

Invisibile come Dio: La vita e l'opera di Gabriele Biondo. Michele Lodone.
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Based on the preliminary work of Italian scholars Augusto Campana, Carlo Dionisotti, and Delio Cantimori, Michele Lodone has produced an exceptional biography and edition of three major works of Gabriele Biondo (ca. 1445–1511). Lodone provides a very detailed presentation on the life of Gabriele based on the deficient information we have from that time. Gabriele, the fifth of eight children of the humanist Flavio Biondo (1392–1463), was educated in Rome, became a secular priest, and then became the prior of the *pieve* of San Stefano in Modigliana in 1470. Gabriele was a charismatic figure who attracted many clergy members and lay people into his spiritual orbit and counsel during the later years of his life.

Most of the book is devoted to the three significant writings of Gabriele. Lodone provides an introduction and edition of these spiritual works, the first of which is *De Meditatione et Deceptionibus*, written in 1492. According to Lodone, this text was written as a primary guide for lay people who were inexperienced in the practice of meditation. Gabriele was influenced by the medieval mystical tradition that focused on spiritual effectivity and the imagination, but with one correction or rejection (*scarto*): Gabriele taught that this effective spirituality was to be experienced only in the intellect, and therefore it was an exclusively internal experience in which the meditator should be totally separated from external manifestations or carnal sentiments. This was the only way for those engaged in meditation to escape the human tendency for tyrannical self-

love (*amore proprio*). To truly experience the mercy of God, one must annul or annihilate the human will (*annullamento della propria volonta*), make adequate contrition, and accept the absolute giftedness of divine mercy. Lodone claims that Gabriele was influenced strongly by a radical Augustinianism, in which the entire spiritual path is based on the elimination of self-centered love and the passive acceptance of divine grace and mercy.

The second text, *Commentarius*, is the Latin translation (1503) of the—now lost—Italian *Ricordo* that Gabriele composed in 1498, which survives in only one manuscript in Seville (cod. 325). This teaching (*insegnamento*) or advice (*consiglio*) on meditation and the spiritual life instructs clerics and lay people about the remedy to prevent them from falling into mortal sin, which is the result of the human will and the erroneous belief in its own self-sufficiency without grace or the mercy of God. Especially important is the attention paid to the practical aspects of late medieval devotion, such as attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist, going to confession, listening to sermons, and participating in other practical exercises. All of these are to be minimally observed; for example, he tells his readers to receive Eucharist only once a year, and to go confession only three or four times a year unless they have committed a mortal sin. These are practical ways in which true Christians will be able to fully embrace the spiritual truth that final salvation is brought about only in the annihilation of their proper will into God's will.

The third text, *De Amore Proprio* (1502), is addressed to a religious sister, Alessandra degli Ariosti. According to Lodone, this longer text is more theoretical, convoluted, and often more obscure than the previous two writings. Once again, we are reminded that the spiritual path that centers itself on the annihilation of the self-will is the only way to access the divine. Although he was not a friar, Gabriele was conversant in the Franciscan mendicant tradition. He was influenced especially by the spiritual writings of Angelo Clareno and other friars who focused on the importance of the intention, mind, and spirit of their founder, Francis of Assisi. In his negative critique of the fifteenth-century reform movements, he urges the friars to avoid the trap of being guided by the self-centered human will taught by the moderates or reformers of the Orders, which essentially results in the deformation of the original form of life.

This significant book by Michele Lodone tells us much about how certain Christian writers such as Gabriele Biondo—on the eve of the Reformation—dealt with the issues of the human will in relation to divine grace, the role of meditation, and the end goals of the spiritual journey.

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