



JEROME SAVONAROLA 1452 – 1498

Jerome Savonarola was an Italian priest who was active in the city of Florence during the Renaissance. His life and work preceded the Protestant Reformation, but he was an early reformer in the Roman Catholic Church where he denounced both church and state corruption, despotic rule, moral rot, and the exploitation of the poor.

After earning a degree in the arts, Savonarola prepared to enter medical school, but he later abandoned his career intentions to enter the priesthood. Savonarola took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and was ordained as a Dominican Friar. He believed that his mission was to warn people of the coming day of God's judgment with his fiery sermons and social causes. He wrote instruction manuals on ethics, logic, philosophy, and government, composed devotional works, and prepared sermons for local congregations. He was highly critical of Lorenzo de Medici, the leader of Florence at the time, and the Pope in Rome. When both men died shortly after Savonarola warned them of the coming wrath of God, people started paying attention to his sermons!

Savonarola continued to speak out strongly against the corrupt clergy in Rome and the new Pope tried to silence his denunciations by offering to make him a Cardinal. This would have made him subject to the Pope on all matters of faith and practice. When Savonarola refused the position, the Pope excommunicated him from the church. From that point on, scoffers dismissed him as an over-excited zealot, and the crowds in Florence turned against him. He was imprisoned, tortured and eventually burned at the stake in 1498.

Savonarola's preaching against Medici despotism later became a model for the Italian struggle for liberty and national unification, and his meditations on suffering, later published by Martin Luther, were a model for evangelical testing and piety. For us today, he is a role model for those who stand up to hypocrisy in the church and those who would use the church as a means of personal advancement.