

Marsilio Ficino:

Magnus of the Renaissance, Shaper of Leaders



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ABSTRACT

This article summarises the life of Marsilio Ficino, a philosopher, priest and scholar, and his profound influence on the Renaissance. The major events and achievements of Ficino's work are described along with his physical characteristics, personality and life style. Marsilio Ficino translated the major works of Plato and other ancient philosophers and convinced the leading thinkers of the Catholic church to modify their view of the relationship of reason to belief. He also helped redefine the 'human being' in the eyes of the Church and the leaders of that time.

The Renaissance was a time of major social, economic and political upheaval and Ficino provided a stabilizing force for the society of Florence and played a significant role in influencing the thoughts and actions of the leaders of 15th century Europe. Ficino's view of mankind and his interpretation of the immortality of the soul helped unleash extraordinary amounts of creativity in architecture, painting, sculpture and literature.

This article puts forward the view that Ficino's work was not only a major influence on the Renaissance but affected the ways we treat people in Western society and workplaces. Ficino also has shaped our view of the ideal leader. The Academy that Ficino led was the forerunner of today's institutions that focus on the development of leadership. Ficino also laid the groundwork for the growing interest in business schools in philosophy, ethics, the environment and spirituality of work. His work contains ideas similar to Wilber's Integral theory such as the universe consists of part-wholes organised into a natural hierarchy.

Finally, this article suggests that modern times are similar to the tumultuous social, political and economic conditions of the Renaissance and that Ficino's example and ideals provide significant relevance for leadership behaviour today.

Introduction; Marsilio Ficino, Shaper of the Renaissance

This century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts... poetry, rhetoric, sculpture, architecture, music...and all this in Florence."
Marsilio Ficino, 1492 (Severy, 1970: 43)

This article describes the life and work of Marsilio Ficino, a philosopher and leader of 15th century Florence who helped spark the Renaissance and the relevance of his ideas for the challenges we face today. Marsilio Ficino influenced philosophers, theologians, artists and leaders of the Renaissance in such a deep way that he reshaped the thinking of his time. Many of his ideas still underpin the values and views we have in the way we treat and lead people today and provide a compass for the way ahead.

Ficino brought the philosophy, culture and wisdom from the Egyptian, Greek, and Islamic worlds together with Medieval Christian Europe, which was a major contribution to the development of Western society. Ficino chose the best from each of these worlds—separating superstition from wisdom, speculation from reason. He achieved the extremely difficult integration of Platonic reason with Christian religious doctrine. He brought the view of the immortality of the soul back into Christianity and convinced leading thinkers that the human being was a reflection of the divine. From Ficino's work comes much of the finest Western tradition in philosophy, religion and literature, which stimulated the great minds and thought of the Renaissance. His work provided a fertile ground and stimulus for the finest and best leaders of the Renaissance and led to the human being represented as a figure of magnificence and beauty in art, religion, and music. The artists, writers, and leaders influenced by Ficino produced great works that described the link between the cosmos and human potential and portrayed the qualities and behaviours expected today of good leaders and citizens.

Marsilio Ficino was more than a philosopher with powerful intellectual and spiritual ideas. He was a *magnus*, a unique type of philosopher that brings spirituality into the heart by making it part of the total environment and culture of society. Ficino knew that there was no other way for human institutions and society to live and prosper. Ficino, while wholeheartedly devoted to philosophy, was immensely practical. He brought about cultural change by continually encouraging leaders to maintain their health in body and mind, to keep good company, and to live and work in an environment that was harmonious and uplifting. He also insisted that leaders become examples of the highest qualities and only focus on activities and actions that bring out the best in human nature.

Few people are aware, however, of Marsilio Ficino and the significant role that he played in radically reshaping the worldview of 15th century Florence. Ficino's words and actions convinced leaders of that time to treat the individual human life with dignity and respect because the human soul was an expression of the divine. His view of the worth of the human spirit has become so fundamental to modern Western life that we often take it for granted. Marsilio was what Joseph Badaracco, Jr. refers to as a 'quiet leader', a person whose *"small efforts are snowballs that roll down hills and accumulate force. Sometimes, in situations poised on the knife's edge, they tip things in the right direction. Sometimes ostensibly small acts influence other people months or even years later by taking root in their experience, gestating, and shaping their development.....In short, quiet leadership is what moves and changes the world"* (2002:9-10).

In the first part of the 21st century we are experiencing an extraordinary revision in the way we see the origin and evolution of the universe and human consciousness. This is profoundly affecting our understanding of ourselves, our relations to others and to the earth. This new understanding and experience of ourselves has led to questioning of the fundamental Western values and lifestyle, especially the dominating influences of the United States, technology and capitalism. The Islamic religion, for example, is directly confronting the Judeo-Christian values that underpin the Western lifestyle.

Many people are still struggling to find a way to find sense and meaning in a world that encourages unbridled consumerism and provides power and wealth to those who gain the largest share of ownership. We live in a world pervaded by overpowering scientific technology that provides unlimited material wealth and military supremacy for those that control it. Modern society no longer provides intellectual or scientific support for belief in an all-powerful God separate from the creation. The world today is a competing mixture of power, health and wealth for a few and the need for safety, food, clothing, shelter, health and education by a vast number of people around the world. Tribal, national, corporate and personal self-interest directly oppose the efforts of service organizations like the United Nations and 'enlightened' leaders to provide basic health and human rights for all people.

The opposing interests of leaders creates confusion and a loss of worthwhile meaning that gets carried into the workplace. As Russ Moxley says; *"By and large today,...workers are a dispirited lot. Too many of us leave work each day feeling drained, deenergized, used up. As a result, we and our organizations are losing a source of vitality that is desperately needed. One reason why we are dispirited is because of how leadership is understood and practiced. Too often, the practices of leadership suffocate spirit. We can, and must do better."*(2000: xiii).

Our circumstances today have many similarities to the social, economic and spiritual turmoil experienced during the Renaissance. During the Renaissance, the life and work of Marsilio Ficino provided an integrating and unifying force that helped still the chaos and turbulence of that time. He was a spiritual and intellectual force that brought new understanding and meaning to Italian society. The problems and dilemmas that Marsilio helped resolve have a number of important lessons for our time. This article aims to show that the work of Marsilio Ficino has much to offer leaders today.

The Life and Character of Marsilio Ficino

Marsilio Ficino lived from 1433 to 1499. He was the second son of Dietifeci Ficino, who was the personal physician of Cosimo de Medici, head of the richest and most powerful family in Florence, bankers to a succession of Popes. Much of the details of Marsilio Ficino's life have come from Giovanni Corsi's "*The Life of Marsilio Ficino*" which was written seven years after Ficino's death in 1506 and from the twelve volumes of letters he sent to his friends and leaders all over Europe and England that Ficino meticulously copied and saved.

Marsilio Ficino was first of all a philosopher, but he was also scholar, doctor, musician and priest. As scholar, apart from his original works, he translated into Latin the whole of Plato and many other classical writings. He did this at amazing speed and so well that his translations remained the standard editions until they were replaced by translations in national languages in the 19th century. As a doctor many, including the Medici, called upon his services before any others. As a musician his contemporaries recognised him as extraordinarily talented.

It is probable that in his 66 years Ficino never set foot outside the territory of Florence and the record of his life is little more than the chronicle of his books and letters. And yet, associated with his Platonic Academy and under his immediate influence was the most brilliant group of men ever to have assembled in modern Europe. These were the men who embodied the Renaissance -Lorenzo de' Medici, Alberti, Poliziano, Ladino, and Pico della Mirandola. Directly inspired by Ficino were the great Renaissance artists, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Dürer, and many others. Professor Kristeller has said that the whole intellectual life of Florence in his time was under his influence (Kristeller, 1943).

In 1434 Cosimo de Medici overcame major adversity and conflict with the Albizzi family to become the undisputed ruler of Florence. Through energy and wisdom in finance, in politics, in generous patronage of artists and philosophers, Cosimo – and his son Piero and grandson Lorenzo after him – would enable Florence to prosper, to preserve its republican government, to foster its love of beauty and life and its admiration for the brilliance of ancient Athens and Rome.

Cosimo had an extraordinary love of the classical world, its art and literature, especially the teaching of Plato's Academy. He had a strong desire to bring Plato's philosophy to Italy and especially Florence. Upon meeting Ficino when he was still a young boy, Cosimo felt he had the potential to accomplish this task. The son of a doctor, also trained as a doctor, Ficino inherited the medieval tradition of linking astrology, music and medicine into a holistic view of health. Cosimo convinced Ficino to abandon his studies of medicine at university (which Ficino had taken in deference to his father's wishes) and to take up the study of philosophy and the healing of souls.

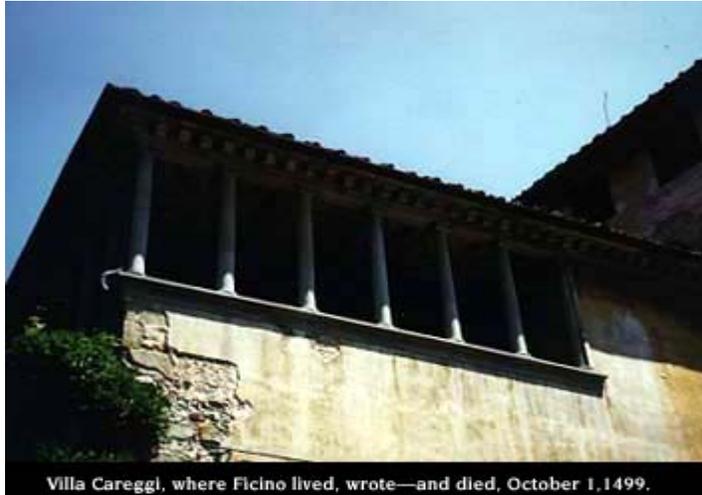
Cosimo managed a banking empire that had branches in Milan, Venice, Pisa, Rome, Avignon, Geneva, Bruges, and London and in 15 years made a profit of 290,791 florins – more than four million dollars (Severy, 1970). The church was opposed to taking interest on loans, and considered it immoral and an offence against God. Cosimo was able to justify his lending by using the Code of Justinian, which showed that the ancient Romans tolerated interest-taking and that the risk in lending justified the interest.

At the Council of Florence, Cosimo was inspired by the lectures of Gemistos Plethon, a philosopher of Greece. These talks triggered a desire to recall to Italy as soon as possible the philosophy of Plato. And in 1456 he decided to found a Platonic academy. Cosimo was particularly interested in the immortality of the soul and stimulated discussions and debates with a small group of scholars in the hope of finding a satisfactory answer.

In 1462 Cosimo encouraged Ficino to learn the Greek language and then commissioned Marsilio, at the age of 29, to translate the whole of Plato. He exhorted Ficino to take special care over his studies since he felt that the bringing of the philosophy of ancient Greece to Italy was his natural calling. Cosimo also guaranteed Ficino that he would not neglect him in any manner and would supply everything he needed. To Ficino's father he said; "*You, Ficino, have been sent to us to heal bodies, but your Marsilio here has been sent down from heaven to heal souls.*" Cosimo gave Ficino beautifully written Greek books of Plato and Plotinus that were very costly.

The Platonic Academy of Florence was set up the same year probably to coincide with this work. It was situated in a villa at Careggi that Medici gave to Ficino. It overlooked the Medici villa a kilometer away. The purpose of this Academy

was to teach Plato's philosophy as a way of life, gathering like-minded thinkers within its walls. These thinkers pursued the same goal of virtue and wisdom – which provided a bond of friendship and fellowship within the Academy. The Platonic Academy was not a university or formal college but a circle around the brilliant Ficino, one that revolved around banquets, conversations, public speeches and celebrations of dates such as Plato's birthday. The major topics that the Academy explored were how to contemplate God, divine friendship or Platonic love, and the common truths found in all religions.



Balcony at the Villa Careggi, where Ficino worked, lived, and died.

The following year Cosimo interrupted Ficino's work on Plato and gave him a new commission - to translate a manuscript that had just been found containing the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, an Egyptian philosopher believed to have lived in the time of Moses. To the Egyptians, Hermes was the inventor of language and writing, the master of knowledge, with power to guide souls at the time of death. *"On Divine Wisdom and the Creation of the World"* or the *"Poimandres"* as it was often called, was a manuscript that described Hermes Trismegistus and provided the missing link between the philosophy of Graeco-Roman antiquity and the revealed wisdom of Christian scripture. Both Plato and Pythagoras had studied in Egypt and Moses had been brought up as an Egyptian so the Poimandres was proof that the divergent strands of Greek philosophy and Christian theology shared a common source.

Just before Cosimo's death in 1464 Ficino presented him with his translations of ten shorter dialogues of Plato. On having these dialogues read to him, Cosimo felt that his quest to bring Plato's philosophy to Italy was finally fulfilled. Ficino always acknowledged his indebtedness to Cosimo: *"I owe Plato much, to Cosimo no less. He realized for me the virtues of which Plato gave me the conception"* (Acton, 1979:12).

The eventual publication of Ficino's translation and commentaries was enormously influential in dissolving the dichotomy between the Greek philosophic tradition and Christianity. The fusing of these two great strands in Western culture was of great significance in determining the direction the Renaissance would take. The Catholic Church in Rome was at this time hotly debating the respective merits of Aristotle compared to Plato and only when Plato's moral teachings were accepted as being in harmony with Christian values, could the Academy fully expound Plato's philosophy.

After the death of Cosimo, the Florentine Academy, the teaching of Plato and support for Ficino were in jeopardy. Power was transferred to Cosimo's son, Piero. Piero de Medici, as the new head of the Medici family, continued support of Ficino and the Academy. He urged Marsilio to publish his translations of Plato and to interpret and expound them in public so that his citizens might also be enlightened by the newfound splendor of such fine philosophy. He supplied Marsilio with many volumes of great value, in both Greek and Latin, which greatly helped in setting out and explaining the teachings of Plato. During this time Marsilio gave public lectures on Plato to a large audience. Some of his lectures still exist, as well as four volumes of Platonic commentaries.

Piero was crippled for much of his life, and was forced to travel in a litter, and from the age of 50 could not even walk from one room to another. Quiet, serious and sick a great deal of the time, Piero had a brilliant son, Lorenzo, who was full of energy, talent and warmth. Lorenzo had the soul of a poet and his verses are ranked among the best poetry of the Italian Renaissance. In 1469 Piero died and at the age of 29, Lorenzo found himself the head of the Medici family and the leader of Florence. Lorenzo had to lead Florence in very uncertain and turbulent times.

Between 1469 and 1473 the work of translation proceeded rapidly. Yet these were difficult times for Ficino personally. In 1468 he became ill and depressed. He speaks of 'a certain bitterness of spirit' and often refers to the influence of Saturn causing him to be melancholy. Ficino continually worked to resolve many questions of deep religious, metaphysical and philosophical nature. Trying to bridge the gap between religious belief and Platonic reason in a way that respected the religion he had great faith in but which was true to Platonic meaning was emotionally very difficult for Ficino. He was advised by his close friend Giovanni Cavalcanti to cure himself by writing a dialogue on love. Ficino used Plato's *Symposium, De Amore* to produce a work in which he explains how creation is brought into being, sustained and again gathered to its source through the flow of love (Corsi, 1981).

In 1471 printing came to Florence and thousands of copies of Ficino's and other scholars' writings were circulated to the educated of Florence. During the tenure of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Platonic Academy of Florence went far beyond the point to which Cosimo had brought it. Women became better educated than any other time before and the achievements in art, science and philosophy led Ficino to describe this time as a golden age similar to the glory of ancient Greece and Rome.

Ficino became a priest in 1473 and was made a Canon of Florence Cathedral. In 1473 he began to publish his ideas which emphasized the divinity of Man's soul and the personal relationship between Man and God. In this book he writes of Man: *"Let him revere himself as an image of the Divine of God. Let him hope to ascend again to God, as soon as the Divine Majesty deigns in some way to descend to him. Let him love God with all his heart, so as to transform himself into Him, who through singular love wonderfully transformed Himself into Man."*

The Academy blossomed for the next 20 years under the financial support and protection of Lorenzo de Medici and the leadership of Marsilio Ficino. The activities of the Academy were conducted quite openly and meetings were held in the Medici villas. Members included some of the closest friends and supporters of the Medici who were actively involved in government and thus gave the Academy considerable authority and influence.

In 1478, a conspiracy to oust Lorenzo as the head of Florence had the backing of the Pope and led to an estrangement between Ficino and Lorenzo. This coup was a serious challenge to the Florentine republic and would have led to the demise of the Academy if it had succeeded. The attempted assassination of Lorenzo in the Florence Cathedral resulted in the death of his brother, Giuliano, and the serious wounding of Lorenzo. Ficino was suspected of involvement in the plot and was under investigation because he had corresponded and received financial support from two of the main conspirators while the third had been a long-standing member of the Academy.

The crisis however, instead of alienating Lorenzo further from Ficino, actually brought the two men closer together. During this period, Ficino wrote some of his most inspired and moving letters to Lorenzo on the unity of the spirit and on the harmony between country and city life.

As a result of the Pazzi assassination conspiracy against the Medici family, Florence was put under interdict by the Pope, and was attacked in a bitter war. By 1478, largely as a result of the war, there was an outbreak of plague in the city. Ficino helped overcome the disease by publishing a very different work, a practical guide to the treatment of plague. This was made immediately accessible and of use to citizens and was later translated into Latin as a standard medical text and published alongside the famous medical doctor Galen's work on fevers. It is easy to forget that while all of Ficino's works dealt with contemplation of the divine and immortality, they were written at a time of intense social and political conflict.

Throughout his life Ficino faced opposition and censure from the Church on account of his Platonic teachings. Ficino's acceptance by the church was further strained as a result of his association with a brilliant scholar Pico della Mirandola. Attracted to Ficino and the Academy, Pico attempted to harmonise all systems of religions and philosophical thought into a universal synthesis. Pico was outlawed by Rome and had to flee to France to ensure his safety.

Pico was eventually allowed to return to Florence and continue his association with Ficino. This association and the growing intolerance of the church to any variation or opposition to its teaching brought the writings of Marsilio Ficino under investigation by the Inquisition which had been given new papal powers to control the printing of books containing false or erroneous material. Ficino appealed to his friends including three lawyers, an ambassador and the Archbishop of Florence to exert all their influence on the Pope and at the eleventh hour the authorities were persuaded to drop their investigation. Ficino was also accused of practicing magic several times, but was always cleared due to the powerful alliances he maintained, and perhaps also to the sincerity and eloquence of his manner.

This investigation, plus the mounting opposition from its critics led the Platonic Academy to disguise its identity and go underground while still continuing to have Medici's protection. At its pinnacle, the Academy included some of the most

brilliant minds of the century. Ficino's correspondence to leading citizens throughout Italy and the nation states of Europe filled twelve books of letters. One of Ficino's letters lists more than 40 distinguished members of Florentine society. The Academy did not receive widespread recognition because members were sworn to secrecy and discretion and to speak cautiously of its work outside its walls, especially during the last years of Lorenzo's rule. Ficino best summarized the work of the Academy in one letter in which he describes the rebirth of the liberal arts and the teaching of Plato in Florence. In little more than half a century, an unprecedented burst of creativity transformed Florence, nurtured the talents of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, and kindled the magnificent era we call the Renaissance (Severy, 1970).

In 1485, the Dominican monk Savonarola began to harangue the Florentines with prophetic speeches of the Apocalypse. He led a backlash by preaching a return to the religious ideals of the Middle Ages and a fierce denunciation of vice and corruption, especially by those in authority. He sought to separate religion from philosophy and faith from reason. Although it was Lorenzo who brought Savonarola back from exile, the friar soon accused him of ruining the state and squandering the wealth of the people. While Ficino first expressed support for Savonarola, he later distanced himself from Savonarola's extremism and advised others to do likewise.

In 1491, almost 30 years after Cosimo asked Ficino to translate Plato into Latin, the press of Bernardino di Choris of Venice, printed the first complete translation of Plato by Marsilio Ficino. The preface included a dedication celebrating the relations of its author with Cosimo, Piero his son, and finally, Lorenzo the Magnificent, his current patron, student and close friend (Horsburgh, 1909).

After Lorenzo's death in 1492 and the expulsion of his son Piero, the activities of the Academy were greatly reduced. The last few years of Ficino's life were the dawn of "the age of exploration." Christopher Columbus would reach the 'New World' in 1492.

After the death of Ficino in 1499, the Academy was continued into the 16th century under Francescoda Diaceto. The original academy that Ficino started in Florence led to other academies being initiated in Italy, Europe and eventually England. Some of the great minds of the Renaissance belonged to an academy like Ficino's including Leonardo da Vinci, Alberti, Galileo, and Galibei. The Royal Society in London and the later academies with members such as Sir Isaac Newton, regarded themselves as sharing in the same tradition as Ficino's Renaissance Academy. These later academies tended to specialise in some branch of human knowledge where Ficino's Academy embraced the whole range of human activity.

Marsilio Ficino was described as very short in stature, of slender build, and somewhat hunched in both shoulders. He was a little hesitant when speaking and at times stuttered. His legs and arms, and particularly his hands, were rather long. His complexion was ruddy. His hair was golden and curly.



His health varied since he had problems with his stomach. While he was described as normally cheerful and sociable, at times he was melancholy and sullen. He was a vegetarian who encouraged his followers not to eat cooked food, and throughout the year to rise with the sun, or an hour or two earlier. He did not eat a lot and was very particular with his food, but he enjoyed excellent wines. However much he enjoyed wine, he never went away from parties drunk. To Ficino, discipline was essential to the spiritual life.

Ficino was considered mild, refined and gentle, although he was sometimes quick to break out into anger, but became instantly calm again. He easily forgot injury, but would never forget his responsibilities. Throughout his life he was content with simple clothes and possessions. He was neat rather than elegant and was averse to extravagance. His supporters provided the necessities of his life. He was very satisfied with his situation in life, so that at no time did he squander or try to accumulate riches. As might be expected of a philosopher, he was indifferent to business matters.

Through his study of medicine he became keenly interested in health, his own and the health of all his friends. He was given credit for remarkable cures for many of his friends. As was the Hippocratic custom of the day for doctors, Ficino always provided his service free of charge. He gave excellent care to parents, relatives, and friends, but particularly to his invalid mother, Alessandra, whose life he prolonged through considerable care and attention to her 84th year.

Ficino was also known for his love of music and his excellent talent as a player of the lyre. Singing his Orphic Hymns, Ficino enthralled Bishop Campano who was traveling through Florence. In a letter Campano says it was *'as if curly-headed Apollo took up the lyre of Marsilio and fell victim to his own song. Frenzy arises. His eyes catch fire.....and he discovers music which he never learnt.'*

Ficino's letters have a quality of timelessness, so that he seems to be speaking to us as clearly today as he spoke to his contemporaries in 15th century Florence. Almost absent from them are accounts of his feelings of disappointment or satisfaction with the tumultuous events that were occurring in his time. He was a true man of the spirit; largely independent of the 'blows of fortune'. He imparted tranquility and strength, like his own, to those who listened to him. For example, it is said when a meeting of leaders to discuss a crusade against the Turks became exceedingly morose because the Turks seemed an invincible threat to Florence and Europe, Ficino picked up his lyre and with his music he changed the atmosphere in the meeting from pessimism to confidence and strength.

Ficino's letters are the way we best get to know his character since they are marked by clarity, eloquence, honesty and integrity. His letters were a source of wise counsel to his friends. He often wrapped up his advice in playful humour. The Ficino letters show a man engaged in a life-long quest for real and substantial happiness, not just for himself but also for all of mankind. He is deeply religious but profound, persistent questioning forged his belief.

Lessons for Our Time

"By stressing the dignity of man and his creativity, the renaissance bequeathed an imperishable legacy. Men may stray from its ideals, but eventually the magnetism of this age pulls them back into an orbit of symmetry, proportion, and order. Fortunately for mankind, we cannot escape the influence of the Renaissance, which taught us to utilize the best of our classical heritage, to develop all sides of our personalities and powers, and to appreciate beauty in myriad forms."

Merle Severy (1970: 40).

Marsilio's historical significance is described mainly as a translator of Plato and other Greek philosophers and as a highly influential commentator on the relevance of these for his time. Ficino's major works were the translations of Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus and Plato.

Although Marsilio Ficino is undoubtedly a major figure of the Renaissance, many people have not heard of him and are unaware of his influence on the Renaissance. There are many reasons why the philosophy and writings of Ficino have been overlooked. Philosophy after the Renaissance was more interested in the philosophical method than in discovering the 'truth' to the answers of questions such as *'Who am I?'* and *'How and why did the universe begin?'* It should also be remembered that the church saw the Academy as contrary to many of its ideals and therefore Ficino's leadership was carried out in secrecy for some time.

Ficino was concerned with penetrating the deepest mysteries of life and to lift the human spirit into a state of purity and illumination that brought the soul back to God, the source of its being. He was concerned with explaining the journey of the soul in its return to its origin. Philosophy and science of the 18th and 19th century made God irrelevant and therefore Ficino's philosophy and work. Ficino saw God as immanent through creation that the Being of God and the being of the world were entirely interdependent, which was an opposite view to those in the Catholic hierarchy who stated that the created world was wholly distinct from outside, and other than God.

Marsilio Ficino died in 1499 at the end of the 15th century. His life and work made a significant contribution to the ideas, science and art of the Renaissance in several important ways.

1. He integrated the Greek's use of reason and Platonic ideals with Christian belief.
2. He rekindled the idea that God was immanent, permeated all things and that the human soul was an expression of God.

3. The establishment of an Academy that brought ideas from all around the world to discuss, debate and to seek universal truth.
4. He influenced leaders' needs to live and represent Spirit in everything they did and to create a society that was just, fair and uplifting for the human spirit.

1. The Integration of the Platonic Ideals with Christian Belief

More than any other Renaissance thinker, Ficino brought together the ideas of Plato such as the use of Reason, as a method of finding truth with the one God of the Christian religion. He showed that Plato's ideas of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful were evidence of the love of one absolute and all pervading God. Ficino built a stable platform for empirical science to be acceptable to the Christian religion. The work of Galileo, Copernicus and later Newton were acceptable to the Church as a result of his work that opened the door to a revolution in the way that man saw himself and the physical world. From this acceptance came the Scientific Revolution that led to technology, air travel, global communication, and advances in manufacturing, banking and health.

He saw that the use of reason was integral to a spiritual and worthy life: *"When you have satisfied searching reason and the proven counsel of the wise, consider yourself to have satisfied all men. For thus you have satisfied truth itself, which is greater than all"* (Ficino, 1981:5).

It is hard to accurately assess the full impact of Ficino's work on the Renaissance and the development of European and Western Culture. Ficino certainly was one of the brilliant scholars, poets and artists that led the Renaissance. While he was a major proponent of bringing Plato into Florence and the Catholic teaching, there were other scholars who also translated portions of Plato's works. However, many of the major philosophers, theologians, scholars and leaders from all over Italy and Germany attended his lectures and incorporated his ideas into their works.

Ficino's greatest contribution was that he introduced Platonic philosophy to Europe. Christianity, Ficino said, must rest on philosophical grounds. Plato does not stop at intermediate causes but rises to the highest cause. The philosophy of Plato is a logical outcome of previous thought which began with the Egyptians and advanced till Plato took up the key questions of religion and made it possible for the scholars of the Renaissance to clearly link them. Ficino followed this line of thought in speaking of the human soul, which he considered as the image of the Godhead, a part of the great chain of existence coming forth from God and leading back to the same source. Aristotle, on the other hand, denied the immortality of the soul and had a major influence on early Christian thought (Moore, 2002). It was only after Ficino's lifetime that the immortality of the soul was accepted into Catholic doctrine.

He brought into harmony ancient views of various deities and Christianity. His writings led to the adoption of the belief in the immortality of the soul as a central Christian tenet. Ficino brought Platonic ideas into Christianity and merged Christianity with Reason. This had been done before but Ficino did it at a time that set the stage for the unleashing of the individual human spirit and creativity. The most eloquent monument to Ficino's influence in bringing Egyptian and Greek thought to the Florentine society is the mosaic of Hermes Trismegistus in the Siena Cathedral.

While Ficino was not the first to help bring Platonic thought to Europe or to show that there was a continuous line of religious thought that stretched back from Egypt to Moses through to the Church, he more than anyone else established that the equal authority of *'lawful philosophy is no different from true religion; and lawful religion no different from true philosophy'*. This coming together of religious and philosophical thought, of belief and reason, was the basis upon which Western society could advance science and social reform.

This became the basis of the philosophy of the Renaissance and then the modern age, for in the century or so following Ficino's birth, more progress was made in the arts and sciences than in the previous thousand years. The voyages of discovery to America, to Southern Africa and the East mirrored the inward achievements in art and literature. Europe at that time was on the threshold of the scientific age of which the inventions of Leonardo and the discoveries of Galileo and later Kepler, were the beginnings.

2. God is immanent and the Soul Divine.

"I believe – and with no empty faith – that we are of divine origin" (Ficino, 1984: 58). Marsilio's work made the human soul a direct window to God. And through this window Ficino showed that God's love poured into humans and humans were a reflection of the divine and were immortal. Each individual person was part of God and had respect and dignity. Ficino saw God as immanent in the creation. Marsilio showed that God permeated everything and this happened through love.

It was Ficino more than anyone who took from Plato, Plotinus and the Hermetic writings the concept that the individual soul was immortal and divine, a concept that was all-important to the Renaissance. Previously the Church considered

each person to be filled with original sin and had to earn God's love by following the commandments of a detached and ferocious God. From this perspective life was temptation; man was sinful and unclean and had to be controlled by strict religious rules and rituals. Ficino helped free everyone from this view and unleashed a river of creativity in art, literature and music that glorified the best in humankind and showed that to be spiritual one had to love God and other humans. Ficino took this message to religious and government leaders and indicated it was their duty to do this even more than everyone else.

This view, that humans have dignity and a divine nature, was to be the trademark of the Renaissance and the major reason why it was such a turning point in Western history. To Ficino, the writings of Plato contained the key to the most important knowledge for Man: knowledge of himself, that is, knowledge of the divine and immortal principle within himself. This positive view of humankind provided the background ideas out of which the humanistic and Human Relations movement grew in England and the United States in the 20th century. The industrial revolution and technology that brought health and material wealth to Europe and the Americas were a result of the acceptance of humanistic values and science as a valid way to determine what was true.

Ficino adopted the concept, so often of deep concern to Cosimo de Medici that implied that the soul had the power '*to become all things*' and that Man, as Ficino states in a letter to Bernardo Bembo, could '*create the heavens and what is in them himself, if he could but obtain the tools and the heavenly material*'. As a result, he not only affected artists and scientists such as Michelangelo, and Gallitteri but he also set the foundation for the average person to be cared for by the State and Church. In this way he was one of the originators of the Human Relations movement and is especially relevant to the emerging field of spirituality at work.

Many of Ficino's ideas — the soul of the universe, a moving Earth, the role of gender, and the unity of nature — were explored by many Renaissance scholars and scientists. This exploration had begun with the idea of man as a divine being of the highest order, and encouraged the search into nature using science. According to Ficino, man's role is to oversee the welfare of all elements and all animals, and thus he is the natural lord and ruler of nature. Ficino's vision of man is that he is endowed with a mind similar to that of God.

An important part of Ficino's philosophy was the hierarchy of Being. In a review of Ficino's philosophy Professor Kristeller describes Ficino's view as; "*Since the world as totality of all things is first divided into some partial spheres, these spheres, like the whole, must be considered as graduated series or orders*. He then quotes directly from Ficino; '*The series of things is divided in its parts in such a way that there are many different orders of things in nature and that always the lowest parts of each higher order are somehow connected with the highest parts of the next following lower order*' (1964:80). Ficino therefore is describing the Great Chain of Being in which there are a series of interconnected but increasingly greater levels. The levels emanate from the Supreme Being and cascade down from matter through all species to man who is the highest level of consciousness. Ficino therefore held a similar view to Ken Wilber's levels of consciousness, which describes the entire universe as comprised of holons, part/wholes that integrate upwards into increasing levels of complexity, integration and consciousness until absolute Being is reached. As Wilber says the universe is made up of layers and levels of holons, or a 'holarchy', all the way up and all the way down the cosmos (Wilber, 1996). This view has gained increasing support as a way to describe levels of organisational and leadership development (Cacioppe, 2000).

Many of Ficino's ideas were also similar to many of the concepts of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist philosophy. Ficino's view that God was present every moment and through all things is similar to many of the Buddhist, Sufi, and Hindu mystical teachings. These concepts which encourage the practice of meditation, yoga and letting go of mental and emotional attachments are finding a great deal of popularity with educated people from Eastern and Western cultures and are reshaping our work and personal lives into more participative and caring societies.

For Ficino the immortality and divinity of the soul was the basis of 'the dignity of Man', which the artists and writers of the Renaissance sought to express in countless ways. In time the expression of this ideal touched every aspect of life. As the nobility moved out of their castles, they moved into houses that began to express the grace, proportion and light of the Renaissance. The forbidding towers and narrow streets that dominated many mediaeval Italian towns gave way to spaciousness and order. Today the harmony of a Georgian farmhouse as well as the stately homes of Europe still reflects the 'birth of beauty' in the 15th century.

Knowledge of ancient literature and history became the unquestioned basis of education in the West and remained so until very recently. The original impulse of the Renaissance, that the divinity of Man should be reflected in all activities, became in time a movement of general refinement, which lasted for centuries. This affected the taste and manners of the entire population of Europe. The improvement in manners meant more than learning to use a fork or how to make polite conversation. It was the adoption of a code of conduct that made consideration for others a norm of society. It was the reflection of 'Man's dignity' in his social behavior which Marsilio's letters echoed time and time again.

Many of today's managers and workers take for granted workplace practices such as employee health and safety, worker participation, personal and professional development, sick leave, study leave, and flexible work hours. They don't realise that for most of human history these were unheard of practices. They would be surprised to learn that Marsilio Ficino and the Renaissance were the catalysts for these.

3. The Establishment of an Academy of Integrated Learning

Ficino established an Academy that brought together the greatest thinkers, artists and leaders of Florence and helped them shape, build and bring into reality in their own field these fundamental ideals. From this Academy and Ficino's letters poured out a new way of thinking, seeing the world and appreciating other fellow human beings that sparked a huge shift in art, thought and behaviour.

Academies were a common part of Renaissance Italy. Learned people often spent an evening in discussion of themes in intellectual or artistic interest and these meetings took on the attributes of an academy. The Platonic Academy, however, was especially Florentine. Its discussions were half philosophical, half mystical and were expressions of talented and intelligent people who were interested in exploring the higher good in which the spirit could find satisfaction. The informality of the Academy and the equality which was given to anyone of age, background or calling that had something to contribute, sprang from the republican tradition which was part of every aspect of Florentine life. *"It was a source of inspiration to artists and thinkers, whilst professional men and merchants engrossed in money-making found here a way of escape from the preoccupations of their businesses"* (Ady, 1955: 126).

The meetings at the Academy were the main means by which Ficino taught philosophy to its extraordinary members. His several hundred letters, many to bare acquaintances, only give a faint reflection of the discussions that had taken place within its walls, among men of considerable stature. The Academy was a spiritual community bound together by a common bond of love for each other and to Ficino. Its members were called *'patronica familia'* and Ficino was 'the father of the Platonic family'. Ficino was their centre and they were the centre of the Renaissance (Rowdon, 1974, Williamson, 1974). Ficino's death in 1499 removed a major source of the inspiration from the philosophical debates he had once led. *"To expound the works of Ficino is to write the history of Platonism in Italy... the Academy came into being and died with him"*.

Ficino's academy brought back to life the debates and discussions that were the foundation of the great Athenian democracy and became the crucible where the ideas of the Renaissance were born. Today the lively discussions and interactions in pursuit of learning and truth common in universities echo the meetings that occurred in the Academy.

The Royal Society in London, which was established in 1660, was said to be influenced by Ficino's legacy with its influence on language and scientific thinking. Isaac Newton, one of the Society's most renowned members, was influenced greatly by the translations of Hermes Trismegistus that Ficino had brought back to life.

A private high school in New Zealand called the Ficino School is dedicated to the memory and work of Ficino. This school is educating young boys and girls in classical as well as modern education in a way that is in keeping with the principles and values that Marsilio Ficino recommended. The Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond focuses on philosophy, ethics, community leadership and emerging social issues rather than the traditional functional areas (e.g. marketing, finance) in its leadership degree at the undergraduate level. Some universities in Australia have introduced courses in philosophy and leadership into MBA programs.

4. Responsibility of Leaders to Bring Philosophy and Spirituality into Everything.

Ficino's Academy awoke the leaders of Europe to the deep significance of the Platonic tradition. In Italy his correspondents include Lorenzo de Medici; Ferrante, King of Naples; Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino; Pope Sixtus IV; Giovanni Cavalcanti the poet; Ermolao Barbaro; Bernardo Bembo; Pier Leone of Spoleto, Marco Barbo, and other scholars and churchmen too numerous to be listed. His letters to eminent people all over the continent contributed directly to this awakening. He was a friend and source of inspiration to the young John Colet who became the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and founder of the English public school system. He wrote to de Ganay, Chancellor of the Parliament in France; to the humanist Reuchlin in Germany, King Matthias of Hungary who invited him to his court to give personal instruction in Platonic philosophy; an appointment that he declined but a function, which he filled through his follower, Francesco Bandini, who resided with the King for several years.

While still alive the fame of Ficino spread throughout almost the whole world. After Italy, the first country to take up the Renaissance was Hungary. The kingdom of Hungary was far bigger than now and it played a crucial role in the defense of Europe against the Turks who were aggressively expanding during this time. Ficino's translations and books on Plato were very popular in Hungary and with the Hungarian King Corvinus. Matthias Corvinus was an enthusiastic follower of Ficino's ideas, especially the ideas of a philosopher-king as described in Plato's Republic, and that a ruler who could

unite wisdom and strength in himself could be the solution to the dangers facing Italy and Europe. Many influential people at the Hungarian Court were also deeply affected by the idea of the philosopher king as the leader and Ficino's ideas that the ruling class should be the examples of virtuous behaviour. Matthias aspired to election as Holy Roman Emperor. He founded a famous library at Corvina and created a highly educated administrative class in both the church and government, selected on ability rather than birth which attracted leading teachers to Hungary. These ideas also influenced the flowering of architecture, music and literature. Even though the Turks soon overran Hungary, his philosopher king and a society imbued with a spiritual consciousness rose from the ashes to take a lasting place in the evolution of Western society.

Both Matthias and Pope Sixtus IV made lavish promises and offered large rewards for Ficino to leave Florence and come to their cities to spread Plato's teachings. But he was content with his present circumstances and would not go to Rome or Hungary for any gifts however fine and rewarding. He would not abandon the Medici, to whom he owed all that he had been given, his friends, his mother or the Academy that was flourishing. All of these were very dear to him.

Ficino's ideas also influenced major leaders in the parliament and church in France. By the late 1500's Ficino's ideas had gained adherents all over Europe and England. Shakespeare was exposed to the writings of Ficino and flavors of his philosophy can be found in his sonnets and plays. The 17th century Cambridge Platonists embraced a similar view of the world as Ficino. They attempted to work out a new balance between the demands of the mind and the needs of the soul. They also tried to provide an alternative to the mechanistic view of the universe with its accompanying harsh political theories.

Ficino helped Florence remain the center of humanistic and intellectual movements' right up until his death, producing such influential thinkers as Pico della Mirandola. Ficino spent a great deal of time with the Medicis', especially Cosimo and Lorenzo, discussing Plato and Hermes Trismegistus

Ficino also had considerable influence over a young poet, Angelo Poliziano, whose brilliance in literature and languages had a great influence on Florence and the Renaissance. Ficino profoundly inspired young Poliziano who became one of the great poets and scholars of Italy. Poliziano referred to Ficino as 'Hercules' or 'young Homer'. While Pico, Poliziano and Ficino had strong disagreements on important philosophic topics such as love and the work of Plato and Aristotle, their friendship and love of God bound them together through all tribulations.

Ficino's work as physician had an element of natural magic to it. Ficino defined infection as an attraction of like by like and that like could be used to cure like. This concept has been considered to influence the development of modern vaccines and other medicines. Ficino also influenced Pier Leone, who was the leading physician of his time as well as a passionate investigator of nature's secrets. Leone devoted himself assiduously to the Platonists and to Marsilio, whom he always held in the highest honour.

There is some evidence to suggest that Copernicus was influenced by Ficino's thoughts and approach to religion and science. While some scholars dismiss the idea that Ficino and the Platonic Academy had any direct influence on the work of artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, it would be hard to imagine that these artists could not have been exposed to his ideas in the small city-states of Florence, Rome and Milan.

When Ficino preached in the Cathedral, Corsi tells us that people flocked to hear him speak and were delighted by his sermons on the gospels. He was not afraid to write to the leaders of religious orders and once to the Pope himself, urging them to fulfill their responsibilities, at a time when corruption in the church was common. Ficino also wrote to lawyers, rhetoricians and other leaders of significant influence. Towards the end of his life, he was able to write, even somewhat humorously, that through his correspondence he held all Europe in service to his friendship.

Ficino did have his critics however. He was satirized in the poems of the sarcastic poet Luigi Pulci as the '*flea*'. Pulci considered Ficino's philosophy unintelligible to mortals and his major effort of bringing Plato to Florence was "*only to spout it forth again in bubble and lunacy*" (Bertoluzzi, 1999:20). Villari in 1888 described Ficino as a '*species of living dictionary of passion for Plato and the classical ancient philosophy.*'"

Ficino, with his strong advocacy of philosophy as the basis of a good and balanced life, was an ideal example of a leader and scholar. He provided guidance, learning and spiritual development to leaders of the nations and city states that was accepted because of Ficino's eloquent and intelligent religious views and the exceptional way he lived his life.

Ficino participated in an enlightened society and he encouraged its leaders to share their good fortune and wealth with everyone. The citizens of Florence possessed a sturdy independence and took intense pride in the fact that they enjoyed the most democratic government in continental Europe. They even called important citizens like the Medici by their first name and declined to raise their hats to anyone except the archbishop. All 6000 members of guilds were eligible to

serve as lawmakers and to hold government positions. The Medici family introduced a progressive income tax that required more from the rich so Florence's wealth would be distributed across the society.

Ficino in one of his public lectures described philosophy as, *'defined by all men as love of wisdom ... and wisdom is the contemplation of the divine, then certainly the purpose of philosophy is knowledge of the divine.'* According to Ficino, the study and practice of philosophy is vital for the highest development of the mind and leads to the highest good, right government and a harmonious society. Ficino would insist that philosophy has to be at the core of all leadership development.

In his letter to Giovanni Francesco Ippoliti, the Count of Gazzoldo, he describes the nature and function of a philosopher and its relationship to leadership; *"In truth, once the mind of a man practicing philosophy has contemplated the good itself, and thence judges what things in human affairs are good, what bad, what dishonourable or honourable, harmful or useful, he organizes human affairs as a model of the good itself. He leads them away from evil, directs them to the good, and by this wise governance he manages personal, family and public affairs, and he teaches the laws and principles of good management. From this laws have their beginning"* (Ficino. 1981:30). He describes the end result and outcomes of the leader who lived philosophy: *"Finally, its fruit is the right government of men"* (Ficino, 1981:31).

Ficino's intellectual and spiritual contribution to Western culture is vast, clearing blockages and opening up the mind and heart. Spiritually, he explored the path of personal development, which while inherent in Christian teaching appeared closed and irrelevant to many during his time. The discussions of 'self actualization' and 'self realization' introduced by Maslow and Rogers in the 20th century were possible as a result of the encouragement of Ficino at the end of the 15th century to find the universal within the individual, unity within the diversity.

Significance of Ficino for Modern Society and Leadership

Ficino's letters have a familiar ring today. The 21st century Western society, like Florence of his day, seems to have lost its direction and is largely dominated by politics, materialism and self-interest. Yet our modern democratic societies have an affinity with the open mindedness of the 15th century. We are on the threshold of a new revolution in the way we see the world and our selves. The new sciences of quantum physics and chaos theory with its descriptions of Mandelbrot sets, wavelces and morphic fields have opened up entire new dimensions to the universe and have turned our ordinary understanding of physical reality on its head.

It was similar questions that Ficino addressed in the 15th century: the true nature of man, the meaning of work, and the relationship of man to the world. His writings and translations point a way out of conflict, a way to resolve the disparity between the rich and the poor, and to end the preoccupation with the acquisition of wealth and consumption by continually reminding leaders that fulfillment lies in self understanding and reconnection to our source. Russ Moxley would agree with Ficino about the need for work to be fulfilling for man at the deepest level; *"Being engaged in work that is meaningful is a deeply felt human need. Each of us wants work that is imbued with purpose. Finding meaning and purpose is a spiritual act"*(2000:12).

The words of Ficino help us deal with a major dilemma of modern times: the dilemma of reconciling freedom, autonomy and the creativity of the individual with the need to accept direction from a higher authority. In simple terms, it is the need to give individuals a say, an ability to question, challenge and to be creative and at the same time for organisations to have central leaders who decide the overall direction and actions of any endeavor. Ken Wilber's Integral Theory describes two major drives of holons, autonomy and communion. The tension between individual autonomy and central control in organisations reflects the dynamic between these two drives.

The decision of the United States President, George W. Bush Jr. and the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Tony Blair to wage war on Iraq in 2003 was an example. Millions of individuals expressed disagreement and anger at the decision that sent 250,000 men and women to fight and kill in Iraq. Every day in organisations, people question and challenge either overtly or covertly, the decisions of managers and leaders. Ficino's solution for this problem is for the leader to act in service to the highest Good for everyone. He also called that lasting Good, 'God'. He encourages each of us, every day to carry out actions that lead to that Good. In other words, society, leaders and their followers, should not act based on personal or national self-interest but toward the lasting good and welfare of all of mankind. In a letter to the young Cardinal Riario, he wrote: *"Remember that your servants (employees) are men, equal to you in origin, and that the human species, which is by nature free, ought not to be, indeed cannot be, united by fear, but only by love"*(Boddy, 1989: 197).

The second dilemma that Ficino helps us with is the larger role that humans play in the world and the cosmos. Ficino clearly believes that man is the keeper of the Kingdom; that man has the highest consciousness of the living beings and therefore his work is to achieve harmony with the world and himself. He must therefore live and act in a way that represents the highest and best. Like Plato, he would look at the music, food, the built environment and literature of

modern society and demand that these uplift and nurture the human soul. Ficino would ask us to examine our health care, education systems, and our workplace practices and ask if these recognise and encourage the development of a spiritual dignity and respect for everyone.

Capitalism has become the major economic system on the world stage and now its ability to deliver the Promised Land is being questioned. Ficino would have been less interested in how much shareholder wealth, profit and market share the organisation generated than whether its services uplifted the quality of life of each person (e.g. worker, customer, citizen, etc.) associated with it in any way. Ficino was also a practical man who related to the leaders of the state. He would therefore acknowledge that businesses need profit and money to exist, but would see these like air, food and water, which are needed to survive but are not the purpose and reason for existence. *"Money...can take possession of the man who loves it but can give nothing back* (Ficino, 1981:9). Ficino would undoubtedly remind us of a higher purpose that should be expressed in our art, music, literature and our work, in providing products and services.

Ficino's guidance to merchants is also relevant; *"The (duty) of the merchant, with true faith and diligence (is) to nourish both the state and himself with goods from abroad...Merchants should so seek wealth that they harm no one. For whatever arises from evil in the end falls back into evil. Let them keep their wealth in such a way that they do not seem to have acquired it in vain, nor just for the sake of keeping it. Let them so spend that they may long be able to spend, and may prove to have spent honestly and usefully"* (Boddy, 1989:198).

Ficino saw that only those who practiced wisdom in their thoughts and actions would be worthy leaders. *"Happy is the man for whom all things end well: but they do so only for him who uses them well. He alone uses each thing well who has learned of his own power and that of others, from wisdom"* (Ficino, 1981:72). The development of wise leaders would involve more than improving business skills such as strategic planning, negotiation, and performance management. Ficino would have encouraged the study of philosophy and ethics, meditation and emotional intelligence skills. He would have wanted the older and wiser leaders to model the best leadership qualities and to coach and mentor the leaders of the future.

Russ Moxley recently wrote similar words to Ficino about leadership: *"We must choose to understand ourselves and be our true self and our whole self...We must choose to use all of our energies – mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual – in our work and in the activity of leadership. We must learn to see with the 'eye of contemplation,' to discern the movement of spirit within and among us"* (2000, 210-211).

The values and behaviours of leaders in public and private life is an important issue. Can good leadership and management occur when leaders proclaim certain values yet live their private lives by different standards? For example, today it is common for CEOs to be paid millions of dollars in wages and benefits while at the same time requiring the reduction in the numbers of workers in the organisation or require workers to take salary cuts in order to save the company money. In cases such as Enron, HIH and Pan Pharmaceuticals, we see leaders abusing their power and fraudulently providing distorted information to their customers and the public in order to increase profits and benefit themselves. Ficino warned Cardinal Riario: *"No great man ought to believe that his conduct can in any way be hidden. For the greatest things, whatever they be, are most fully exposed to view and are the envy of all who forgive little and disparage much. Since it is very difficult for a prince to conceal himself from others, let him see that nothing at all lies hidden either in private or in public life"* (Boddy, 1989:197).

Ficino knew that the Renaissance was an important time in the development of man and society. He saw the tremendous creativity, transmission of new ideas and progress that occurred amid chaotic, political and turbulent times. He recognised that the integration of reason with the realisation of God permeating everything was an important achievement in his time and the basis for this new era.

David Boddy says in his essay, Marsilio Ficino on Leadership; *"But it was not the masses that produced the Renaissance: it was the leaders. They turned to ancient wisdom. They studied and learnt. They practiced, and had the courage to refresh that wisdom in a manner appropriate to time and place. Guided by the philosophers, like Ficino, the leaders were uplifted, by having their minds and hearts lifted towards God."* (1989:188-189).

Today we seek to discover and initiate a better way of interacting with the world. We may define and see God in a different way than Ficino and his contemporaries. God today is often described as the 'Ground of Being', or 'Consciousness'; the life energy that flows through everything rather than as an all powerful, all-knowing independent personal God. But Ficino's work and teaching still provide a relevant message to transform our society. If listened to, this message would result in a chorus of leaders, philosophers, teachers, lawyers, artists, scientists, bankers and politicians who provide education, economic, legal and social systems that develop and unleash human greatness and create a new Renaissance in our time. Only then can we achieve a whole and healthy society integrally interconnected with all of life.

*He alone will hold the nature
and purpose of man
who always remembers that this nature
and purpose
can be held either not at all
or, at most, only rarely
and with great difficulty.*

Marsilio Ficino

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