

OPPORTUNISM OR SELF AWARENESS: THE MISUNDERSTOOD PERSONA OF POPE PIUS II

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the misconstrued personality regarding one of the most famous rhetorician, humanist, diplomat, and prelate of the Italian Renaissance, Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464), better known by his papal name: Pope Pius II (1458-1464). This work extends beyond studies that focus exclusively on his handling of the affairs at the Council of Basel (1431-1449) and his involvement and support for the Conciliarist movement in which Piccolomini was cast as an opportunist whose “pen was at the service of the highest bidder.” In addition, this study deconstructs the notion of rank opportunism, which currently prevails in the context of his achievements and presents a more rational explanation for his behavior when he switched from being an advocate of the Conciliarist movement to an adamant member of the Holy See. In the process, he adopted a firm stance on crusading, a goal for which he would sacrifice his life leading a crusade against Mohammed II to regain control of the fallen city of Constantinople in May 1453.

KEY WORDS

Councils, Church, Popes, Bulls, Spain, Muslim, Constantinople, Crusade.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Consilia, Ecclesia, Papae, Bullae, Hispania, Mahometanus, Constantinopolis, Sacrae Crucis militiae.

Scholarship has yet to portray accurately the motivations of humanist, diplomat, rhetorician and prelate Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (1405-64), known also as Pope Pius II. The few studies that do exist on Piccolomini's life focus exclusively on his activities as they relate to the Council of Basel (1431-1449), where he first distinguished himself as a church authority, and cast him as an opportunist who exercised his newfound power solely as a means to advance his own aims. Morimichi Watanabe, for example, characterizes Piccolomini as a corrupt official whose "pen was at the service of the highest bidder"¹. Others, such as Thomas Izbicki, refer to his political and personal indiscretions as unfortunate yet very glaring aspects of his papal legacy². However, a full consideration of Piccolomini's life reveals that the man who rose to power as Pius II in 1458 was successful in adapting himself to meet the numerous challenges he and his contemporaries faced in the complex and corrupt environment of the fifteenth-century Catholic Church. Despite Watanabe's and others' statements to the contrary, Piccolomini did not abandon viewpoints or loyalties in order to seize opportunities that advanced his station in life. Although he at times changed his opinions about political and religious issues throughout his long career as a prelate, he did not do so capriciously. Piccolomini's changed stances on key disputes within the church, such as his decision to oppose the Council that he had defended for decades, are instead attributable to several factors: the corruption of the prelates and monarchs of his day, historical events which forced him to revise his strategies, and his own maturation as a learned scholar and prelate. Piccolomini's complex personality has caused many scholars to err as to his true identity; this statement is better understood by Rowe's words: "Yet for all the attention lavished upon him, there has been little agreement in the interpretation of Aeneas's personality and historical significance. Since the days of Burckhardt, the fifteenth century in Italy has elicited different interpretations, and it is only natural that this diversity be reflected in the treatment of one who was, as all admit, the mirror of the ages. Besides, it must be acknowledged that his life is so enigmatic in so many ways that agreement over its final meaning is probably impossible"³. For all to agree about Piccolomini's life 'is probably impossible'; yet, I will demonstrate another facet of this multifaceted individual. The purpose of this study is to deconstruct the notion of rank opportunism, which currently prevails in the context of his achievements and to present a more rational explanation for his behavior later on in life when he adopted a firm stance on crusading. Pius II originally sought to do no more than regain his family's lost estate and only afterward to achieve success in the realm of ecclesiastical affairs.

The Piccolomini family had arrived in Siena from Rome in the twelfth century and quickly established themselves as one of the most dominant families in the

1. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini*. Thomas M. Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, Philip Krey, eds. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006: 234.

2. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 203.

3. Rowe, John Gordon. "The Tragedy of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II): An Interpretation". *Church History*, 30 (1961): 288.



region.⁴ They were always in opposition to the current political establishment: loyal to the Guelphs when Siena was Ghibelline, noble and conservative when Siena was Guelph. Their wealth grew as they shared alliances with the Guelphs who protected the local aristocracy and the Church against the Ghibellines who supported the imperial power of the Hohenstaufens. The source of their income was not only attributable to the vast tracts of land they possessed but also to their banking and trading activities with other affluent families of the region. Given the unstable political environment among the two parties, however, the Piccolomini estates were often under attack and their capital diminished. By 4 September 1260, the Sienese Ghibellines ascended to power by defeating the Florentine Guelphs in the battle of Montaperti. From this date forward the Piccolomini family began its ineluctable political and economical descent.⁵

Silvio, the grandfather of he who would one day become pope, died at a young age leaving his wife pregnant with his son, Silvio Posthumous, who, with little income, was unable to maintain his household and found himself forced to take up arms in the service of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, duke of Milan. His military career was disastrous and soon he returned to Corsignano⁶ to be with his wife Vittoria Forteguerri, a woman of patrician descent but lamentably without a dowry.

Given that his family had lost their fortune even before his birth, young Aeneas had no recourse but to help out on the farm with his father, becoming the head of the household after his father enlisted in the army. At the age of 18, Aeneas, already a man, decided to make the short trip to Siena where he would initiate his academic

4. The genealogical tree of the Piccolomini's was ordained in 1685 by Francesco Piccolomini, nephew of our future Pope Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini. It consists of 311 branches in which we observe matrimonial alliances with very prominent families in the world of domestic and foreign politics. Among these lineages we find the Farnese, the king of Naples, the Sassonia Lawenburg, the Borgia, the Carraffa, the Colona, the Caracciolo, Del Carreto, the Gonzaga, the Malaspina, the Sani, the Orsini, the Sforza, the Santacroce, the Strozzi, the Savelli, the Vitelleschi, the Capranica, and the Caetani.

5. Two decades later in 1280 with the pacification of the Ghibelline families, the Piccolominis' started to prosper once more, but never again to where they once were. They bought extensive land in and around Siena. Once again, envy from other families made them lose a lot of their properties, but by mid fourteenth century enough land for plowing was in their possession. In a letter addressed to Emperor Segismund in 1437, Aeneas's resentment towards Florence and the Guelphs is obvious: "Florence, I say, which is the headquarters of the Guelphs? Do you understand what the name Guelph means: a Guelph is one who resists the empire; a Ghibelline, one who obeys it. What city is a grater rebel against the empire than Florence: Which is more envious?" (Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 118).

6. Corsignano was acquired in 1351 by Eneas di Corradino, great grandfather of Eneas Silvio. Our future pope, Pius II never stopped loving his native town. Soon after his appointment as pope, Corsignano's name was changed to Pienza (1462) in a decree in which was elevated from church to cathedral, creating at the same time a join bishopric with Montalcino. Pienza was taken from the dioceses of Chiusi and Montalcino from Arezzo. Pius II gives us a more detailed account of this merger in book nine of his *Commentaries*. The architect of the palace in Pienza was Bernardo Rossellino. The palace in Siena, better known as the *Loggia* was erected by Giacomo and other members of the Piccolomini family a few years after the construction of the palace in Pienza. The architect was Antonio Federighi. For more in the subject of the creation of the bishopric of Pienza see Giuseppe Chironi's article. (Chironi, Giuseppe. "Pius II and the Formation of the Ecclesiastical Institutions of Pienza", *Pius II 'El Più Espeditivo Pontifice' Selected Studies on Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405-0464)*, Zweder von Martels, Arjo Vanderjaggy, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2003: 171-185).



career: "At eighteen, in Siena, he started studying full time ... so diligently that he did not give himself time to eat nor sleep. ... He woke up before dawn and when he went to bed, he always had a book with him. ... Aeneas had a very disciplined mind and was apt to learning."⁷ From 1423-1431, Siena would become his home and as he sets forth in his *Commentaries*: "After he had worked for a few years in the field with his father, Aeneas moved to the city ... started to study grammar. Then, studied with passion poets and orators; finally, studied law" (Book I). Obtaining his Law degree was the first step towards becoming an influential player for the Conciliarist movement which he would defend for decades until he became an absolute defender of the universal Church.

What made Aeneas take both sides of the Conciliarist movement? He was an extremely intelligent person. Opportunistic as some scholars have framed him? No. Was luck on his side? Some critics might argue it was luck. I, instead, believe he was a fabricator of ideas and ideals.⁸ He has been criticized for his opportunistic flair and lack of loyalty to his masters: "[a] friend or opponent of the Council [where] his primary concern was the pursuit of his own career"⁹. On the contrary, he was very loyal to his supporters. Speaking of his relationship with his master Frederick III (1440-1493), Aeneas comments: "I shall try to stand well with the king. I shall obey him and follow him. His desire will be mine"¹⁰. As we shall see later, his political views began to change from Conciliarist to pro papal soon after his coronation as poet laureate in 1442.

We must ask ourselves why Aeneas was not a supporter of the Church prior to 1442. Given that the Piccolomini estate was left in ruins, he had no access to ecclesiastical circles, which could only be penetrated via wealth and political power. Therefore, it is not a surprise that he promoted, a large number of family members to ecclesiastical offices once he became pope, including his only nephew as cardinal, one who later would become Pope Pius III (1503).¹¹ His love for Siena and Corsignano, his birth place, was clear. Of a total of 820 appointments

7. All citations from Piccolomini's *Commentaries* come from Florence A. Gragg and Leona C. Gabel's edition. Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta have published two volumes of Pius II *Commentaries* (Pius II, Pope. *Commentarii rerum memorabilium*, Margaret Meserve, Marcello Simonetta, eds. Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2003).

8. I agree with Simonetta, "Pius II was by no means a naïve politician, blinded by dreams of eternal glory. The call for the crusade was a necessary ploy in the efforts to reestablish the Church's central role in European spirituality. It served also to distance all the schismatic tendencies of the councils, which Piccolomini had known personally in the early part of his career" (Pius II. *Commentarii rerum memorabilium*...: 169). His main concern from the beginning was to regain economical and political control and to give his family name the dignity once it possessed.

9. Watanabe, Morimichi. "Authority and Cosent in Church Government: Panormitanus, Aeneas Sylvius, Cusanus". *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33/2 (1972): 234.

10. Watanabe, Morimichi. "Authority and Cosent in Church Government...": 234.

11. Pius III (1439-1503) was born in Siena as Francesco Todeschini. Pius II allowed him to assume his family name and arms and took care of his legal studies at Perugia. His uncle made him archbishop of Siena, and few weeks later, deacon of S. Eustachio; he was only twenty-one. As a man of culture, he founded the Piccolomini library to house his uncle's writings, entrusting the decoration to Pinturicchio (1502). Sadly, after his coronation as pope on 8 October, Pius III died ten days later.



recorded in the 788 bulls of Reg. Vat., 515, 516, 517, 122, fully 14.9% went to Sienese compatriots and relatives of the pope. An additional 71 appointments or 8.6% were among those recommended by various ecclesiastics and secular powers. Pius II sought to reaffirm friendships, reward loyalty and assure political support by granting appointments recommended by allies in the hierarchy to positions of strategic secular power. Alliances were thus strengthened with Cardinals Prospero Colonna, Rodrigo Borgia, and Latino Orsini, and with Emperor Frederick II. We should not forget that it was Colonna who cast the decisive vote in favor of then Cardinal Piccolomini in the conclave of 1458¹².

Piccolomini's only strategy to recover his family's lost fortune was by playing a political game which required partaking in secular as well as ecclesiastical affairs. Aeneas's grandnephews and nieces married into wealthy and powerful families. The grandchildren of Aeneas's sister, Laudamia, bear surnames which encompass the major houses of Italy: d'Aragona, Colonna, Farnese, Orsini, Sanseverino, Caracciolo, Appiani, Bandini, de Franchi, Savelli, and Acquaviva. Through political alliances, a more mature Aeneas was able to recover an ample part of the family patrimony.¹³ He knew from the very beginning that the only way to recover his family fortune was through politics, by gaining political strength, and then, breaking into ecclesiastical circles. I agree with Chironi who affirms that "the politics of patronage of Pius II in the ecclesiastical realm was the fruit neither of passion nor of whim, but that it was based upon a precise strategy of political and patrimonial preservation, the true significance of which has not been recognized clearly before"¹⁴. The concept of patrimonial preservation was very vivid in Piccolomini's mind and being loyal to his superiors was one way to help him achieve it.

Aeneas was also loyal to his teachers. Panormitanus taught law at Siena between 1418 and 1430 and we could assume that Aeneas took classes from him. Panormitanus supported René of Anjou as king of Naples; he was also in favor of the Council despite being employed by Alfonso V of Aragón (1416-1458) who was against Eugenius IV and who was later deposed as pope on 25 June 1439. Aeneas served as master of ceremonies to elect Amadeus VIII, duke of Savoy as the antipope Felix V (1439-1449) on 5 November of that same year. As a reward, Felix V made Aeneas papal secretary in 1440. Panormitanus perceived the pope as *dei vicarius in terris* but argued that the Pope was there to execute the Council's decrees and not to use His *plenitudo potestatis* to destroy the *status ecclesiae*. This was the same vision that Aeneas shared at the beginning of his political career. He was not interested in ecclesiastical matters just yet; he was barely beginning to understand the secular affairs of his day when he first entered public life as

12. Hilary, Richard. "The Nepotism of Pope Pius II, 1458-1464". *Catholic Historical Review*, 64 (1978): 34.

13. "The already considerable patrimony was increase both by the nephews of the pope —with new canonries in Siena and Rome— and by other members of the family who had made use of it for furthering their careers, for instance the bishops of Pienza, Girolamo, senior (1517) and Francesco Maria, senior (1584)" (Chironi, Giuseppe. "Pius II and the Formation of the Ecclesiastical Institutions...": 185).

14. Chironi, Giuseppe. "Pius II and the Formation of the Ecclesiastical Institutions...": 185.



a secretary of Domenico Capranica, Cardinal of Fermo around 1432.¹⁵ An early letter to Capranica reflects his image as a young man who is eager to take on the world. "Aeneas's extravagant style of expression, pungent observations, and ear for gossip"¹⁶ are rhetorical techniques which will disappear as he grows older and wiser. One year later, Aeneas is already offering advice to the Sienese government on how to receive the Council's envoys to the Italian princes and communes.

By 1437, Aeneas addressed a letter to the Emperor Segismund, who played a prominent role in the Council of Constance and also in the early years of the Council of Basel, pointing out the dangers of the Venetians becoming part of the Holy Roman Empire: "Excellent emperor, it is your duty to see this; it is your duty to avoid the danger. But I do not know how you are to avoid it while you help the Venetians, whom I fear far more than the Florentines. As they are more powerful, they aspire even more to empire, which they have said was given to them on the day on which Eugenius was made pope. They thought that this would create so many cardinals from among the Venetians that the papacy always would belong to the Venetians, helping them seize even the empire. This already would have been done concerning the cardinals if the Council had not resisted, but once the Council is gone, I foresee we will return to the same state of affairs"¹⁷. During these early years of his political career Aeneas is very much in favor of the Conciliarist movement and completely opposed to pro papal affairs.

Aeneas's political strength increased by the day. In the summer of 1440 in a letter to Juan de Segovia we see Aeneas courting the favors of the recently crowned Amadeus VIII as antipope Felix V: "It rarely was heard that the pontiffs of the Romans were crowned in general councils. You, however, have heard that Alexander V was crowned at Pisa, and Martin V at Constance. But this coronation excels those as much as Felix V exceeds them in nobility. This is the opinion of those who contemplate these events, and thus I will relate them, but with few words. I do not write, then, as a historian, but, as the servant of a lord"¹⁸. There is no such thing as relating these events modestly; Aeneas goes very much into detail describing the event and bringing out Felix's most outstanding personal traits: "At the beginning of the day, Felix, the pope-elect, came to all those waiting persons, venerable with white hair, graceful in bearing and appearance, displaying singular prudence. ... His speech was sparing and fretful. ... Felix showed himself so well versed in them that he needed no prompter, and no one had thought that this father who had passed forty years or more engaged in secular affairs ever could have had such leisure to be so instructed in the rites of the church"¹⁹. Aeneas continues with a vivid description of the ceremony. It would not be long before he became conscious of the fact that the Conciliarist movement was embroiled with severe internal conflicts which was

15. For all references on Piccolomini's letters I make use of Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*

16. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 61.

17. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 119.

18. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 126.

19. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 127-128.



an impediment to pursue his goal of recovering his estate. Soon, he would serve the Curia.

The winds of Fortune kept blowing Aeneas's way. By 1442 he left the service of the Council of Basel for that of Frederick III, king of the Romans, who in 27 July 1442 crowned him poet laureate at the Diet of Frankfurt. It is during this time that he saw himself as a person whom he could admire and who could take a neutral stance with regard to his own self interest, a person who had been brought into the Eugenic party by papal bribes. Nonetheless, Aeneas would still defend the council: "... in every matter, if the pope is unwilling to obey the council, he scandalizes and disturbs the universal church through the crime of disobedience. For, as will be said below, the council represents the universal church, and I am not afraid to say that it is the church. Perhaps you will ask whether the council surpasses the pope in collations to benefices and trivial matters. Even then I say, 'In everything'"²⁰ and continues, "If ever disagreement should occur between pope and council, when they do not wish matters to be handled badly, the opinion of the council is to be followed; and the pope will err indeed, if, after he has expressed his opinion, he resists defiantly the opinion of the synod"²¹. This is one of the most poignant letters where Aeneas shows his alliance to the Council. He is also extremely committed to the king when he finds himself in Vienna working in the imperial chancery as a poet and secretary. Nevertheless, Aeneas did not disconnect himself completely from the Roman Curia. He made sure to stay in contact with close advisors from the Eugenic camp such as Giovanni Campisio: "Thus, you will find me here with the king to whom I have committed myself willingly since I have become involved in the storm in the church, as if in the safest port so that, free from the dissensions of prelates in this sort of business, I might live life and enjoy myself in it"²². By the end of 1443 Aeneas's views start to change due to the tumultuous shifting of power from the Conciliarist movement towards the Curia. For Aeneas, this change in power meant one step closer to regaining part of his lost patrimony.

When it became apparent that Alfonso V, king of Aragón, would triumph over René of Anjou and the kingdom of Naples, Eugenius IV abandoned his alliance with Anjou to support Alfonso. In turn, the king of Aragón abandoned the Conciliarist movement for the Curia. This event would have a deep impact on how Aeneas would perceive politics: "The king of Aragón who, after the fashion of princes, does not want the kingdom to serve the faith but the faith to serve the kingdom, ordered his prelates to leave Basel. Conversely, the French, Venetians, and Florentines who, so to speak, had worshipped their Pope Eugenius like a god, after king René was driven from Apulia, also changed sides, an amazing turn of events. Those who favored the council are attacking it, and those who once attacked it now favor it. The church is now a game. We see the ball knocked about by the blows of the players. But God watches from on high, and, although He rarely afflicts us with fitting punishments

20. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 144.

21. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 146.

22. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 151.



on earth, in His supreme judgment He leaves no wrong unpunished"²³. Alliances, which he once assumed were sacred, he now realizes are nothing but a political game, a match in which his team is losing against the Curia.²⁴

Yet again, Aeneas distressed for not having received help from those whom he had represented and in whose favor he had spoken out at Basel, becomes somewhat infuriated when he sees no aid from them to secure a benefice: "Your words which you declared to me at the end in Basel were to this effect when you said that our most sacred lord Felix was going to provide for me, present or absent, with some benefice, and you pledged your efforts to it —of which matter no result has followed"²⁵. By the end of 1443, Aeneas is angry with the results at Basel and his protestations appear more frequent. Once more, in another letter addressed to Juan de Carvajal, Aeneas offers a trenchant critique of both factions dividing the unity of the Church: "It was my intention after I had left Basel to observe a lasting silence about ecclesiastical affairs when I saw they were ruled not by the leading of the Holy Spirit but by human passions. You now force me to say something, you who advise me to emulate the armed Aeneas. I would rather keep silent than speak because my words will be pleasing to none of the parties, just as no party pleases me. You wish that I should speak. I will comply, but be warned that you might hear things that displease you. You watch over the right of one party. What am I to tell you that would please, since I am praising neither party? ... I am like Parmeno, full of cracks"²⁶. Here Aeneas, two years before he would take Holy orders, is finally breaking down morally. He is not being opportunistic as mentioned before but instead, standing on neutrality, is driven by the inefficiency of the Conciliarist movement to get things done, rather than, seizing an opportune moment to scale the ecclesiastical ranks.

Early in 1444, Aeneas makes a full circle in his political career; from conciliarist now back to renew his ties with Domenico Capranica. This time not to work under him, but instead, to ask the cardinal to commend him to Eugenius IV and thus taking a major step toward rejecting the Conciliarist movement and by default, accepting the pontiff who Aeneas at one point entirely rejected as the head of the Church: "I ask earnestly, above all, that you commend me at the feet of our most holy lord, whose estate I endeavor to promote as far as my small estate permits"²⁷. By mid-summer, Aeneas dismisses the notion of neutrality as a "new snare" in a letter to Juan de Carvajal. From here on, he would be one hundred percent devoted to the Church and against all diets which he considered dangerous to the progress of the Church: "All diets are fecund, one having another in its womb. ... For many years now we have had diets, and there is yet no end. Affairs are stormy, souls divided. It pleases some to keep neutrality in force because it is a new snare. Those

23. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 158-159.

24. Later on, during his papacy he would restore things and passed a bull *Execrabilis* where the papal authority would have supreme power. This bull ended the Conciliar Era.

25. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 165.

26. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 171-172.

27. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 185.



with possession of benefices are the foes of union because they wish to give way to no man's right"²⁸. Later, he would also add: "There has yet to be a diet which has not brought forth another diet. I believe, because the word *dieta* is feminine, that diets readily are impregnated and give birth. Should not this custom perish?"²⁹. By fall, Aeneas engages in the first two stages of mysticism to prepare himself for what is to come: *via purgatio* and *via contemplatio*. Not only does he reject the Conciliarist movement but submerges himself in the Holy Scriptures: "Already I have grown old. Worldly literature does not attract me any more. I wish to plunge into the depths of the gospel and drink there that water which keeps him who imbibes it from tasting eternal death. This world is nothing, and the man who chases after it is deceived. Blessed is he who has hope of eternal life and who places his joy in Christ"³⁰. For Aeneas there would be no turning back; he would fully pledge his support for the Curia.

As time passed, Aeneas would become more outspoken in favor of the Church; nevertheless, his support for the Conciliarist movement at Basel would come to haunt him. In the fall of 1447 in a letter addressed to the rector of the University of Cologne, Jordan Mallant, Aeneas sets an apologetic tone for his efforts in supporting the Conciliarist movement for which he blames his youth and the leading men of his time whom he had trusted. Aeneas blames his inexperience; however, he maintains himself truthful to his beliefs: "It is ruinous to abandon truth, not opinion". His opinion changed, yet not his convictions. He gives credit to his maturity for leaving Basel: "I withdrew from Basel and renounced its errors, when I discovered that the city was a harlot, which has opened my mist-covered eyes and illuminated me with the rays of his splendor, since I sinned out of ignorance. I erred, I admit, after the manner of Basel and walked in its crimes. ... I spoke foolishly; wrote more foolishly. And, because I thought I was knowledgeable, I was not ashamed to write pamphlets and disparage with ignorant opinions the power of the Roman pontiff. I thought the things that were said were true and wrote from hearsay. ... The falsehoods of many fed my error"³¹. Aeneas also accuses Eugenius of falsehoods and therefore his

28. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 190.

29. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 237.

30. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 205.

31. Aeneas continues his defense in the following manner: "At the time, I, a baby bird, had hastened down from school in Siena, and knew nothing of the ways of the Roman court or Eugenius's career. I thought everything I heard was true. I took those who spoke on faith, was sustained in their errors, and joined with them. When they suspended Eugenius, I took part in the deposition. When the one whom they call pope was "desecrated," I by no means withdrew. But I became miserable and stupid. More stupidly, I was polluted by their foolishness and was sunken in the pits of sin, and I would not ever have emerged had not compassion looked down on me from on high. They often find mercy who sin out of ignorance. No one, once returned to grace, knowingly stands revealed as a sinner. The wicked man, when he has fallen into the depths of sin, is held in contempt. Thereupon follow disgrace and opprobrium. ... I am not tainted but grieved by my part at Basel. I do not deny but rather shudder at what I said and wrote. I am afraid lest I bear the punishment for these things. May God have mercy on me according to His great mercy; may He be gracious unto me, a sinner. May He not remember the faults of my youth and my ignorance; may He ease me from my crimes while I have set my sight toward heaven and spoken against Christ our Lord. Erring, I have erred. I acknowledge my fault, and I give thanks to a



[Aeneas] late departure from Basel: "Eugenius committed some things he would have done better to have omitted, perhaps many. As a man, he erred often, and the Lord corrected him"³². Here, Aeneas attempts to persuade his listeners to forgive him by comparing himself to the pope, and to make his argument stronger he quotes from the Scriptures: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" [John 1:6]. Six years later the illustrious city of Constantinople would fall to the Turks, an event which would leave its mark upon Aeneas for the rest of his life. He would, from then on, become inextricably involved in the idea of crusade. His fervor to defend the Church from the Turkish threat would grow to the point that he would give his life for this cause.

By summer of 1453, news of the fall of Constantinople had already reached Italy. Aeneas relates this event to Nicholas of Cusa, once a prominent member of the Council of Basel but now a cardinal under Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455). Cusa was one of the most gifted and influential churchmen of the time. Here in this letter we can appreciate the frustrations and the fervor for mounting a crusade to regain control of the Holy city of Constantinople.³³ Aeneas paints a rather disturbing picture of what happened and the perils of not winning Constantinople back from the Ottoman Turks: "The emperor of New Rome, having been captured, is reputed to have been beheaded soon afterward. Priests and all the monks were mutilated with diverse torments and killed. All the rest of the common people were given over to the sword. There was such an effusion of blood that rivers of gore flowed through the city. ... The people who hate our religion will leave nothing there holy, nothing clean. Either they will destroy all the noble temples; or, certainly, they will profane them. ... or will be subjected to the filth of Mohammed"³⁴. Aeneas is not only saddened by the notion of sacred temples being destroyed and profaned but he also questions the continuation of the humanities, a field of study he never forgot, even when he became pope: "Into whose hands Greek eloquence will fall I do not know. Who of sound mind will not mourn? Where now will we seek fluent genius? The river of all doctrines is cut off; the fount of the Muses is dried up. Where now is poetry to be sought? Where now philosophy? I admit that the study of letters is illustrious in many places among the Latins, as at Rome, Paris, Bologna, Padua, Siena, Perugia, Cologne, Vienna, Salamanca, Oxford, Pavia, Erfurt. But all of these

faithful God who did not leave me to err worse. Let no one think me so bound by what I have written that I may not change my opinion. The human race would be in a bad way if it could not change its assumptions. Augustine wrote books of retractions. We are free all the way to death; the final decision judges us. But accept the outcome, for I have obtained mercy" (Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 276-277).

32. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 278.

33. Constantinople was a holy city, one of the five patriarchal cities of ancient Christianity, and the capital of the Greek empire. The others were: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Later on, as Pope Pius II, claimed that "among the purposes he had at heart none was dearer than that of rousing Christians against the Turks and declaring war upon them" (Piccolomini, Aeneas Sylvius. *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II: An Abridgment*, Florence Gragg, Leona Gabel, eds. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1959: 115-116).

34. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 310.



are rivers derived from the fountains of the Greeks. A river cut off from its source dries up. Where will you find water in a river when you find its source dried up? I cannot but mourn, holy father, when I see such a downfall of letters"³⁵. Through these words we observe his lasting devotion to the humanities, even though he is no longer dedicated to cultivate these fields of knowledge.³⁶

Aeneas also tries to instill the fear of an imminent attack now that the Turks have captured Constantinople and by doing so he pleads for an internal resolution for the wars being fought among his countrymen: "The situation is bad; hope is much diminished. We see the slaughter of the Greeks; next we expect the ruin of the Latins. The nearby house has been burned; now we await the fire. Who now lies between us and the Turks? A little earth and a little water separates us. Now the sword of the Turks hangs over our necks; and meanwhile we wage internal wars. We persecute brothers, and we permit the foes of the cross to grow fat on us. Germans are angered by Germans; and Italian hand sheds Italian blood. Neither the French nor the Spaniards agree among themselves. Everywhere there are feuds between neighbors, immortal hate, and wounds hard to cure... The leader of the Turks chose an opportune time for himself. He safely invaded the Greeks while the Latins accepted divisions among themselves. May God take away from him the thought of invading us at last, since we are at odds. Brother does not trust brother, nor father trust son. This will happen to us unless divine pity lends aid"³⁷. Aeneas, aware of the internal divisions dividing his country, doubts that if Mohammed were to attack, Italy would be able to defend itself.³⁸

For Aeneas and other ecclesiastical figures, the fall of Constantinople was a punishment not just for the Greeks but also for all Christians. Aeneas trying to convince cardinal Cusa, to wage war against the infidel gives him the dire news: "This is a great loss; but it is even worse that we see the Christian faith undermined and driven into a corner. For what once occupied the whole world is driven from Asia and Lybia; nor is it permitted to be undisturbed in Europe. The Tartars and the

35. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 312.

36. The notion of the Turks as a threat to learning and high culture was widespread as a hate-tool with the purpose of propaganda. "According to Lauro Quirini, a Venetian humanist living in Crete, more than 120,000 volumes were destroyed by the Turks." See Bisasha, Nancy. "New Barbarian" or Worthy Adversary? Humanist Constructs of the Ottoman Turks in Fifteenth-Century Italy", *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, David R. Blanks, Michael Frassetto, eds. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999: 190 (docs. n° 31, 34). Also, Peter of Cluny described Mohammed as "a poor, vile, unlettered Arab who achieved wealth and power through bloodshed, thievery, and intrigue" (Tolan, John V. *Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002: 157).

37. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 315.

38. Aeneas is not alone in this line of thought that unless Europe unites there will be no victory against the infidels. "Coluccio Salutati, Florentine chancellor from 1375 to 1406, expressed his admiration for the Turks on one important occasion. In a letter of 1397, Salutati discusses the threat the Turks posed to Christendom, rendered disunited and vulnerable by the papal schism. While Europeans are fighting amongst themselves, he argues, the unified Turks are expanding their empire with their formidable military machine. He describes and praises at length the austerity and rigor of Turkish military life, and, what is more shocking, he even praises the *devshirme*, or 'boy tribute'" (Bisasha, Nancy. "New Barbarian" or Worthy Adversary?...": 194).



Turks hold much of the land beyond the Don and the Hellespont. The Saracens, too, occupy a kingdom among the Spaniards. Little of the world retains the name of Christ. The land in which our God was seen for thirty years and, more fully man, conversed with me, which he illuminated with miracles, which he dedicated with his own blood, in which the flowers of the first resurrection, the enemies of the cross have trampled for a long time because of our sins".³⁹ Such was Aeneas's anger at loosing Constantinople that when he was a bishop under Nicholas V, he took action by telling him that future historians would blame him for losing the imperial city: "I am certain Your Holiness is affected with great grief and deeply deplores the outcome of this matter —and with reason ... For all Latin writers who shall relate the deeds of the popes, when they come to your time shall write of your glory in this wise: 'Nicholas, the fifth pope of that name, of Tuscany, reigned thus many years; he retrieved the patrimony of the Church from the hands of tyrants; he restored unity to a divided church; he added Bernardino of Siena to the catalog of saints; he constructed the palace of St. Peter; he restored St. Peter's basilica in a wondrous way; he celebrated the jubilee; he crowned Frederick III.' They shall say all these beautiful and seemly things of your name, but what they shall add at the end will ruin everything: 'but in his time the royal city of Constantinople was captured and sacked by the Turks'"⁴⁰. Later on, as Pope Pius II he will urge the Church and princes alike to join in a crusade to defeat the Turks or face the disastrous consequences of not taking action.

Aeneas would make use of three rhetorical devices to move his crusade forward: *ratio*, *culpa*, and *divide et impera*. Aeneas believed that a crusade would not fail because if *ratio* was not sufficient reason to take up arms, fear of what might happen if the Turks conquered Italy would be sufficient to wage war: "Either reason will persuade or the soul will fear what might happen in the future in such a case of necessity to the nobility of the Rhinelanders, the magnanimity of the French, the prudence of the Italians, the fortitude of the Spaniards, or the audacity of the English. Indeed, such a nearness of locations will warn the Bohemians, the Hungarians, the Poles. So it will be, believe me; the crusade will be launched with the common consent of all Christians"⁴¹. He not only believes that the Holy Roman Empire is stronger but also bigger in size and more resourceful: "Our land is fecund with strong men able to put together an innumerable army. It will have the robust breast of youth in arms. Whether you ask about men, horses, or arms, Christians are superior to Turks. There

39. Aeneas continues: "The first time Charlemagne reclaimed that land; then Godfrey recovered the lost city. To retain it even Conrad Caesar and Louis, king of France did not hesitate to proceed into Asia with assembled armies. But, since afterward our princes gave themselves over to discord, neither Jerusalem nor Antioch nor Acre remains in our power. Whatever we held in Asia we lost dishonorably; fleeing, we left the victory to Mohammed. A prodigious expulsion and a great withdrawal. Truly, was it more tolerable to lose the cities which we held among our foes than to be expelled from these cities which once were founded by Christians in our own land?" (Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 313-314).

40. Pertusi, Agostino. *La Caduta di Constantinopoli*. Rome: Fondazione L. Valla, 1976: 46-48; Hankins, James. "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II". *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49 (1995): 133.

41. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 317.



is nothing that impedes us except either our negligence or our dissension. Whether we fight on sea or on land, we wish only to be victors. Even Italy alone could take arms against Greece, Asia, Lybia, and Egypt. What if she acts now with the added forces of Germany and France? We know from the memory of our ancestors how many times the forces of the Latins assembled, the peoples of the East trembled, and our armies always returned victorious"⁴². Nevertheless, Aeneas does not rule out the possibility of losing a war against the Turks. Even though he makes sure to point out the magnanimity of the Christian people and armies, he is still not convinced if the Curia can be victorious due to the sinful ways of the Christian people: "Unless perhaps God, angered by the sins of the people, inflicted either pestilence or famine on our forces. For, when Mars was manifest, victory always belonged to the Latins. If the Christian people now, with good souls, not moved by avarice nor eager for vainglory, but alight only with zeal for God, for the safety of our brothers, for the law of Christ, for increase of the Catholic faith, took up arms, the Lord would look down upon his people from on high, without a doubt; and, rejoicing over the sons of men, he would safeguard his heritage. He would bestow with his audacious right hand, if we persevere, not just triumph over the Turk but over the Saracens, too, and over other barbarian nations"⁴³. The second concept is *culpa*, guilt by not taking arms. In a letter addressed to Nicholas V Aeneas comments: "You should have seen old men with venerable gray hair offering their hands with a prompt heart for this expedition. They said they would be blessed to die if they fell fighting against the impious barbarian"⁴⁴. Lastly, he uses the topos of *divide et impera*. Mohammed was not gaining territory because he was more dangerous or more skillful at war, but because the European Christians were divided. Mohammed's troops were not more numerous nor more powerful than those of Western Europe, but it would take a nation united to confront the enemy forces of Islam. Aeneas was aware of the deficiency of being divided at home; therefore, in his *Epistola ad Mahometem II*, he argues for unification: "Some belittle Christians while they magnify your strength, others place their hope... in the divisions and conflicts which come between our people and believe that it is not difficult for outsiders to conquer those who are divided at home. ... Do you think that dissension will be conducive to your desires and so trust in Christian disharmony? All Christians will come together if ever they hear that you are approaching the heartland of Christendom. You cannot do anything better for peace among Christians than invade Christendom with great, strong forces, for all private hatreds will stop when a threat to all is sensed:

42. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 317.

43. Piccolomini in an attempt to rouse Christian peoples to fight against the infidel makes use of both: Christian and pagan sources to gain support on his crusade mission. Martels points out: "It is characteristic of Piccolomini's view of tradition that in addition to Christian sources he quotes pagan ones in support. He leaves it to Cicero (*Somnium Scipionis* 13.13) to confirm the idea common among Christians that everyone who does something for his country will receive a sure place in heaven, and he adds that this is even more certain and true for the defenders of the Christian faith against the impious Turks" (Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 221).

44. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 317.



with combined forces arms will be taken up against a common enemy. And do not think it necessary that all Christianity come together—which we confess is a difficult thing—to throw back your advances, to blunt your attack, and to throw out your forces. One of our four nations will be enough and more than enough to scatter your armies”.⁴⁵ Continuing with the topos of *divide et impera*, he expresses: “Someone may say—as we have already mentioned—that the intestine quarrels which embroil our people can provide an entrance into Italy for you and that if one ruler shuts you out, another will take you in and provide an entrance. There are of course divisions, hatreds, and rivalries among Italians which are deep, numerous, and dangerous—how I wish this were not so!—but there is no one who wants to be subject to a non-Christian master and all want to die in the orthodox faith. No one is eager to leave his religion. You will find that you will be unable to do here what your ancestors did with the Greeks when they gave aid to two sides in their struggle for power, now to one side, now to the other and weaker one, until both were exhausted and enervated; then they overcame them both and got control of their kingdoms”⁴⁶.

Pius II is simply following one side of the humanist current, the most attainable one, of *divide et impera*. However, as James Hankins observes, “other humanists regarded as impractical the policy of uniting all of Christendom in peace antecedently to declaring a crusade. An alternative, more realistic project was to induce one of the kings of Christendom—Alfonso of Aragon, the king of France or the duke of Burgundy—to unite with the Venetians and form a simple bilateral force against the Turk”⁴⁷. I disagree with Hankins on the basis that Alfonso of Aragón who had tremendous power did not have amicable relations with the Roman curia. Hankins later states: “The anti-Turkish policies he [Alfonso of Aragon] favored publicly were in any case quite different from those of the pope. Alfonso promoted a policy of encirclement and expressed a willingness to ally himself with the Mamluks and other Muslim rivals of the Ottomans. The pope, on the other hand, could not be seen to be in league with Islamic powers, yet was eager to keep Alfonso occupied with foreign adventures; if Alfonso were engaged elsewhere, he could not continue his habitual incursions into the Papal State”⁴⁸. Pius II truly wanted to work from within his territory and then perhaps bring other nations to embrace his cause.

David Abulafia also supports my theory that Alfonso of Aragón did not have a close relationship with Rome. Abulafia observes: “Despite declared interest in the East, Alfonso of Aragon is usually seen as a ruler whose major concern was not the crusade against the Turk so much as self-glorification, as the new Roman Emperor (in all but name), cast in a classical mould”⁴⁹. Yet, Alfonso could not appear to show

45. Baca, Albert R. “The Art of Rhetoric of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini”. *Western Speech*, 34 (1970): 12-13.

46. Baca, Albert R. “The Art of Rhetoric of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini”....: 14.

47. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 121.

48. Pius II, Pope. *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius...*: 125.

49. Abulafia, David. “Ferrante I of Naples, Pope Pius II, and the Congress of Mantua (1459)”, *Montjoie: Studies in Crusade History in Honour of Hans Eberhard Mayer*, Benjamin Z. Kedar, Jonathan Riley-Smith, Rudolf Hiestand, eds. Aldershot: Variorum, 1997: 236.



any interest in the crusade or, indeed, any other fifteenth-century European leader. The political game consisted in showing a great deal of interest in the crusade while, nonetheless, pledging very little support, if any. Such is the case with the Venetians who had made peace with the sultan in 1430, 1446, and 1451 and were officially neutral during the siege of Constantinople. Also, the Florentines under Cosimo de' Medici were officially in favor of crusade but, given the political upheaval, help was never offered.⁵⁰ Another element Pope Pius II would use to transmit his crusading propaganda and to provoke the European nations to shift in favor of his crusade was the writings of three Renaissance thinkers: Juan de Segovia, Nicholas of Cusa, and Juan de Torquemada.

All three writers manifested genuine interest in converting Muslims. All three scholars had innovative and relatively sensitive approaches to Islam and were fully committed to the project of conversion. Cusa and Segovia both believed that a more accurate translation and close reading of the Koran were needed if a Muslim audience were to be reached. It is for this particular reason that Segovia commissioned a new translation from a Muslim jurist.

Juan de Segovia's writings influenced Aeneas in two ways: pro conciliarism and negative views on Islam. In the 1430s Aeneas worked side by side with Segovia who was known in Basel as the leading proponent of late medieval conciliarism and to a lesser degree an advocate of a peaceful resolution to the Christian-Muslim conflict. Unlike his contemporaries this Salamanican theologian advocated a pacifist approach to the conflict rather than the popular but ineffective crusade. He believed the effect of promoting crusade propaganda was negative. It only increased rather than decreased Muslim antagonism toward the Christian faith. He developed this approach towards Islam in a work entitled: *De gladio divini spiritus in corda mittendo sarracenorum*, which he also shared with two other prominent ecclesiastics present at the Council of Basel: Nicolas of Cusa and Jean Germain.

Segovia's non-threatening approach toward Christian-Muslim relations had very little impact on Aeneas's early years. Jesse D. Mann summarizes Segovia's approach in the following way: "In order to facilitate mutual understanding and to correct theological misconception on both sides, the Salamanican professor advocates high level exchanges or dialogue between Christian and Muslims intellectuals to be conducted in the presence of the civil authorities. Such a dialogue, preceded of course by a cessation of hostilities and by a deepening of cultural relations, should, in Segovia's view, proceed from points held in common, from similarities rather than differences. The psychological astuteness of this approach is obvious and has lost none of its appeal in our own day".⁵¹ We can truly affirm that Aeneas, later in life, was not sympathetic to Segovia's pacifist views. Rather, he embraced Segovia's beliefs in the origins of Islam. According to Segovia, and to many Christian authors

50. For more in this subject consult Cardini's article: Cardini, Franco. "La Repubblica di Firenze e la Crociata di Pio II". *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 3 (1979): 455-482.

51. The renowned Islamicist Montgomery Watt in a recent contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue, likewise to Segovia, seeks to emphasize those beliefs common to both religions. Mann, Jesse D. "Truth and Consequences: Juan de Segovia on Islam and Conciliarism". *Medieval Encounters*, 8/1 (2002): 84-85.



before him, Islam spread as quickly as it did because it used force, the appeal of sexual licentiousness, and the promise of a physically pleasurable after-life to attract the “naturally lustful” Arabs.⁵² Islam allegedly offered its adherents an easy route to salvation which according to Segovia, and again to many before him, required nothing more than *sola fide*. Also, according to Christian views, Muslims are too obsessed with vengery to concern themselves with knowledge; Islamic law emphasizes military over scholarly training; in an intriguing variation on the unfortunate “sun-people vs. ice-people theme,” Segovia maintains that Islam produces few scholars because Muslims inhabit regions where the climate is not conducive to study; and, Muslims are, and have been from the birth of Islam, contemptuous of reason, and they therefore avoid debate with non-Muslims.⁵³

From a Western perspective it was believed that Islam arose out of conflict. Segovia clearly considered Islam itself to be characterized by violence, moral laxity, and sexual licentiousness. The association of Islam and sex has been “a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes toward the Orient”⁵⁴. Nevertheless, Juan de Segovia opposed the Crusade following the fall of Constantinople on both moral and practical grounds. He believed it was contrary to the true nature of Christianity, and he cited the long, inglorious history of the Holy War as proof that it was not the will of God. On the contrary, it was Islam that was born of war and was sustained by it. He made it very clear that he was not opposed to Christians fighting a just war. “I want to emphasize”, he wrote, “that I do not condemn the lawful wars against the Moslems owing to their invasion of Christian lands or other similar causes, but only those undertaken with religious motives in mind or for the purpose of conversion”⁵⁵.

52. Robert Ketton commissioned by Peter of Cluny produced a full Latin version of the Koran around 1142-1143. John Tolan puts in perspective how the followers of the Koran were viewed by one of the greatest mind of the Middle Ages: Peter of Cluny: “Peter’s reading of the Koran was guided by the annotations in the margins of the manuscript, minicommentaries that guide the reader of the ‘diabolical Koran’ by pointing out passages that would seem particularly shocking to the Christian (and especially monastic) reader. The reader is constantly told to note the ‘insanity,’ ‘impiety,’ ‘ridiculousness,’ ‘stupidity,’ ‘superstition,’ ‘lying,’ and ‘blasphemy’ of what he is reading. And continues: “Numerous annotations accuse Muhammad of being too fond of women, and of playing on the Saracens’ lust by promising them houris in heaven. He threatens his followers with hellfire in order to get them to follow his law and to conquer Christian lands” (Tolan, John V. *Islam in the Medieval European Imagination...*: 156).

53. Pius II portrayed Islam as a weapon fashioned by the devil to supplant and destroy Christianity. He comments in his *Lettera ad Mohammed*, “Mohammed’s discovery was of the devil. ... Mohammed was formerly an idolater, poor, haughty of spirit, Arab by nationality, and took the advice of certain perverse Jews and Christians ... and produced a third religion which was put together with elements from the Old and New Testaments and much nonsense gathered from other sources” (Mann, Jesse D. “Truth and Consequences: Juan de Segovia...”: 88).

54. Said also comments: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978: 309). These themes of Muslim violence and sensuality are, for example, enshrined in Delacroix’s renowned painting: *The Massacre at Chios* (1822-24). Approximately 82,000 Greek islanders of Chios were hanged, butchered, starved or tortured to death. 50,000 Greeks were enslaved and another 23,000 were exiled.

55. Schwoebel, Robert H. “Coexistence, Conversion and the Crusade against the Turks”. *Studies in the Renaissance*, 12 (1965): 176.



Later, in Aeneas's political career he would side with popes Nicholas V and Callistus III respectively in regards to Islam. Segovia's mild views on Islam would not have taken him anywhere in politics.

Segovia's pacifist views between Christians and Muslims did not impact much on Aeneas. Segovia argued for friendship among religions. From increased peaceful relations, Segovia expected a mutual understanding to develop between the two peoples and a diminution of fanaticism and prejudice. Once these aims were accomplished, Christians were to institute discussions on doctrine beginning, of course, with those teachings professed by both. Among his correspondents Segovia got the strongest encouragement from Nicholas of Cusa who also saw the possibility of converting Muslims. Cusa claimed that among the Muslims the most learned praised the Gospel and preferred it to the Koran⁵⁶. Cusa also developed an economical strategy in his *De pace fidei* (1453) showing Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and others that their religions presupposed and implicitly contained all the essential truths of Christianity; that Christianity could provide a framework to achieve a unity of all faiths.

Pius II was more in accord with Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy against the Muslims. Cusa's works were not, however, free from polemic and he supported efforts to combat the Turkish advance, though his attitude toward Islam was generous compared to the views of most contemporaries. In *De pace fidei*, Cusa expresses his obsolete irenic views, arguing that a number of religious faiths contain elements of truth: "there is only one religion in a variety of rites." Although he sustained that true religious unity could only be accomplished through universal Christian belief, his attempt to find common ground with other faiths was progressive, to say the least. His next work, the *Cribratio Alkirani* (1461), which focuses strictly on the Koran, is less charitable toward Islam. This shift may have arisen partly from the mounting anti-Turkish sentiment in Europe and partly from his decision to dedicate the work to Pius II, for the pope's edification in confronting Islam.⁵⁷

Additionally, Aeneas sought help to finance his crusade through asking for monetary support from the Italian states; he would encounter staunch opposition from them. The fifteenth century was a period of moral bankruptcy for the crusading ideal. While we occasionally hear of large sums collected by crusade preachers, increasingly voices of cynicism and disillusionment emerge from the councils of Italian states. Too many times the princes of Europe had broken their promises; too often monies collected for crusading projects had been diverted into the coffers of princes and popes to serve unholy purposes. As the catalog of funds diverted illicitly from crusade became longer and longer, it became increasingly difficult to channel religious zeal into the purchase of crusading indulgences. The preaching of crusade

56. Schwoebel, Robert H. "Coexistence, Conversion and the Crusade...": 178.

57. At the end, as Nancy Bisaha mentions, "Pius found the *Cribratio's* irenic perspective ill suited to his needs and sought inspiration elsewhere. As Gaeta has proven, Pius II drew heavily on the *Contra principales errores perfidi Machometi* of Juan de Torquemada. This highly polemical work was written neither to understand Islam nor to convert its followers, but as a call for and a justification of crusade". Bisaha, Nancy. "Pope Pius II's Letter to Sultan Mehmed II: A Reconsideration". *Crusades*, 1 (2002): 193.



came to be regarded by a growing body of the laity as an elaborate shell game, a trick to bubble the credulous out of their cash.⁵⁸ Pius II in the seventh book of his *Commentaries* captures perfectly the sense of impotence among those in charge of launching a crusade:

*We are seeking to effect this; we are searching out ways; none practicable presents itself. If we think of convening a council, Mantua teaches us that the idea is vain. If we send envoys to ask aid of sovereigns, they are laughed at. If we impose tithes on the clergy, they appeal to a future council. If we issue indulgences and encourage the contribution of money by spiritual gifts, we are accused of avarice. People think our sole object is to amass gold. No one believes what we say. Like insolvent tradesmen, we are without credit. Everything we do is interpreted in the worst way and since all princes are very avaricious and all prelates of the Church are slaves to money, they measure our disposition by their own. Nothing is harder than to wring gold from a miser. We turn the eye of the mind in all directions. We find nothing certain, nothing solid, nothing that is not utterly unsubstantial.*⁵⁹

From Pius's words we observe the lack of support given to his crusading ideal. The fifteenth century was not only a period of moral bankruptcy, but also a period of disillusionment where the state and ecclesiastical leaders were more interested in their own well-being rather than apprehensive about the probable Turkish threat.

The dream to reconquer Constantinople came to an end in the early days of August of 1464 when Pius II's soul ascended into heaven. Although he never recovered the Holy City from Mohammed II, Pius II accomplished his goal of recovering a vast majority of the land, which at one point had belonged to the Piccolomini patrimony. By doing so, he was able to accomplish his primary goal: to restore the family name for all eternity. To know Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini in depth is undoubtedly an arduous task. Nevertheless, I hope I have showed another facet of his ambiguous persona and in doing so, I close with a pertinent quote from Thomas Izbicki: "And it is one of the ironies of history that it is this complicated life—with its protagonist's vain effort to set it in order—which so attracts our attention. Aeneas combined in one life political indiscretions and high policy, sexual escapades and sober second thoughts, satirical turns of phrase and conscientious efforts to describe the powers of Peter and his successors, humanism and crusade, assertiveness and self defense. This Protean figure, whenever we encounter him, leaves us eager to make our own effort to wrestle him into one true form; and he continues to elude our grasp".⁶⁰

58. There were two ways in raising money through indulgences to pay for a crusade. One, the traditional way in which, such men as fra Giovanni de Napoli, fra Michele Carcano, St. Bernardino of Siena, and fra Roberto Carraciolo da Lecce preached crusade aimed at the broadest possible audience; and, on the other hand was the humanist manner in which their crusade propaganda was destined only to elites, religious figures, and lay people. Their only purpose was to press European governments to take military actions against the infidel Turks. Hankins, James. "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature...": 114-115.

59. Piccolomini, Aeneas Sylvius. *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries...*: 237.

60. Izbicki, Thomas M. "Reject Aeneas! Pius II on the Errors of His Youth", *Pius II 'El Più Expeditivo Pontifice' Selected Studies...*: 203.



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