign individual concordats with the rising nation-states whose priorities did not include a general call to arms unless the perceived enemy threatened their own interests or their own borders.[157]

Aeneas's stature as a historian also gets mixed reviews. To some he appears surprisingly modern in his application of historical method and demand for accurate translations, as he does here: "In the translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* by George of Trebizond I found Cicero named among the examples. I do not know why Trebizond did this. For translations should be made word by word; or, if the sentences are translated, the work must be done so that they seem to be made word by word. I do not know why Cicero, who was not yet born when the volume was written, is named in the works of Aristotle" (no. 61). Furthermore, as one would expect from an Italian humanist, he had a deep apprecia-

155. See, for example, Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy,* 192–93, who maintains that "Nicholas V—the best pope of the century—made some effort to give this new fervour a lead. . . . His successor, Pius II—the famous humanist Aeneas Silvius—was tepid and half-hearted, too much the cultured scholar to be the religious zealot"; and Morrall, "Pius II: Humanist and Crusader," 33–34.

156. Nederman, "Humanism and Empire," 499–502, 513–15. See also Widmer, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini in der sittlichen und politischen Entscheidung,* 167, who maintains that Aeneas was a "humanist Ghibelline."

157. For general background, see Burns, *Lordship, Kingship, and Empire*; and Muldoon, *Empire and Order.*

tion for history. In his later history of the council of Basel he writes, "Here is its greatest praise: history is the witness of times past, the light of truth, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity" (no. 76).

Ironically, these admirable principles are frequently absent from his best-known, but revisionist, historical work, *Commentary on the Proceedings of Basel;* and yet this work brought more success to Aeneas among succeeding generations than he could gain among contemporaries. The reasons may be related to the First Vatican Council. In what Francis Oakley calls "the politics of oblivion," the conciliar tradition of the late Middle Ages has tended to be forgotten or discredited. Consequently, many have found it convenient to accept at face value Aeneas's narrative of a radical and rebellious assembly at Basel.[158] But it is one thing to allow Aeneas a second look at his youth—another for modern practitioners to accept his revisions without considerable caution.[159]

Beyond Aeneas the pope and historian, there is Aeneas the man of letters. An exercise in humanist self-reflection, his correspondence is a means of shaping a public persona that could be left to posterity. A governing principle for writing these letters, as well as the *Commentaries* and the revised history of the Council of Basel, was to establish that the council and all who opposed him had lost their reliability of discernment even as he had gained it. In this light he could defend his career choices at the critical points where others, such as Gregor Heimburg, Jordan Mallant, and Diether von Isenberg, had attacked him. The new Aeneas who emerged from these decisions saw the self-serving "reforms" of "the multitude" at Basel as denying, rather than supporting, the *status ecclesiae,* the cherished conciliar principle concerning the church's well-being. And the cardinals who plotted in the privies to elect his rival proved that they were not men whose judgment about a papal candidate anyone should follow. In a similar fashion he scrutinizes all those who, because of their ten-

158. Oakley, prologue to *The Conciliar Tradition.* For a general overview, see Izbicki, "Papalist Reaction to the Council of Constance"; Morrissey, "After Six Hundred Years"; and Schneider, *Das Konziliarismus als Problem der neueren Katholischen Theologie.* For Basel, see Meuthen, "Das Basler Konzil in römisch-katholischer Sicht." For a general synthesis, see Alberigo, *Chiesa conciliare.*

159. On the varied evaluations of Aeneas as a historian, see Rowe, "The Tragedy of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini," 311–12, nn. 95, 98, 101, 103, 104, and Rowe's own judgment: "In the end we must therefore conclude that Aeneas was not a so much a historian as a journalist and a publicist" (300). In contrast, Ady, *Pius II,* 72, 281, 291–92, is far more positive. On Aeneas as a historian of Basel, see Christianson, "Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini and the Historiography of the Council of Basel"; and Miethke, "Die Konzilien als Forum der öffentlichen Meinung im 15. Jahrhundert," who concludes that Aeneas's treatment of the council's membership was a "distortion" that turned a "trend into a grotesque" (751).

dency to follow their passions, showed that they could not be trusted with the discretionary power needed to bring harmony and unity to Christendom and lead a united front against its enemies.[160]

Nevertheless, through all attempts at explanation and evaluation, the letters remain a marvel and monument of humanist writing and a mine of information, insight, and entertainment. And since Aeneas was not above revising his works as the years went by, they also offer an opportunity to fill out or balance the better-known works and achieve a fuller, more satisfying portrait of the man and the ever-evolving stages of his journey from conciliarism to papalism. As the letters have done so many times before, they make us eager to wrestle Aeneas into one true form. Even then this protean figure, whenever we encounter him in all his richness and complexity, continues to elude our grasp.

160. O'Brien, "A Dialogue with Conciliarism."