

“Pro communi doctorum virorum comodo”: The Vatican Library and Its Service to Scholarship¹

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I UNDERSTAND that the original plans for this “Symposium on the Great Libraries” intended that Leonard Boyle, O.P., prefect of the Vatican Library from 1984 to 24 May 1997, speak to you on the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Fr. Leonard Boyle died in Rome on 25 October 1999 at the age of seventy-five. I was asked to speak instead. My remarks on this splendid and much-loved institution are dedicated to his memory.²

Don Achille Ratti, who had already been a professor of rhetoric at the Milan Seminary, also enjoyed a distinguished career as a librarian, first as director of the Ambrosian Library in Milan (1888–1914), and then as prefect of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (1914–1919). When he was elected pope in 1922, taking the name Pius XI,³ Professor Berthold Ullman of the classics department and the librarians of the State University of Iowa sent a congratulatory message to the Vatican on this choice, stating in their telegram, “Unus ex nobis factus est papa.”⁴ In a similar way, when the news spread in 1984 that Fr. Leonard Boyle had been appointed prefect of the Vatican Library, many of us

¹Read 10 November 2000.

²Several conferences and essay collections honored Fr. Boyle after his retirement. Most recently, the Vatican Library’s staff produced a volume in his honor, *Collectanea in honorem Rev.mi Patris Leonardi E. Boyle, O.P. septuagesimum quartum annum feliciter completis. Miscellanea Bibliothecae apostolicae vaticanae* 6 (Vatican City, 1998).

³Ratti served as apostolic visitor to Poland and then archbishop of Milan before his election to the papal throne.

⁴“One of us has been made pope” (Eugène Cardinal Tisserant, “Pius XI as Librarian,” *The Library Quarterly* 9.4 [October 1939]: 397). This article was also reprinted as a pamphlet “for private circulation” (Chicago, 1939). All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

throughout the universities and scholarly institutes of the world rejoiced, and said, in the manner of the librarians of Iowa, "One of us has been made prefect." We felt this not because Fr. Boyle was a scholar—after all, many of the prefects of this venerable library had been great scholars—but because of his expansive vision of and wide experience in scholarship and teaching, which included both ecclesiastical and lay institutions, both religious and secular scholarship, both Europe and North America. Fr. Leonard was a distinguished scholar of late medieval spirituality, and an expert in paleography and diplomatics, disciplines concerned with the study of medieval manuscript books. He had also been a beloved teacher of these subjects at the Angelicum in Rome during the 1950s, and since 1961 at Toronto's Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies and University. He had initiated many of us in Europe and North America into the study of medieval manuscripts through his teaching and his books.⁵ His tenure as prefect of the Vatican Library was guided by his belief that in a fundamental way the Library belonged to us, to scholarship, to the republic of letters, in the way that all great treasures are in effect the patrimony of all.

The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana originated from the broad, extensive bibliophile interests of the Renaissance popes, and to a large extent its initial humanistic characteristics, its emphasis on the ancient classics, on patristics, and on medieval and Renaissance erudition have remained dominant.⁶ The Library contains more than 150,000 manuscripts and archival pieces (about half of which are codices); 8,300 incunables (65 of which are on parchment; it includes the largest and most important deposit of Italian incunables); 161 volumes bound before 1793; and a general collection of more than 1,600,000 printed books. The Library also owns an extensive collection of medals and coins (in the Gabinetto Numismatico, or Medagliere), and a renowned assemblage of drawings and prints (in the Gabinetto delle Stampe e dei Disegni);

⁵ A bio-bibliography of Leonard E. Boyle is appended to Leonard E. Boyle, O.P., "Vox paginae": *An Oral Dimension of Texts*. Unione internazionale degli istituti di archeologia, storia e storia dell'arte in Roma (Rome, 1999).

⁶ The bibliography on the Library and its collections is vast. The most imposing scholarly survey is Jeanne Bignami Odier, *La Bibliothèque vaticane de Sixte IV à Pie XI. Recherches sur l'histoire des collections de manuscrits*. Avec la collaboration de José Ruyschaert. Studi e testi 272 (Vatican City, 1979), which includes extensive bibliographical references to both manuscript and printed sources. I will be quoting this fundamental book by author. A brief introduction to the Library and its resources, as well as detailed instructions for their use by scholars and an online catalog of printed books, and numerous pictures can be found through the Library's Web site www.vatican.va/library_archives/vat_library/). Also useful, particularly for its lavish illustrations, is *The Vatican Library, Its History and Treasures*, edited by Alfons Maria Cardinal Stickler and Leonard Eugene Boyle, O. P. (Yorktown Heights N.Y., 1989).

and numerous other artistic objects. The Library also issues various publications related to its collections, the work of both the professional staff and independent scholars: bibliographies, catalogs, monographs.

The Vatican Library remains a living, growing institution, but at its core is its extraordinary collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, and the printed books reflect this. The collection of printed books is strong particularly in paleography, history, art history, and classical, medieval, and Renaissance philology.⁷ The manuscripts are divided into two categories. One is the open collection, the “Vaticani,” which is added to constantly; the *fondo* Vaticani numbers now more than 15,000 pieces. The other is constituted by the closed *fondi*, that is, the collections that have been kept as they were at the time that the Library acquired them, such as the libraries put together by noble Roman families beginning in the Renaissance. The Biblioteca Vaticana could be best characterized as a library of libraries.

When Fr. Leonard took over this complex institution in 1984, the Library had to face the tremendous challenges and opportunities that the electronic age has brought to the management of book and manuscript collections all over the world. Fr. Boyle decided that the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana would embrace these innovations. Initiatives that he put in place would allow us, for example, to consult the printed books’ card catalog over the Internet, and scan a digitized version of manuscript miniatures on CD-ROM. The Vatican Library became a leader in the growing integration of the European national libraries and institutes made possible by electronic advances. Boyle’s familiarity with Anglophone countries⁸—Ireland, the land of his birth, England, the land of his education, and Canada and the United States, where he had trained several generations of medievalists—broadened the Library’s outreach. Through exhibits (including the memorable “Rome Reborn” at our Library of Congress in 1993), through conferences, through ambitious scholarly projects, through his vast international network of students and colleagues, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana expanded

⁷While Greek and Latin manuscripts constitute the vast majority of holdings, the Library also has important collections representing both Western and non-Western cultures.

⁸Leonard Boyle was the first head of the Vatican Library whose native tongue was English. But native Anglophones have played a significant role in the history of the Library. The Englishman Henry Stevenson (1818–1890) was employed as scriptor, and responsible for the publication of the catalog of the Palatini and Reginenses Greek manuscripts; his homonymous son (1854–1898) was also a scriptor and an archaeologist. See Bignami Odier, 249 n. 70, 251 n. 86. They must not be confused with Joseph Stevenson (1806–1895), who copied documents relating to English history in the Secret Vatican Archives on behalf of England’s Public Record Office. His adventures in the Vatican Archives are amusingly recounted in Owen Chadwick, *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives* (Cambridge, 1978): 77–89.

its role as an international center of scholarly activities. In all these undertakings Boyle not only reflected his great personal liberality as teacher and scholar, but also continued to fulfill in the manner of our age the generous vision the founders of the Library had established long ago.⁹

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From very ancient times, the bishop of Rome as head of a complex administration and as the leader of western Christendom preserved documents and other written material bearing on the spiritual and temporal power of the papacy. During the Middle Ages, and certainly by the seventh century, the Lateran Palace, the residence of the pope as bishop of the city, maintained a combination archive-cum-library, attached to a scriptorium, where documents and books could be written. This “Bibliotheca Lateranensis” was clearly very large by the standards of that age. It included patristic works, saints’ lives, chronicles and histories, canonical and liturgical texts, as well as papal letters, synodal acts, and similar material that might be more properly classified as archival. The historical circumstances in which the library of the medieval popes was put to use tell us that the purpose behind the collection in the papal palace was to serve as an arsenal with which to support the doctrinal and juridical prerogatives of the bishops of Rome. This was the reference library, in a sense, that the medieval popes and their advisors deployed when they made pronouncements on issues of relevance to the See of Peter. These encompassed not only doctrinal or liturgical issues, but also matters of law, of economics, of diplomatic affairs. In 680, for example, Pope Agatho sent to the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV books whose contents were to be used to extract citations against the heresy of Monothelism debated at the Council of Constantinople in 681.¹⁰ Similarly, the extensive florilegium that was

⁹ Because such generosity has not always characterized the history of the Church and its dependent institutions, some have seen Fr. Leonard as a revolutionary in his tenure as prefect. For example, Nicholas Barker in his obituary of Fr. Leonard in the *Independent* (2 November 1999) wrote that Boyle “opened [the Library’s] doors to readers from all over the world; he also stood up for freedom and in consequence became a martyr.” I do not presume to know how Fr. Leonard would respond to such statements, although I am sure that he would point out that the Library’s doors had long been opened to scholars from all over the world. My view is that Boyle continued a tradition that had been part of the Library from its founding, even if at times adumbrated under the strains of religious intolerance and political conflicts.

¹⁰ The correspondence between pope and emperor reveals that not only such works as Augustine’s *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* and *Contra Maximianum*, but also many Greek books were available to the pope. The most thorough discussion of the earliest history of the papal library and archives is found in Giovanni Battista De Rossi, “De origine historia indicibus scrinii et bibliothecae Sedis apostolicae,” in H. Stevenson, Jr., and J. B. De Rossi,

the basis for the condemnation of Iconoclasm at the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 787, it has now been shown, was compiled not in the eastern empire but at Rome's Lateran palace, and thence brought to Nicea.¹¹ The activities of the most famous medieval papal librarian, Anastasius Bibliothecarius (d. 879), a skilled diplomat, were keenly focused on the prerogatives of the bishop of Rome, confirming the political nature of the papal library during this period. The fate of the papal library during the Avignonese period illustrates its stature at the end of the Middle Ages. Boniface VIII (1294–1303) had collected a sizable library. When the papacy moved to Avignon, it was largely dispersed. The Avignon popes, and especially Clement V (1305–1315), recreated the papal library, but when the papacy finally settled back in Rome in 1417, the return of the archives held a far higher priority. The books, on the other hand, were returned slowly and in stages. Once in Rome, the pope's books and archives were given no fixed abode, but moved around the city, as the pope's residence did. We are not even sure that during this period of instability an official "Bibliothecarius" for the pope's book collection existed.¹²

The papal collection of books and documents might have remained what it had been throughout the Middle Ages, a private depository of archival and literary supports for papal pronouncements and prerogatives whose primary mission was to buttress the spiritual and temporal concerns of the popes. But by the middle of the fifteenth century, a convergence of forces under the influence of humanism resulted in the creation of a different kind of papal library, whose stated, clear mission was to serve not only the Church, but more broadly scholars and humanistic learning. Historians disagree on the date of the actual founding of the modern Vatican Library. Some trace its establishment to the pontificate of Nicholas V (1447–1455), while others see the bull "Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae" issued by pope Sixtus IV in 1475 as the real founding of the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*. The vision of

Codices Palatini Latini Bibliothecae Vaticanae 1 (Rome, 1886): XI–CXXXII. For Greek books and Greek scribes at the pope's palace see Jean-Marie Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1980), 1:176–78; and 2:204 n. 74 for further bibliography.

¹¹ Alexander Alexakis, *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1115 and Its Archetype* (Washington, D.C., 1996), especially 255–60.

¹² A portion of the Avignon manuscripts were returned at the order of Eugene IV (1431–1447), whose bibliophile interests are also believed to be responsible for the most ancient group of oriental manuscripts of the current Library, about sixty Arab and Coptic manuscripts given to him by the Coptic Mission at the Council of Florence in 1441. The final recovery of Avignon manuscripts is due to Franz Ehrle (later prefect; see below), who discovered them in the library of the Borghese family, from which they were acquired in 1891 (Bignami Odier, 2–3, 37–38).

these popes and of the librarians whom they appointed was the creation of a collection that would be universal, all-encompassing according to the humanistic criteria of the ages, open to all scholars, and with a fixed abode within the Vatican complex. Their library was to be not only a depository of texts, but also an institution where new scholarly pursuits would be encouraged, and the production of accurate copies of ancient and modern texts would be undertaken.

Already during the pontificate of Nicholas V, the idea of creating a large library in Rome with its own rooms, and opening it to the public, had been aired. Vespasiano da Bisticci, the Florentine bookseller and biographer of Renaissance figures, reports that “[i]ntentione di papa Nicola era di fare una libreria in Sancto Piero per comune uso di tutta la corte di Roma.”¹³ Before he ascended the papal throne, Tomaso Parentucelli da Sarzana was already well known as a scholar and bibliophile. He had advised Cosimo de’ Medici on the proper way of organizing the Medici Library of San Marco.¹⁴ But the resources of the Roman See—especially the unexpected income supplied by the Great Jubilee of 1450—allowed him to participate on a much larger scale in the humanistic efforts to find and make available previously unknown texts.¹⁵ In a letter Nicholas wrote in 1451 to the humanist Enoch of Ascoli, by which he charges him to scour the monastic libraries of Germany in search of ancient texts that “culpa superiorum temporum sunt deperditi” [have been lost by fault of earlier ages], the pope makes clear that his purpose in creating a large library is “ut pro communi doctorum virorum comodo habeamus librorum omnium tum latinorum tum grecorum bibliothecam condecemtem pontificis et sedis apostolicae dignitati.”¹⁶

¹³ “It was the intention of Pope Nicholas to create a library at St. Peter’s for the general use of the court of Rome” (Vespasiano da Bisticci, *La vita di Nicolao P.P. V* in *Le Vite*, ed. Aulo Greco, 2 vols. [Florence, 1970], 1:35–81 at 65).

¹⁴ John F. D’Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore and London, 1983), 35 with further bibliography in the notes. The “bibliographic canon” Parentucelli had written for Cosimo is published in G. Sforza, *La patria, la famiglia e la giovinezza di papa Niccolò Quinto* (Lucca, 1884): 359–81. According to Vespasiano, this “canon” also served to guide the library of the Badia of Fiesole, and that of the duke of Urbino and the Sforzas (*La vita*, 46–47).

¹⁵ A great opportunity for the acquisition of books was provided by the dispersion of the treasure of Constantinople, which fell finally to the Turks in 1453. Many contemporary observers noted that the Jubilee income allowed Nicholas to purchase a lot of Greek books so that “Greece did not perish, but it migrated to Italy, . . . thanks to the goodwill of this one man, Pope Nicholas” [. . . non periit Graeciam, sed in Italiam . . . unius eius Nicolai pontificis clementia commigrasse] (Eugène Münz and Paul Fabre, *La Bibliothèque du Vatican au XV^e siècle* [Paris, 1887]: 47–48).

¹⁶ “So that we may have a library of all Latin and Greek books for the common (i.e., public) benefit of learned men as befits the dignity of the pontiff and the apostolic see” (Münz

Nicholas, and Sixtus IV after him, intended the library to be public, open to scholars, and comprehensive in its holdings, in a way that differed from the more confined focus of the Medici Library at S. Marco (housed in a Dominican convent), or the Este Library at Ferrara, which was much more narrowly aesthetic and meant for a select few. The Este collection was to include only good and useful texts; only the best authors would be allowed on its shelves. Isidore, Cassiodorus, scholastic compendia and vernacular authors, for example, were to be excluded.¹⁷

In his desire to create a library for the “common benefit of learned men,” Nicholas, as well as the other library builders of the Renaissance—the Este of Ferrara, the Medici of Florence, and the Sforza of Milan—were also attempting to replicate the public libraries of antiquity, where the library was not solely a depository of materials, but a place of intense scholarly activity, especially of philological study, and learned discussions. Such ideas led the popes and their advisors to engage in the search for ancient texts that, it was felt, had been neglected in the intervening ages, as Nicholas said to Enoch of Ascoli. The model of the ancient library as a scholarly center also inspired Nicholas’s efforts to restore Latin and Greek texts to their original authenticity, and to make them more broadly available. Long before he became pope, Parentucelli had shown his skill in the discovery and emendation of ancient Christian and classical texts.¹⁸ These interests transformed Renaissance Rome into the main center for the study and diffusion of classical texts in the second half of the fifteenth century. The most-often cited testimony of this transformation took place in 1452, when the humanist-philologist Lorenzo Valla translated into Latin Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, and dedicated it to Nicholas V. Valla, and the scribe, Johannes Lamperti de Rodenburg, signed the dedication copy to certify its correctness both as a translation and as a transcription, and deposited it at the pope’s library to serve as a master copy, a

and Fabre, *La Bibliothèque*, 47–48). Enoch traveled as far as Denmark. He returned with Tacitus’s *Germania* and *Agricola*. Around 1455, he brought back from Hersfeld a fragment of Ammianus Marcellinus’s history. For details and further bibliography on the hunt for classical texts, see Michael D. Reeve, “Classical Scholarship,” in Jill Kraye, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge, 1996): 20–46.

¹⁷ Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor, 1997): 26–29.

¹⁸ In 1426 he discovered a sixth-century manuscript of Lactantius; he has recently been identified as the corrector of a manuscript of twelve speeches addressed to Roman emperors. Their modern editor did not realize the corrector’s identity but did note that the emendations had been executed “with admirable shrewdness” (Reeve, “Classical Scholarship,” 26).

normative, correct text against which all other future copies could be vetted.¹⁹

Giovanni Tortelli, another humanist scholar who served as papal librarian, dedicated to Nicholas V a treatise on correct Latin spelling (*De orthographia*). The dedicatory preface places this work within the grammatical tradition of the ancients, worthy of sitting on the shelves of the pope's illustrious library, and makes explicit the author's intent that his grammar should serve a central role in the Library's own production of correct texts.²⁰ Tortelli's grammatical guide became a reference tool for the correction of texts included in the papal library, as is documented by textual improvements and marginal notes found in many of the surviving books of Nicholas's original collection, some in the pope's own hand.²¹

The new technology of printing also played a role in this cultural program. It was promoted in papal circles for its production efficiency, but especially because it could generate correct texts, free of the scribal errors that inevitably contaminate handwritten copies. Giovanni Andrea Bussi (1417–1475), scribe and editor for Nicholas V and librarian of Sixtus IV, convinced the papacy to patronize the printing establishment of Sweynheim and Pannartz, which thus moved from Subiaco, near Rome, into the very Palazzo Massimo in 1467.²² In 1468 Bussi began a prolific collaboration with the printers, and edited a large corpus of classical and Christian texts, many of which constituted the first printed editions.²³ Bussi's long prefaces claim philological superiority for his printed editions, which was

¹⁹The word "archetypus" is first used here by the scribe to mean precisely in humanist terminology "an official exemplar, preserved in a public library to serve as norm for successive copies, according to ancient use." Other terms, such as "primum exemplar" to indicate the author's original, uncorrupted by later scribes, are found used also among Roman humanists of this period (Silvia Rizzo, "Per una tipologia delle tradizioni manoscritte di classici latini in età umanistica," in *Formative Stages of Classical Traditions: Latin Texts from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Oronzo Pecere and Michael D. Reeve [Spoleto, 1995]: 387–88).

²⁰"... in tua illa bibliotheca quam omnium quae fuerunt praestantissimam compares aliquo pacto collocare possis" [... that you may place it in your famous library which you are putting together, the most illustrious of all]. The preface has been most recently published with commentary in Rizzo, "Per una tipologia," 402–07. For a detailed discussion of the manuscripts annotated by both Nicholas and Tortelli and the influence of the *Orthographia*, see Antonio Manfredi, "L'*Orthographia* di Giovanni Tortelli nella Biblioteca Vaticana," *Collectanea in honorem*, 265–98.

²¹Rizzo, "Per una tipologia," 390–91.

²²*Ibid.*, 388–90; Bignami Odier, 13–14, 283; Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics*, 24–25.

²³For a list see M. Miglio, "Bussi, Giovanni Andrea," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 15 (1972): 568.

achieved through philological means (that is, the comparison of several manuscript copies to discover the correct reading), and then fixed in the printed medium.²⁴ Printing had become a natural extension of the original papal library's agenda to be not only a book depository, but also a producer of texts according to high philological criteria.

* * *

Nicholas's emphasis on the size and breadth of the collection—all Latin and Greek books, in his words, by which he included also numerous translations—seems to have been suggested in particular by the Renaissance infatuation with the celebrated Library at Alexandria, here demythologized by my colleague Roger Bagnall. Pier Candido Decembrio commented in 1451 that Nicholas was planning to build a rival to the libraries at Pergamum and Alexandria, both in size and in quality of texts.²⁵ And Vespasiano would later comment that in fact the pope could be compared with Ptolemy.²⁶ The activity of scribes engaged by the library, and the preoccupation with textual accuracy, the search for unknown texts by emissaries dispatched all over the world, the organization of the library according to a prescribed order, and also the grandiose program of translation from Greek supported financially by the pontiff—these are the activities that the humanist Giannozzo Manetti emphasizes in his biography of Nicholas V, published in 1455, and these are the activities that Renaissance humanists identified particularly with the Library at Alexandria, as was described, or imagined, in both classical and Christian sources. After enumerating Nicholas's varied activities in acquiring and commissioning books, Manetti adds that the pope was imitating the famous king of Egypt Ptolemy Philadelphus, who had congregated (“incredibile dictu”) about

²⁴ Some of his prefaces have been published in modern collections (viz. Beriah Botfield, *Prefaces to the first editions of the Greek and Roman Classics and of the Sacred Scriptures* [London, 1861]). Not all contemporary or modern philologists have accepted Bussi's premise that a printed edition is necessarily more accurate than a manuscript version (Miglio, “Bussi,” 568–69; Ezio Ornato, *Apologia dell'apogeo: divagazioni sulla storia del libro nel tardo medioevo* [Rome, 2000]: 86–87).

²⁵ “Nemo unquam librorum adeo fuit cupidus nemo studiosior. Bibliothecam fieri instituit: cur si tempus non defuerit, nec pergamenae aut antonianae dono datae quondam Cleopatrae cessurae sunt vel numero vel elegantiae” (Letter to Lionello d'Este in Adolfo Cinquini, *Lettere inedite di Pier Candido Decembrio* [Rome, 1902]: 25). Perhaps one aspect of the Alexandrian Library in particular interested Nicholas: it was renowned for its translations, the most famous of which was the *Septuagint*.

²⁶ “. . . nella fine sua si trovò per inventario, che da Tolomeo in qua non si venne mai alla metà di tanta copia di libri” (*La vita*, 64).

sixty thousand Greek books.²⁷ The pope's biographer makes it clear that Nicholas himself was familiar with the sources on Ptolemy's library, and specifically with the letter of Aristeas, for he says that Nicholas "knew that this is what the aforementioned Ptolemy had accomplished with great renown to his name, with the assistance of the most learned man, the noble historian of those ages and royal commissioner Aristeus."²⁸ Just as telling is the discovery that the earliest Latin adaptation of Tzetzes' ornate description of the Library at Alexandria has a direct connection with papal circles. This is the so-called Scholium Plautinum, a long marginal commentary added to a copy of the Latin comedies of Plautus written by Giovanni Andrea Bussi, whom we discussed above. The Latin scholium preserves most of the information provided by Tzetzes, including specific details about the size of the collection, the physical description of the two libraries inside and outside the palace and their organization, as well as Ptolemy Philadelphus's worldwide search for books of all languages, which were then translated.²⁹ It is certain that the ultimate source of the Latin rendition is a manuscript of Aristophanes with Tzetzes' prolegomena now in Milan; it seems likely that Bussi himself, who was a friend and student of the Greek émigré scholar Theodore of Gaza, was the translator.³⁰

At his death in 1455 Pope Nicholas left a library holding 800 Latin manuscripts and 353 Greek ones. These constitute the original nucleus of the ancient collection of the Library even today. Theological works dominate, as expected. But it is worthy of note that Nicholas's library contained more of the classics than he had prescribed for Cosimo's library at San Marco.³¹

²⁷ "In quo quidem Ptolemeum Philadelphum inclytum Egyptii regem egregie admodum imitatus est, quem in construenda illa sua tam celebrata ac tam admirabili bibliotheca hunc congregandorum librorum modum apud idoneos auctores tenuisse tegetat, ubi sexaginta circiter librorum dumtaxat Grecorum milia (incredibile dictu) collocasse traditur" (*Vita Nicolai V summi pontificis in Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. Ludovico Muratori, 3.2 [Milan, 1734], cols. 907–60, at 926).

²⁸ ". . . [Nicholas V] predictum Ptolemeum, doctissimo viro ac nobilitato illorum temporum historico et regio commissario Aristeo procurante, magna cum nominis sui laude fecisse cognoverat" (*ibid.*). On this letter and on Tzetzes, see Bagnall, above, 349, 351, and 361.

²⁹ The Scholium Plautinum is discussed and edited by W.J.W. Koster, "Scholion Plautinum plene editum," *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4.24.1 (1961): 23–37; a partial English translation is found in E. A. Parsons, *The Alexandrian Library. Glory of the Hellenic World. Its Rise, Antiquities, and Destruction* (Amsterdam, 1952): 105–21, and two plates. The description of Bussi's manuscript of Plautus (Vat. lat. 11469) can be found in José Ruyschaert, *Codices vaticani latini. Codices 11414–11709* (Vatican City, 1959): 104–05.

³⁰ I am preparing a fuller treatment of this subject, focusing on the relationship of the Greek original and its Latin rendition.

³¹ For the inventories of Nicholas's books, see Bignami Odier, 11 and notes; the inventory of Latin books is published in Münz and Fabre, *La Bibliothèque*, 48–113.

Pope Nicholas's design for a public library was formally realized by Pope Sixtus IV, whose bull "Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae," first issued on 15 June 1475, is recognized by many as the foundation charter of the Vatican Library.³² All the functions and activities of the Library from that time on, even to our own day, despite the changes that of necessity have occurred, can be traced back to Sixtus's bull.

The bull's preamble confirms the nature of the Vatican Library as Nicholas V had envisioned it. Here, the Roman pontiff, a patron of scholarship—he describes himself as the "commendabilis cuiusque exercitii liberalis adiutor"³³—institutes the Library not only for the "ornamentation of the Church militant, and the increase of the Catholic faith" but also for "the convenience and the honor of scholars and students of letters."³⁴ The bull underscores the importance of learning and the work of scholars, and points out that the Library's dual mission is to preserve the scholarly achievements of the past, and make them available to new scholars, whose duty then becomes to propagate their benefits among others.

After the preamble, the bull makes three practical provisions. First of all, Sixtus gives a physical reality to the Vatican Library. Three rooms in the papal palace were adapted to house the Library. Two of these rooms constituted the "Bibliotheca publica" or "communis," divided into a "Bibliotheca latina" for Latin manuscripts, and a "Bibliotheca graeca" for Greek codices. This division is clearly in imitation of the libraries of antiquity, many of which were believed to have been divided into two sections, one for Latin texts, the other for Greek ones.³⁵ The third room, called the "Bibliotheca secreta" or "private library" contained the most precious volumes, segregated from the rest for their safekeeping. A fourth room was added in 1480 ("Bibliotheca nova pontificia"), to house archival materials. The Library and the

³² The most thorough discussion of the bull and its two later redactions (15 July 1477; 19 October 1481) modifying some of its financial provisions is José Ruyschaert, "Sixte IV, fondateur de la Bibliothèque vaticane (15 juin 1475)," *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 7 (1969): 513–24. My citations of this bull refer to his edition on 523–24 (the translations are mine). Ruyschaert (515) states that "the grandiose project of Nicholas V of a public Vatican library was abandoned" by his three immediate successors (Callixtus III, Pius II, and Paul II).

³³ "[S]upporter of every commendable liberal study."

³⁴ These are the opening words of the bull ("Ad decorem militantis Ecclesie, fidei catholice augmentum, eruditorum quoque ac litterarum studiis insistentium uirorum commodum . . ."), which recall the terminology used by Nicholas V.

³⁵ It has been recently suggested that the room for the "Bibliotheca graeca" of Sixtus IV may have been the locale of Nicholas V's library (Bignami Odier, 285). For the organization of ancient libraries, see Paolo Fedeli, "Biblioteche private e pubbliche a Roma e nel mondo romano," in *Le biblioteche nel mondo antico e medievale*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Bari, 1988): 29–64.

Archives remained part of the same establishment under the program instituted by Pope Sixtus, but the physical arrangement, which detaches the books from the documentary material, is in fact the beginning of the separation between the Library and the Archives that will be fully accomplished in 1630. This most important distinction emphasizes that the Library is seen as a place that is to remain open and in use at least in theory, while the Archives become increasingly restricted, and their entrance forbidden altogether to any but the staff by a decree of excommunication. It is then that they become the Archivio Segreto Vaticano. “Old documents are non-military weapons for holding on to property we have acquired,” in the words of a papal majordomo;³⁶ the Archives were functionally the real heir of the medieval papal library.

The original rooms decorated by Ghirlandaio, Melozzo da Forlì, and Antoniazio Romano housed the Library for over a century. Its growing size was accommodated during the pontificate of Sixtus V (1585–1590) when the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana moved into the new building designed by Domenico Fontana, between the Cortile del Belvedere and the Cortile della Pigna.³⁷ By testament of Sixtus V, the room on the top floor of this building, which we call today the Biblioteca Sistina or Salone Sistino (visited through the Vatican Museum), was designated to contain the growing collection of books and manuscripts. The Biblioteca Sistina was decorated with lavish frescoes representing ancient libraries, the invention of the various alphabets, ecumenical councils, and contemporary views of Roman monuments. The furniture was taken from the old library of Sixtus IV. Its vestibule became the “Sala degli Scrittori,” the professional staff of the Library.³⁸ The Library continued to expand on this floor into the nineteenth century, as more and more *fondi* were added to its holdings.

The second provision of Sixtus IV’s bull “Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae” established a staff to manage the Library, and set aside a regular income for their keep. Bartolomeo Sacchi of Cremona, known as

³⁶ As quoted in Chadwick, *Catholicism*, 9. In 1612, Paul V reversed an earlier plan to move the archives to Castel S. Angelo, and instead placed a separate head administrator in charge of each institution. He is credited with the formal creation of the central archives of the Church, which had been scattered in several places. Eventually, the Archives would be under the secretary of state, while the Library is under the cardinal librarian (since 1548). Chadwick, *Catholicism*, 5–13.

³⁷ The late sixteenth century was a great age of library building. Chadwick, *Catholicism*, 7, points out that the colleges of Cambridge University built their first libraries, of which the old library at Trinity Hall is a surviving example, at this very same time. Several pictures of the Salone Sistino can be found in *The Vatican Library, Its History and Treasures*, 17–29.

³⁸ With the move of the Library under Leo XIII, it became the private office of the cardinal librarian.

Platina, was named “custos” and “gubernator.” The appointment is memorialized in the famous fresco of Melozzo da Forlì that decorated the south wall of the library of Sixtus IV, and was transported to the Vatican Museums in 1825.³⁹ The fresco represents Sixtus IV surrounded by his nephews, handing over to Platina the bull of foundation. The man behind the pope is Cardinal Raffaele Sansoni-Riario, who holds in his hand a roll, which may very well be the bull itself. Platina is kneeling in front of the pope, and points with his fingers to the famous verses inscribed below the fresco, which celebrate Sixtus’s building achievements, and underline the beauty and public use of the Library: “Plus tamen urbs debet: Nam quae squalore latebat/ Cernitur in celebri bibliotheca loco.”⁴⁰

The fundamental significance of the appointment of Platina cannot be overemphasized.⁴¹ Platina was a scholar best known today as a historian of the popes, and even his particular interest in papal history spilled into his activities as librarian. He compiled a register of privileges relating to the Church, given by both popes and emperors; he rebound numerous ones; he had several recopied to preserve their contents. Platina was also a businessman, an entrepreneur who was active in the development of the collection. He employed scribes, miniaturists, binders; he dealt with merchants of parchment, paper, and ink to copy books that he felt the Library ought to have, faithful to the original vision of a universal Library.⁴² The results of Platina’s energetic activities can be judged most simply by the increase of the collection. In 1475, when the bull of Sixtus IV was issued, the register of books included 2,527 manuscripts; in 1481—six years later—the size of the collection had increased by more than 30 percent, to 3,498, the result of acquisitions through purchase, gifts, and bequests, but also through

³⁹ The fresco was restored in the late 1980s and its history unraveled by José Ruysschaert, “La fresque de Melozzo da Forlì de l’ancienne Bibliothèque vaticane. Réexamen,” *Miscellanea Bibliothecae apostolicae vaticanae* 4 (1990): 329–41.

⁴⁰ “Still more however the city owes you: For the Library that lay hidden in squalor is seen in a celebrated place.” The verses underline the beauty but also the open use of the Library by the contrast between “squalore latebat” and “Cernitur in celebri,” especially since “celebri” can mean not only “famous, celebrated” but also “frequented, busy.” An excellent picture of the fresco, in which the verses can be clearly read, is found on p. 25 of *The Vatican Library, Its History and Treasures*.

⁴¹ The nineteenth-century historian of the popes Ludwig von Pastor, while disapproving of the “heathen tendencies” of humanism and of Platina, still recognized his scholarly predecessor’s significance as a historian (“It is . . . a remarkable work for the period in which it was written. Instead of the confused and often fabulous chronicles of the Middle Ages, we find here for the first time a clear and serviceable handbook of real history” [*The History of the Popes*, trans. E. F. Peeler, 4 (St. Louis, 1938): 447–48]).

⁴² Most of the documents from Platina’s tenure, including expense accounts, are published in Münz and Fabre, *La Bibliothèque*, 135–306.

direct production in the Vatican itself, where Platina ran in effect a workshop to copy and illustrate manuscripts. Platina's library also included printed books and books in the vernacular languages, in keeping with the comprehensive nature of the Vatican collection. The office of Vatican librarian had become the most prominent scholarly position open to a humanist in Rome; the auxiliary posts connected to the Library were also in demand, for they provided humanists who held them a freer exercise of their scholarly talents than other positions within the curial ambience, which were burdened by religious or political considerations and limitations.⁴³ Julius II (1503–1513) and Leo X (1513–1521), in particular, appointed renowned humanists as librarians. Tommaso Inghirami, known as the “Cicero of his age,” a poet, actor, and scholar, served under these two bibliophile popes. Leo X, the Medici pope, also hired the philologist Filippo Beroaldo the Younger and the poet Fausto Sabeo, and subsidized emissaries to scour monastic libraries all over Europe in search of unknown texts. It was Sabeo who discovered the copy of the first six books of Tacitus's *Annals* at the Abbey of Corvey. The copy was taken to Rome, where an edition was published by Beroaldo. The abbot of Corvey was sent a copy of the revised and printed text so that it might be placed in the monastery's library as a substitute for the manuscript taken from it. And in order that the abbot and monks might “understand that the purloining [of the codex] has done them more good than harm” the pope granted them a plenary indulgence for their church.⁴⁴ But we should remember that not all papal librarians were humanists or scholars. When Platina died—of the plague, apparently—Angelo Poliziano was recommended by Ludovico il Moro of Milan to the newly elected Borgia pope Alexander VI (1492–1503). Politian did not get the job; in his place the Borgia pope chose one of his own relatives, Pietro Garsias, bishop of Barcelona, and, later, his private physician, Gaspare Torrella.⁴⁵

The third provision promulgated in the bull of Sixtus IV was that the Library should serve for the public use of all scholars.⁴⁶ The Library was liberally used from its very beginnings. Four registers of

⁴³ D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, 35–36. Many of the librarians, such as Inghirami for example, also had academic careers at Rome's university, La Sapienza.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Theodore Wesley Koch, “The Vatican Library,” in *The Vatican Library. Two Papers* (Snead and Company: Jersey City, 1929): 30.

⁴⁵ D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism*, 36.

⁴⁶ It is for this reason that Sixtus IV, and not Nicholas V, is considered the real founder of the Vatican Library, according to Bignami Odier, 31 n. 4 (“. . . l'actuelle bibliothèque Vaticane remonte d'une manière ininterrompue à la fondation sixtine de 1475 et, comme nous aurons l'occasion de le souligner, cette Bibliothèque est conçue comme publique par son fondateur”).

loans from Platina's tenure have survived. In the register for the first year, there are more than fifty separate entries, some of which cover the loan of several books. These registers suggest that the Library was frequented particularly by members of the Curia, as one would expect, but also by lay scholars and foreign visitors. Among the borrowers, for example, we find Pomponio Leto, who on 7 October 1475 borrowed Gaspar of Verona's *Life of Paul II*, and in December borrowed Appian's *Civil Wars*.⁴⁷ Borrowers were threatened with the "indignation and execration of the pope" if the borrowed books were not returned "whole" and "on time."⁴⁸

Montaigne, who visited the library of Sixtus IV in 1581, a century after its founding, is perhaps the most famous visitor to have left us a detailed account of his tour. Montaigne was shown some of the great treasures of the Biblioteca Vaticana. Henry VIII's presentation copy for Leo X of his treatise defending the seven sacraments against Luther, with the dedication in the author's own hand, solicited Montaigne's commendation of the king's Latin. But the French visitor was attracted particularly by the manuscripts of classical authors, including a "Vergil written by hand, in a letter infinitely large and of a long and straight character, such as we see here in inscriptions from the times of the emperors around the time of Constantine, which have a certain gothic style, and have lost the square proportion which is proper to old Latin inscriptions. The Vergil confirms what I have always believed, that the first four verses which one puts at the beginning of the *Aeneid* are borrowed: this book does not have them."⁴⁹

Montaigne remarks, with surprise, on the freedom with which patrons of the Library were allowed to do their work. A visitor in 1600 similarly observed a great crowd of readers freely using the Library.⁵⁰ But from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, it has been argued, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana became a citadel of Counter-Reformation

⁴⁷ "Ego Pomponius accepi librum His. Gasparis Veronensis de rebus gestis per Paulum. Ex membr. in rubeo sine tabulis, die VII. octobris 1475. . . . Pomponius accepi Bella civilia Appiani in papiro. V. cal. decembr. . . ." (Münz and Fabre, *La Bibliothèque*, 272).

⁴⁸ "Quisquis es qui tuum nomen hic inscribis ob acceptos commodo libros e bibliotheca pontificis, scito te indignationem eius et execrationem incursum nisi peropportune integros reddideris, hoc tibi denunciat Platina S. suae bibliothecarius, qui tantae rei curam suscepit pridie kal. martii 1475, pontificatus sui anno tertio" (Münz and Fabre, *La Bibliothèque*, 269).

⁴⁹ Montaigne is thus accurately characterizing the "Rustic Capital" script of the fifth-century manuscript, the *Virgilius Romanus* (Vat. lat. 3867; see *The Vatican Library, Its History and Treasures*, plate 3), and contrasting it to the "Square Capitals" of the old inscriptions; and he is correct in rejecting the authenticity of the four autobiographical lines interpolated by Vergil's commentators. Montaigne's description can be found in Eugène Müntz, *La Bibliothèque du Vatican au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1886): 131–35.

⁵⁰ The *Iter Italicum* of François and André Schott, described in Bignami Odier, VII.

ideology, whose focus centered on the collection of biblical and patristic material, and its use was restricted to *curialisti*.⁵¹ While such blanket generalizations are not accurate, restrictions, at times quite severe, were imposed on the use of the Library. Still, much was also accomplished both to broaden the collections and to make them more available. It was during this period that the most important libraries put together by Italian noble families during the Renaissance and Baroque periods were acquired by the Biblioteca Vaticana through gift or purchase, and that other great secular collections also entered its portals. The first significant collections to be acquisitioned wholesale were those of Fulvio Orsini⁵² and Cardinal Antonio Carafa around 1600, consisting of important Latin and Greek manuscripts.⁵³ In 1622, the Bibliotheca Palatina of Heidelberg was donated by Duke Maximilian I to Gregory XV (1621–1623).⁵⁴ In 1658, Frederick of Urbino's collections were acquired by Alexander VII. The *fondo* "Reginenses," consisting of the Latin and Greek manuscripts collected by Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689), famously converted to Catholicism, reached the Vatican Library in stages.⁵⁵ The acquisition of these collections enhanced the humanistic emphasis of the Renaissance library. Also during this period, and particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the oriental language collections of the Library were developed through the acquisition of biblical and patristic material.⁵⁶

⁵¹ This is the view of Anthony Hobson in *Great Libraries* (London, 1970): 79–80. But note that he also states on p. 80 that the *Virgilius Romanus* was written in Uncials.

⁵² For the negotiations to ensure that this library would remain in Rome and not be sold to Spain ("where few people take pleasure in these things and where those who appreciate them are more rare," according to the prime minister to the Spanish crown), see Koch, "Vatican Library," 31–32.

⁵³ Bignami Odier, 70–71, 81–82.

⁵⁴ This extremely valuable library, originating in the private libraries of Marsilius von Inghen and Konrad von Gelnhausen, was built up primarily through the efforts of Count Ottheinrich, the Protestant elector of the Palatinate during the dissolution of monasteries in the sixteenth century. When Maximilian of Bavaria captured Heidelberg in 1623, he confiscated the library and presented it to the pope. The Palatina consisted of 1,956 Latin manuscripts, 432 in Greek, 289 oriental manuscripts (most significant in number and importance the ones in Hebrew), 27 in Old French, 846 in German, and 6,000 printed books. It took 196 trunks to transport the library to Rome. By the terms of the Treaty of Paris (1815), 38 Latin and Greek manuscripts were returned to Heidelberg, in addition to the German manuscripts and five others in Latin relating to the history of Heidelberg. The bibliography on the collection and its history is enormous (Bignami Odier, 107–15 and notes). Perhaps the most famous manuscripts of this collection are the fourth-century *Virgilius Palatinus* (Pal. lat. 1631) in *Rustic Capitals*, and part of the *Lorsch Gospel* written at Charlemagne's court (Pal. lat. 50).

⁵⁵ The last major library was acquired in 1922 when the collection of Fabio Chigi, later Pope Alexander VII, was transferred to the Vatican from the Palazzo Chigi by the Italian government, which had bought it in 1918, to make it more widely available to scholars.

⁵⁶ Bignami Odier, 160–61.

The Library never instituted a policy of keeping readers out, as the Archives, a separate institution with its own staff, in fact has done through papal legislation.⁵⁷ The Library remained open, if only for a few hours a day and with occasional interruptions, throughout this period. During the pontificate of Clement XIII (1758–1769), particularly severe limitations on the use of the Library were imposed by a papal bull, even if they were at times ignored or circumvented.⁵⁸ The restrictions imposed will weigh on the Library for the next century, a period during which the Library was shaken by both the stormy political events that overwhelmed the papacy and Rome, including the French occupation of the city in 1798, and then the struggles to establish an independent Italian state.⁵⁹

More problematic was the inadequacy of the reading room: this was the lobby of the Sistine Library, where light penetrated through a single window in a wall seven feet thick. The absence of an appropriate reading room meant most of all that the handwritten inventories and catalogs of manuscripts and printed books could not be easily consulted. Scholars were greatly dependent on the good will of a staff that, even more in those days, was extremely overworked. It is also true that access to the manuscripts was prevented by certain librarians who guarded their contents with great ferocity or jealousy.⁶⁰ Still, while various difficulties no doubt discouraged some readers, there is plenty of evidence in the Library's own archives to show that the Library was never completely closed and that a formal system was in place for the consultation and reproduction of manuscripts.⁶¹ Even today, the consultation of large parts of the Library's extensive collections of manuscripts depends on the catalogs compiled during this period. After the move to the new building and collocation of the Library in the Salone Sistino, a major reorganization of the books was undertaken by the librarian Domenico Ranaldi, his cousins, and his nephews.⁶² Domenico

⁵⁷ See Chadwick, *Catholicism*, as above. Even before the Archives were formally separated from the Library, greater control was kept over their availability. On 23 January 1591, for example, Gregory XIV issued an order prohibiting the copying of documents in the Archives.

⁵⁸ A discussion of Clement's bull is found in Pastor, *History of the Popes* 35:184–85, preceded by the background that may have led to such restrictions, applying both to the consultation and the loan of manuscripts.

⁵⁹ Napoleon confiscated papal property including the Library and Archives. Substantial material was taken to France, but most of it was eventually returned (Bignami Odier, 167, 193).

⁶⁰ G. A. Reggi, a librarian during the 1780s, was described as “peggio di Radamanto e Minosse” [worse than Rhadamantus and Minos] (Bignami Odier, 184, 191 n. 12).

⁶¹ Bignami Odier, 113–15.

⁶² The Ranaldi family is one of several family dynasties in the history of the Library. Members of this family are found in the employ of the Library from the 1540s to well past the middle of the seventeenth century.

and Alessandro Ranaldi compiled the first formal registers (in book form) of Latin manuscripts between 1608 and 1620 in six volumes and two index volumes.⁶³ A similar inventory of Greek manuscripts was completed by Leone Allacci in three volumes a few years later.⁶⁴ These catalogs were in constant use in the vestibule of the Biblioteca Sistina. Copies were made and even disseminated abroad. During the next two centuries, catalogs of other parts of the collection were added, such as an index of printed books (begun in the 1650s), and of Arabic and Syriac manuscripts (in the 1660s). The obstacles posed to scholars in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana were never as forbidding as in the Archives. When, soon after the Archives were opened in 1878, one student asked Pietro Wenzel, the archivist, for advice on how to proceed to find documents for his work, he received the smiling reply “Bisogna pescare”—you have to go fishing.⁶⁵

* * *

In the list of nineteenth-century popes, Leo XIII is remembered by scholars as the most enlightened pontiff because, in the belief that the Catholic Church and the Holy See had nothing to fear from the truth of history, Pope Leo opened the Vatican Archives to the use of researchers in 1878.⁶⁶ His boldness in the matter of the Archives seems all the more remarkable because it followed upon the heel of the most isolated period in the history of both Library and Archives, when the Italian state had taken over Rome in 1870, and in the wake of the First Vatican Council, best known for declaring the pope infallible. Pope Leo was just as decisive in beginning the modernization of the Library, which “awoke as if from a deep sleep.”⁶⁷

The period from the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878–1903) to that of Pius XI (1922–1939) saw the integration of the Biblioteca Vaticana into the mainstream of modern library organization and management. These popes and their librarians addressed the same concerns that had preoccupied the Renaissance popes: space, staffing, and public access.

⁶³ Bignami Odier, 77ff. All in all, there were more than seven thousand MSS in the *fondo Vaticanus latini*. The Ranaldis were not without their detractors: they were frequently accused of being tyrannical in the running of the Library, and issues of economic interests pitted them against each other.

⁶⁴ The third volume was lost in 1797 and redone at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Girolamo Amati (Bignami Odier, 112).

⁶⁵ Chadwick, *Catholicism*, 109.

⁶⁶ This story is masterfully told in all its fascinating details by Owen Chadwick, who turns what might have been an arid tale of ecclesiastical history and dusty documents into a lively page-turner, and conveys the excitement and fascination of archival research.

⁶⁷ Eugène Tisserant, “The Vatican Library,” in *The Vatican Library: Two Papers*, 7.

The working areas of the Library were moved to the floors below the Salone Sistino, which had housed the Library since the Renaissance. The current “Sala di Consultazione” for the printed books (also called Sala Leonina, and beautifully decorated) was first created when Leo XIII opened the Archives, and was meant to serve as a reference room for both Archives and Library, connected by the Cortile della Biblioteca.⁶⁸ This had been the locale where the muskets of the papal troops had been stored. “Cedant arma libris” was the motto for its construction.⁶⁹ The current manuscript room, much more Spartan, used to be part of the Tipografia Vaticana, which was moved to its own building, close to the entrance into Vatican City by the S. Anna gate.⁷⁰ The first floor—the *piano terra*—with the new entrance to the Library in the Cortile del Belvedere was turned over to the use of the Library during the 1920s. When Pius XI made the momentous decision that the Vatican would adopt the automobile and sell its fleet of horses, the stables (on the ground level of the courtyard of the Belvedere, to the right or east of the entrance) were given over to the Library, and converted to stacks for the printed books, which had received a large increase with the acquisition of the Barberini collection in 1902. The Snead Company of New Jersey was selected to build the stacks, of a sort that had not yet been seen in Italy, but was common throughout America.⁷¹ On 20 December 1928, the ex-librarian Pope Pius XI inaugurated the new wing of the Vatican Library. He surveyed the new entrance from the courtyard of the Belvedere and climbed the new staircase leading to the new reading room, went through the new stacks installed by Snead and Company of Jersey City, inspected the technical equipment and the new catalog, and was pleased by all. This visit marked the opening celebration of the pope’s jubilee year.⁷²

With a series of *motu proprio*s, Leo XIII also began the restructuring of the administration of the Library to make it more responsive to scholarly standards. He took the everyday running of the Library out of the cardinal librarian’s hands and placed it into the hands of the

⁶⁸ An Italian-style “bar” provides welcome refreshment and conversation for staff and patrons of both institutions. Pictures of the various areas of the modern Library can be found in *The Vatican Library, Its History and Treasures*.

⁶⁹ “Let weapons yield to books” (Tisserant, “The Vatican Library,” 7).

⁷⁰ Today’s Tipografia poliglotta, established during the pontificate of Pius X, is the heir to a long history of printing within the Vatican. For its earlier history, see José Ruysschaert, “La bibliothèque et la typographie vaticanes de Sixte V. Projets, étapes, continuités,” *Miscellanea bibliothecae vaticanae* 4 (1990): 343–63.

⁷¹ Tisserant, “Vatican Library,” 8–10, describes the pope’s direct involvement in preferring Snead and Co. over the European firms from which bids also had been requested.

⁷² Koch, “The Vatican Library,” 15.

professional staff of the Library: the prefect, the vice-prefect (a newly revived post), the scribes, and other professionals. It was said that Leo XIII allowed “the cardinal librarian to reign, but not to govern.”⁷³ It was because of this administrative reform that so many of the prefects of this century have been scholars and academic administrators: Franz Ehrle, Giovanni Mercati, Eugène Tisserant, Leonard Boyle, and the current prefect, Raffaele Farina.⁷⁴

Finally, Leo XIII also addressed the collection’s accessibility. All restrictions for scholars wishing to conduct research in the Library were lifted by a *motu proprio* of 1888, which was accompanied by a “Regolamento della Biblioteca Vaticana” detailing the organization of the personnel, the administration, and the services the Library was to provide, even including the hours of opening and closing. The second great initiative was the publication of the manuscripts’ catalogs, initiated according to international standards under the prefecture of Franz Ehrle (1895–1913).⁷⁵ The ambitious program of publications specializing in the manuscript holdings of the Vatican Library is exemplified by the series *Studi e testi*, traditionally edited by the Library’s prefect, which was begun by Ehrle and has produced so far about four hundred volumes.⁷⁶

Prefect Achille Ratti—the future pope Pius XI—turned his attention to the catalog of printed books. Resources were very limited during the war, and Ratti found help however he could. The story is told that in December of 1917 Ratti received permission from Pope Benedict XV to allow the staff of the Library to turn the courtyard into a vegetable garden. In exchange, the workers were asked to carry home every evening some of the ancient register catalogs of the printed books and make index-card entries out of them. It was Ratti who began the classification of the “Raccolta generale” (the general collection of printed books) into the broad sections—philosophy, theology, history, etc.—still in use today.⁷⁷ Perhaps the most important step in the cataloging of the printed books was taken between 1927 and 1939, when the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Library of

⁷³ Bignami Odier, 236.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 320–47, a chronological chart of Library officials.

⁷⁵ The first was published in 1885 by the Englishman Henry Stevenson.

⁷⁶ A record of the Library’s publications during this particularly active period is *I libri editi della biblioteca Vaticana MDCCCLXXXV–MCMXXXVII. Catalogo ragionato illustrato* (Vatican City, 1947).

⁷⁷ Ratti’s interest in the Library continued after his elevation, and his patronage facilitated the physical expansion of the Library into the first floor. In addition to the expansion described above, Pius XI added additional space to the Library in the 1920s and 1930s (Tisserant, “Vatican Library,” 8–9; “Pius XI as Librarian,” 394–95; Bignami Odier, 258–59).

Congress helped to prepare a card catalog of all the printed books so that they would be readily accessible to all scholars. It was also hoped that the Vaticana would become a parallel to the Library of Congress, setting standards and policies in organizing and cataloging that would be followed by all ecclesiastical libraries in Italy, and even in the world.⁷⁸

* * *

The Library that Leonard Boyle took over was to a large extent the stable Library constructed under Leo XIII and Pius XI and the capable prefects they had appointed. But the revolution provoked by the computer in the management and distribution of information was transforming libraries as fundamentally as the technology of printing had challenged scribal culture when the Library was first founded. Just as the first librarians, Platina and Giovanni Andrea Bussi, had recognized the opportunities presented by Gutenberg's invention, Fr. Boyle set in motion a series of undertakings to bring the Library into the computer age. Funds were secured for the Library's mainframe computer and software for the online catalog of printed books, which can be searched online.⁷⁹ In cooperation with the École Française of Rome, the miniatures of the manuscripts of several important *fondi* (Reginenses latini, Urbinates latini, Vaticani latini) were put on video disk. With the collaboration of IBM, Boyle began the digitization of manuscripts, which can thus be made available online. Digitization, furthermore, is being exploited to decipher texts rendered illegible by damage or erasure, as was recently done for a Greek manuscript that has three levels of writing.⁸⁰ A printed catalog and corresponding database of the Vatican incunables has been published by William Sheehan.⁸¹ A new, inventory-style catalog was adopted for the manuscripts to make large amounts of the collection available much more quickly. The Vatican Library is also participating in several international projects to set standards for online cataloging and access to manuscripts. In all of these activities,

⁷⁸ For the details of this cooperation, see Leonard Boyle's "The Vatican Library," which serves as a second preface to *Rome Reborn* (see n. 82). It gives me particular pleasure to mention that the president of the Carnegie Endowment was Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University.

⁷⁹ The catalog is part of a network called URBS, shared by fourteen libraries of foreign institutes in Rome today.

⁸⁰ The application of electronic techniques to the study of manuscripts in particular is discussed by Ambrogio M. Piazzoni, "Verso una paleografia elettronica? Riflessioni sull'esperienza della Biblioteca Vaticana nella digitalizzazione dei manoscritti," *Collectanea in honorem*, 473–83.

⁸¹ *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae incunabula*. Studi e testi 380–83 (Vatican City, 1997).

Fr. Leonard was following a mission for the Library that can justly be traced back to Nicholas V and the bull of Sixtus IV, which he was fond of quoting. The discussion of the Vatican Library that Boyle wrote for the book catalog of the exhibit "Rome Reborn," mounted at the Library of Congress in 1993 and based exclusively on materials from the Vatican Library,⁸² could be read as a manifesto of the Library's generous original vision. Here, Boyle is critical of the restrictions that had been imposed on the Library's use from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, and he praises Leo XIII, under whom "the library came out of its isolation and the ideal of Nicholas V began to reassert itself."⁸³ The theme of this preface is not, as one might have expected for such a catalog, a disquisition on the great treasures the Library contains, but rather a closely reasoned argument that the Library's mission remains the "common convenience of the learned," quoting directly Sixtus's bull and Nicholas V's letter to Enoch of Ascoli, a mission that continues to be broadened by technological advances: the unique pieces exhibited in Washington in 1993 can still be viewed not only in the printed catalog, but also on the Library's Web site.

⁸² Anthony Grafton, ed., *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture* (Washington, 1993).

⁸³ P. xvi, quoting Tisserant.