

A MESSAGE HIDDEN BUT ALWAYS SEEN:
The Influence of the Spiritual Franciscans on the Works of Dante Alighieri

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INTRODUCTION

“We are made for art, we are made for memory, we are made for poetry, or perhaps we are made for oblivion. But something remains, and that something is history or poetry, which are not essentially different.”¹

~ Jorge Luis Borges, from “The Divine Comedy”

In 2005, I wrote down Borges’s quotation in my small “thesis” notebook for reference. Two years later, with three quarters of my thesis done I again found these lines and I was reminded how my journey began: to find history in poetry and poetry in history, because they “are not essentially different.” This is also essentially the idea of this thesis.

In 1274 in Florence, Italy, a nine-year old Dante Alighieri first saw the girl who would possess his mind for the remainder of his life: Beatrice. In 1274 in the Marche of Ancona,² three members of a group known as the “spiritual” Franciscans were imprisoned for their rejection of papal authority on the issue of *usus pauper* (the use of property by members of the mendicant orders). From these two isolated events a glimpse emerged of the origins of one of the world’s greatest pieces of literature, the *Commedia* (Divine Comedy). This thesis attempts to explore the relationship between Dante and the spiritual Franciscans, a splinter group

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Divine Comedy,” in *The Poets’ Dante: Twentieth Century Responses*, ed. Paul S. Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff, 121 (New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001)

² The Marche is a region in central Italy which borders Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria, and the Abruzzi, Latium, and the Adriatic Sea. It is comprised of five provinces: Ancona, Ascoli Piceno, Fermo, Macerata, and Pesaro e Urbino.

of the Franciscan order that claimed fidelity to the historical Saint Francis, his life and legacy.

The spirituals were a group of men, and possibly some women, who were alleged to have strayed from the general order of Franciscans, primarily over the issue of obedience to the Rule of Francis and *usus pauper*, the vow of poverty. In 1223, as Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) lay dying, he made two requests that his brothers observe scrupulously: the *usus pauper* and, most importantly, the maintenance of independence from the papacy. However, less than two years after their founder's death, the order requested that the pope allow them to reject these final requests of Francis.

Thomas of Celano (1185/90-1260) was the first hagiographer of St Francis. He had been commissioned by Pope Gregory IX (1143-1241, papacy 1227-1241) on April 29, 1228 to write the first account of the saint's life.³ But in 1260 the Council of Narbonne commissioned a new life of St Francis to be written by the current minister general, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221-1274). The papacy and the order concerned with divisions occurring within the order wanted to produce a unified and official life of the saint. Thomas of Celano's writings then became "lost" and Bonaventure's life of the saint became the official

³ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," or "The First Life" [Vita Prima] from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume I, The Saint*. ed. Regis J. Armstrong, et. al. (New City Press, 1999). Thomas of Celano wrote this work between 1228 and 1229

account of Francis. Although Bonaventure had used much of Celano's writing, his refashioned image of Francis placed greater importance on the canonized Francis and his role as heavenly patron, the one sent by God now sitting in heaven. The earthly Francis and his historical mission and legacy receded as an ever more distant memory. This new image of Francis allowed Bonaventure and his fellow Franciscans to disregard the specific instructions in the writings of Francis, since these were of the earthly Francis. The new devotion was to center on the praise and glory of Francis among the blessed. Here the spirituals found much fault, as they were intent on remaining obedient to their founder and were not willing to submit to the pope if it meant violating the mandate of Francis. They would not compromise on the issue of *usus pauper*. They insisted on adhering to the wishes of the "historical"⁴ Francis.

What was the "historical" Francis that the spirituals insisted on following? Francis believed that all creatures of the earth should receive the word of Scripture. His mission was like that of the itinerant Christ: to preach in towns and cities and in the countryside. Francis went to the towns, as Jesus commanded:

"And he [Jesus] said to them: Let us go into the neighboring towns and cities that I may preach there also; for to this purpose am I come." (Mark 1:38)

⁴ When I use this term I am referring to the represented presence of Francis in the writings of Thomas of Celano and Brother Leo, and referencing the writings and wishes of Francis.

He would preach to any who would listen to the word of God. He did not limit himself to human ears, for he could often be found preaching to flowers and animals. The spirituals maintained this portrait of the independent Francis, one which the church later on would not appreciate or want replicated in his followers. The spirituals did indeed follow Francis in the mission; they were intent on allowing all to hear the words of Scripture. Poetry was one of the ways Francis conveyed the word of God.

It is no doubt a coincidence that the birth of the spirituals movement began in the same days that Dante's poetic voice was born and it is a coincidence that the spirituals traveled through Tuscany and central Italy where Dante lived.⁵ All these coincidences, however, would lead to a moment that we can identify, for Dante himself has recorded it for posterity.⁶

In his *Convivio* Dante writes of attending the *scuole religiosi*,⁷ the religious schools, of Florence – Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella – the schools of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, respectively. From 1283 to 1289, two of the great leaders of the spiritual Franciscan movement, John Olivi (Petrus Johannes Olivi) and Ubertino da Casale, lectured in the church of Santa Croce in Florence. They debated the

⁵ It is possible that a woman spiritual may have inspired the voice of the young poet.

⁶ See Chapter VIII

⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Convivio (The Banquet)*. Translated and edited by Christopher Ryan. From Stanford French and Italian Studies, volume LXI. 1989 : *Convivio* II, xii, 7

question of *usus pauper* and articulated the ideas of the spirituals. We know that Dante attended Santa Croce in 1291 and remained there for thirty months.⁸ Could he have heard the voices of these great spirituals leaders of the movement? Could he have at this time taken their cause to heart?

In 1318, four spirituals were condemned and burned for heresy and for refusing to submit to the authority of the pope. In the same year, Dante was completing his great work the *Commedia*. We might speculate that Dante, regardless of his affection for the spirituals, would not have made any statement of sympathy for them; nor would it have done any good. The spirituals movement was by now dying, and there was no means of stopping their ruin. Dante could however use his poetry, which Francis himself had used in his own mission, to conceal his belief in their cause. Although the movement could not be saved, their message could be preserved in Dante's poetry. This thesis argues that embedded in the text of the *Commedia* there lies a skillfully concealed message that affirms the tenets of the spirituals. As Borges says, it is "history and poetry, which are not essentially different." Through Dante's poetry we can perhaps see reflected a history of the spirituals and a history of the poet's love for

⁸ Charles T. Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence" *Speculum*, 40, no. 3 (1965): 425. It has been proposed by Charles Davis that Dante may have attended the church prior to these years.

them; and through the timeline of history we can see a unity of poetry and his tones which would last as long as the *Commedia*.

Through Dante's poetry we can perhaps also see reflected a history of struggle to keep alive the memory of the Francis they knew and whose meaning for Dante was to be found in Francis's humble earthly life. Through the parallel chronologies of the rise and fall of the spirituals and Dante's own life and writings we can identify numerous pieces of evidence that strongly suggest Dante concealed in his *Commedia* those ideals of the spirituals that set them against the papacy and their brethren in the Franciscan order.

I.
JOACHIM DI FIORE:
 The Prophet and
 the Development of the Apocalyptic Vision of the 13th Century

“Let us arouse the brethren from the idleness of sleep.”⁹

Dante’s poetic world is populated with a variety of characters from all backgrounds and ways of life, but it is to the theologians that we turn to begin tracing Dante’s spiritual journey through the *Commedia*. The first of whom is Joachim di Fiore, “the Calabrian abbot,” whom Dante will mention in *Paradiso* Canto XXVII, and whose writings will play an integral role in the development of the spirituals movement.

I. Joachim di Fiore (1135-1202)

Joachim of Fiore’s theology of history is crucial for understanding the beliefs of the spiritual Franciscans in the mission of St. Francis and in their work as his heirs. It is in Joachim’s writings that the term “spiritual men” (*viri spirituali*) first appears as a prophetic reference to a group of specially selected men who would rise in importance above the church and lead mankind towards the salvation of paradise in the final age of the earth when the apocalypse occurs. Dante himself may have used many of Joachim’s ideas, including his emphasis on the Trinitarian modalities of historical time and his predilection for the perfect number three. We might argue, as other scholars have, that the fear of the coming apocalypse also inspired Dante to write a treatise on the path to human perfection

⁹Bernard McGinn, “Joachim and the Sibyl: An Early Work of Joachim of Fiore,” *MS. 322 of the Biblioteca Antoniana in Padua*. 24. (1973): 128. McGinn is quoting Fiore: lines 334-337

where the unity of intellect and spirituality was seen as essential for those intent on achieving eternal bliss.

i. Background

The eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries was an era dominated by the crusades. The purpose of the crusades was to reclaim the Holy Land for the Christians. Popes, beginning with Urban II (1049-1099), called upon faithful Christians from all classes to take up arms and make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The first crusade occurred between 1095 and 1099, and the last in 1272.¹⁰ People from the great rulers such as Frederick I, the Holy Roman Emperor, Philip Augustus of France, Richard the Lionheart, Louis IX, to everyday men, participated in the crusades. A crusade was a holy war, but it was ultimately a pilgrimage to the places where Jesus Christ had been born, lived, and died. The church propagated the hope that the holy land would be recovered because of the fervor of Christians who willed what God willed. Many who went on crusades were inspired by the concept of a peaceful pilgrimage, not one of a bloody war. Many religious people followed the paths of crusades, such as Joachim di Fiore and St. Francis, but for them a crusade was a sacred journey to the Holy Land. The crusades had a great impact on the lives of these two men and their writings. Joachim's and Francis's theologies changed dramatically from their own experiences in the crusades, as well as from witnessing the experiences of others.

¹⁰ Although in other regions of Europe the crusades straggled until 1291.

Joachim di Fiore began as a Cistercian who wrote a series of works that greatly influenced many major theologians of the 13th century. Born in Celico, Calabria in 1135, Joachim worked as a court cleric until 1168, when he became a monk at the Cistercian Abbey of Carazzo. In 1169, between the second (1145-1149) and third crusades (1189-1192), Joachim went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His pilgrimage occurred as the crusading ventures were starting to turn badly. The great Cistercian theologian and voice of Europe in the 12th century, Bernard of Clairvaux, had preached for the second crusade, which turned out to be a fiasco resulting in the horrible and unnecessary deaths of many, including Jews and Muslims. Bernard was deeply saddened by this failure. Joachim, too, may have had a similar reaction after his experience. Unfortunately, there is not much known about Joachim's time in Jerusalem, except that he was spiritually awakened and that upon his return to Italy, he became a Benedictine, and eventually a Cistercian monk. His abbey lay on the path of many pilgrims going to the crusades, and he repeatedly witnessed the journey of these souls. His writings on eschatology may have been inspired to some degree by the crusades which took the lives of so many, all who were living and dying for the same holy city.¹¹ The Christians' possession of Jerusalem would be a divine sign that the end times were at hand.

¹¹ The *City of God*, by St Augustine in the 5th century, was one of the primary documents used by Pope Urban II (1095) urging Christians to go on crusade. The *City of God* is more important than the earthly city of man and thus it is worthwhile to give one's life in crusade for the earthly

Joachim was elected abbot of Carazzo in 1177. During this time he gained a reputation as a man with a prophetic gift from God. Dante will refer to him as “*di spirito prophetico dotato*”. In the 1180s he appealed to Pope Lucius III for permission to write a series of works based on his prophecies. Pope Lucius agreed, and Joachim began his work. In the 1190s he separated himself from the Cistercians and founded his own congregation in 1196 in the Sila mountains of Calabria, San Giovanni Fiore. In his three works¹² Joachim explains the relationship of the Old and New Testament, history as read in light of the Apocalypse, and the Holy Trinity. Joachim’s writing is based on his interpretations of Scripture through prophecy, most pertinent here is his theology of the ages. His unique reading and prophetic analysis of Scripture would eventually lead to his theological innovations, which in turn resulted in much of the later controversy.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council ruled Joachim’s writings heretical and condemned them; he, however, was not condemned. But Joachim’s writings, or many of their ideas at least, would remain highly influential. Joachim speaks of the coming of “*spirituali*”, spiritual men, who in the final age will lead mankind to the kingdom of heaven. Many later believed Francis and the Franciscans were the spiritual men whom Joachim had prophesized. St. Francis, who was present at the Fourth Lateran Council, would likely have known of Joachim’s writings.

“shadow” of the *City of God*, Jerusalem, than to live the remainder of one’s earthly days in the cities of man.

Although his writings were condemned, Joachim's belief in the coming apocalypse in the year 1260 and the appearance of these *spirituali* was still widely circulated and influenced many believers.

ii. Works

Number patterns in twos and threes and sevens and twelves dominate Joachim's theological writings.¹³ The number three however became the essential number for Joachim, as it reflected the role of the Trinity in the ages of salvation history. He saw the Old Testament and the New Testament as reflecting one another in three ages: the First Age Adam, the Second Age Oziah, and the third Age St. Benedict; The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit. In the First Age, beginning again – three ages would occur before the coming of Christ and three ages after Christ- after the first coming of Christ, reflected the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Second Age reflected the role of the Church in history. The Third Age, the age after the coming of the Antichrist, reflected the role of the mendicant orders, the “*spirituali*”. It is in this division of the ages as he read them in Scripture that others found his writings controversial and ultimately heretical. Even more problematic was Joachim's prophecy that the power of the temporal church would decline and the power of the mendicant orders would rise towards the end of the Second Age and that the *spirituali* would lead believers into paradise.

¹² Three works of Joachim: *Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti* [Concordance of the Old and New Testament]; *Expositio in Apocalypsim* [Exposition on the Apocalypse]. See McGinn, “Joachim and the Sibyl,” 97.

Joachim's first work, *Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti* [*Concordance of the Old and New Testament*], begun in 1183,¹⁴ was based on his view of the Old and New Testaments as related to one another. His second work, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* [*Exposition on the Apocalypse*], stems from his reading of the final age as depicted in the Book of the Apocalypse. In it he interprets the division of the ages of history as read in Scripture, he prophesizes that the third age would come in the year 1260. In this work he also prophesized the coming of the Antichrist and the coming of the third age.¹⁵

iii. The Fourth Lateran Council

The Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215, was called by Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) to address financing and organizing the Fifth Crusade to Palestine, the interference of laymen in the church, as well as many disciplinary and doctrinal issues. The Council issued seventy decrees that included measures against heretics, such as Foulquwa of Toulouse, and the establishment of the Order of Friars Preachers (Dominicans). Francis of Assisi and Dominic de Guzman attended the Council and perhaps may have met one another for the first time there.

Lateran IV's second Canon condemned the writings of Joachim and Amalric of Benno, and it vindicated the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, one of the most widely read works of the thirteenth century. Joachim had died thirteen years

¹³ Bernard McGinn, "The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore." *Church History*, 40, no.1 (1971): 31.

¹⁴ McGinn, "Joachim and the Sibyl," 97.

prior to the Council and the official ruling on his theological writings. Before his death, Joachim believed his writings would be granted papal recognition. Of importance to this thesis is that Joachim had prophesized that two religious orders would rise in power and usher in the final age. He saw them as becoming more powerful and more necessary than the church. Much of his writing gained a certain measure of acceptance. Even his most controversial idea had not been seen as particularly threatening; but as the power of Francis and Dominic rose, pope Innocent III and other church fathers began to see cause for concern and the necessity to control the spread and popularity of these two religious movements on two fronts. First, the pope approved the Franciscans and Dominicans as two religious orders within the church. This allowed the pope to intervene within the order, should he see it as necessary, and it also allowed him to condemn any other potentially heretical movements that might prove threatening to papal authority. Secondly, Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council condemned the writings of Joachim, but not Joachim himself. With this distinction Innocent III intended to nullify the power of Joachim's prophecies while holding Joachim himself as personally faithful to church teachings. Joachim's writing continued to maintain significance, however, and the condemnation exposed the threatening power of his writings, all of which suggested that his prophecies might very well be true.

¹⁵ There are two final works of Joachim: *Psalterium Decem Chordarum*, the *Tracitatus Ouatuor*

iv. Joachim of Fiore's Influence on the Spiritual Franciscans

Joachim's ideas about the declining power of the church are only part of the reason behind the condemnation of his writing. The rise of the Franciscan and Dominican mendicant orders had also brought new fears regarding the truth of Joachimite prophecy. Joachim's prophecy had proclaimed that from the two new religious orders one would emerge as the true leader. Although the definition of the "spiritual" Franciscans has several possible origins, the most likely source of the term stems from Joachim's writing of the *viri spirituali*¹⁶ and indeed certain members of the Franciscan order believed that they would be the chosen *spirituali* according to the prophecy of the Calabrian abbot. This idea however would lead to major controversies and divisions within the order.

Joachim's prophecy of the apocalypse occurring in 1260 did not come true. But his writings were still read and reinterpreted as truth. Certainly his division of the three ages of history and his depiction of the Antichrist would take firm root in the thought of the thirteenth century – and Dante would clearly have been influenced by this.

While Francis was alive the Franciscan order maintained a strong degree of unity. As a charismatic person Francis conveyed firmly his beliefs and intentions for the order. Yet cracks were occurring. Between the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and Francis's death in 1226, the order began to divide

Super Evangelina (unfinished) and other minor works.

¹⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), Preface viii

ideologically. Some brothers did not agree with the provisions allowing the pope to intervene in the affairs of the order, and some believed in the truth of Joachim's prophecies regardless of Lateran IV's pronouncements. Francis was aware of this divide, but continuously maintained his charismatic influence to the day of his death. And his recitation of his Testament in which he made clear the exclusion of intervention by the pope worried many later leaders of the order who saw the need for papal protection as necessary for the survival and continuation of the order. However, they were left with a dilemma, as the rejection of papal intervention was one of Francis's strongest requests. In 1230, leaders of the Franciscan order went to Pope Gregory IX, requesting that Francis's petition to do away with the provision of papal intervention be ignored. Pope Gregory IX agreed, and thereafter even greater divisions within the order occurred.

From 1230 to the 1250s the Franciscans were not openly divided. Many who believed in Joachimite prophecies of the imminent third age were either disregarded or considered 'spirituals,' men who had a close spiritual relationship to God. Few of these Franciscans spoke or published openly on the writings of Joachim. But soon things changed. Gerard of Borgo San Donnino in his *Evangelium aeternum*¹⁷ became the first of the Franciscans fervently and publicly to argue for the authority of Joachim's writing. He strongly believed in Joachimite theology, and quickly other Franciscan followers of Joachim became followers and supporters of Gerard. The most prominent of Gerard's followers was John of

Parma (1209-1272), the minister general of the Franciscan order. John of Parma was a scholastic theologian and a devout man who was highly regarded and respected in the order. However, as the year 1260 approached with no sign of the Apocalypse and Joachim's prophecy of the Antichrist unfulfilled with the premature death of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250), the man many Joachimites believed to be the embodiment of Joachim's Antichrist, Gerard of Borgo and his writings were officially condemned as heretical by the pope in 1255.¹⁸ As one of Gerard's strongest and most powerful supporters, John of Parma also fell from power. He was not condemned, but he was either asked to step down or resign from the leadership of the order in 1257. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio then succeeded him as minister general.

Since John of Parma was so popular and since he was not condemned for his Joachimite beliefs, but rather for his support of Gerard's beliefs, his sentence was light. John's trial, in the year 1257, is one of the first important stages of the spirituals movement, as it laid the ground work for what was and was not theologically permissible within the Franciscan order. Many of the theological positions corresponded to papal views, and it became clear with Bonaventure's leadership of the order that the Franciscans were now officially tied to the papacy and subsequently controlled by the papacy. This alignment with papal orthodox views angered many Franciscans and, although Bonaventure tried to unite a

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971): 1. "[he] had attempted to formulate Franciscan Spiritualism."

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 1.

divided order, his term of leadership would witness the rise of a major crisis in the division of the Franciscans into the spirituals and those who sided with Bonaventure and the papacy.¹⁹

v. Joachim of Fiore's Influence on Dante

Scholars have long supposed that Dante would have been familiar with Joachim's writings,²⁰ as were most theologians of the 13th century. During his education at Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, Dante would likely have come into contact with Joachim's writing. Joachim's views on the Apocalypse may have been one of the inspirations for Dante to write a detailed account of the afterlife. Joachim of Fiore appears in *Paradiso*, alongside Bonaventure, in Canto XI, the theologians' circle.

An analysis of Joachim's writing and the writings and definitions of the spiritual Franciscans leads one to interpret more precisely the definition of the word 'spirituals.' Dante would have been familiar with the term, as he was in attendance at Santa Croce during the preaching of Petrus Johannes Olivi and Ubertino da Casale, two prominent leaders of, if not the fathers of, the spirituals movement. Dante may well have been or have had a lifelong affiliation with the spiritual Franciscans, as we shall see below.

If Joachim wrote that it would be the *spirituali* who would lead believers into paradise and if the term for the Franciscan spirituals has its roots in the Joachimite theory, then Dante, himself, in a sense, can be seen as a "spiritual," as

¹⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, Introduction.

in the *Commedia* he guides his readers through paradise to the eternal Godhead. Throughout the *Commedia* Dante inspires his “readers” to seek spiritual fulfillment. The specific preoccupations of the spirituals, however, were different from Dante’s, which will be elaborated in a later chapter.

A Final Word On Joachim of Fiore and His Influence:

Joachim’s writing influenced many theologians of the 13th and 14th century, and his prophecies contributed to the rise of the spiritual Franciscans.²¹ The importance of his prophecies not only lies in the work that it inspired but also in the work itself. Joachim positioned himself as a man close to God who had the gift of prophecy, and with that gift he articulated the need for the Church to renounce its great power and wealth and yield instead to the leadership of the mendicant orders (Franciscans and Dominicans). The church took action against his works, yet his beliefs lived on, inspiring many others to live spiritual lives without being held fast by the temporal power of the church alone or dazzled by its abundant riches.

Joachimite theology may not have been the entire basis of division within the Franciscan order, but from it theological ideas were articulated that sharply divided the Franciscans. Joachim’s writings were important in the 13th century for they sparked apocalyptic fears and speculations, as well as anti-establishment attitudes. To the spiritual Franciscans his writings also became a powerful source of their authority. Some friars believed not only in the imminent events of the

²⁰ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, footnote 37, 180-181.

apocalypse but also in the power of their message and role as spiritual guides to the afterlife, a role limited to a highly select group. However, after the apocalyptic fears vanished with the uneventful passing of 1260, Joachim's writing still held power for them. He had defined the structure and progress of history and he had argued against wealth and the political power of the church. Whether or not the "spirituals" believed they were the chosen men of the third age, they were nonetheless Joachimites in the vein of an anti-establishment movement. They did not believe the church held absolute authority over them or that the pope could compel their obedience. The 'spirituals' and the 'spirituals' movement, as it came to be called, was not only a reference to the closeness to God of certain individuals but rather the closeness of God to these chosen individuals. This relationship had to be seen as more powerful than the church's relationship to God. Good spiritual Christians could, through a spiritual closeness to God, independent of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, make progress in faith and ultimately reap their heavenly reward. Spiritual guidance was no longer an exclusive right limited to the clerical hierarchy and the pope. Dante's own words seem to echo this anti-hierarchical dissent and his agreement with Joachimism. In the *Commedia* he "recalls" his spiritual journey and those people who led him to the face of God. But in Canto XXXIII of *Paradiso*, he speaks for the reader:

O Light Supreme that art so far uplifted above mortal conceiving,
 relend to my mind a little of what Thou didst appear,
 and give my tongue such power that it may leave
 only a single spark of Thy glory for the folk to come;

²¹ Dante may have been one of those greatly influenced by Joachim di Fiore.

for, by returning somewhat to my memory
 and by sounding a little in these lines,
 more of Thy victory shall be conceived.²²
 (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 375)

Dante asks us to follow him – a layman – to live a life that is equally balanced with intellect and spirituality and love. In this harmonious unity of mind, heart and spirit his followers will be led to the face of God, the Godhead. Dante and his guides are not members of the clerical class. Like Francis's friars who were for the most part laymen, he would lead those to the world beyond. This lesson may well have been taught to Dante by those more intellectual and more spiritual than he, but he in turn imparts this lesson to us. In this lesson Dante the *spirtuale*, becomes our guide.

O Light Eternal , who alone abidest in Thyself,
 alone knowest Thyself, and, known to Thyself
 and knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself!²³
 (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 379)

²² Dante Alighieri, "Paradiso" *Commedia (The Divine Comedy)*, translated and edited by Charles S. Singleton, volume 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); 3:375.

²³ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 379

II.
BONAVENTURE:
 The Minister General of the Franciscans 1257-1274
 and
 The Importance of His Ministry

“Such is the power of Love, that it transforms the lover into the Beloved.”²⁴

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217-1274)

On February 2, 1257, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio succeeded John of Parma as Minister General of the Franciscan Order. At this point the Franciscans began to experience deep division. Bonaventure’s ministry would set the course for the future of the Franciscan movement. Between 1226 and 1257, the order had gone through a series of dramatic changes. By the time of Bonaventure’s ministry the order had begun to move towards a monastic, highly organized existence, which followed the wishes of the papacy. However, many members of the order did not agree with the extreme shift away from Francis’s wishes for his brethren. This opposition group would be labeled the “spirituals”, which historically has become a complicated term.²⁵ Bonaventure was thus faced with the dilemma of maintaining peace within the order while simultaneously protecting the growth of the order under protection of the papacy. Scholars disagree as to whether or not he managed to maintain harmony among his brothers, but they all agree that Bonaventure’s ministry signals the birth of modern Franciscan theology and an officially accepted organization of the Franciscan order that is quite different from

²⁴ Bonaventure, “The Morning Sermon on Saint Francis” (1255) from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume II, The Founder*. ed. Regis J. Armstrong, et. al. (New City Press, 1999): 515

²⁵ See Chapter V

the order Francis founded before his death. Much of the change in the theology and organization of the Franciscans was restructured based on Bonaventure's new biography of Francis of Assisi.

In 1259, Bonaventure began work on a new life of St. Francis which would blend all the previous accounts that followed Thomas of Celano's original works on the life of St. Francis. The result was the publication of the *Major Legend* and *Minor Legend*. Bonaventure's writings on Francis set a new and official tone for the life of the saint. Francis's life, mission, and intentions for his brothers underwent significant changes. Bonaventure's word became the acknowledged mirror of Francis's mind, the accepted way of recalling the life and true intentions of their founder. The spirituals, however, although they didn't argue directly with Bonaventure, were not altogether satisfied with his presentation of Francis. They instead drew on the writings of the brothers who had known Francis personally, such as Brother Leo (+1271). Bonaventure's writing therefore represents an important shift in the image of the historical Francis. Bonaventure, working in a post-Joachimite world, wrote of the importance of Francis as multi-dimensional. Francis was a saint to be venerated, a guide, a heavenly patron, and the founder of a religious order of like-minded brothers ultimately under obedience to the papacy. Francis preached Christ and his crucifixion, and sought to lead others to repentance and to their heavenly reward. His whole life and works had been fully sanctioned by the papacy.

The importance of Bonaventure can hardly be overestimated. Bonaventure shaped the future of the order. But he also spawned a group of disenchanted individuals, the spiritual Franciscans. Under his leadership the Franciscan order moved into a new direction. When he died in 1274, he had reshaped the order and the official direction for the order was one now safely under papal supervision. As an order it could now own property in common, it held churches, and it complied with the directions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The confusion of the early 13th century had dissipated. Francis and his companions were now re-imaged, his legacy now shaped to conform to the organizational priorities of the Roman church.

When Bonaventure died, Dante was nine years old. In the same year, 1274, the spirituals movement began in the Marche of Ancona; and Florence, the birthplace of Dante, experienced some of the first repercussions of the spirituals reaction. To catch the significance of their dissent, it is now useful to examine the life of Bonaventure and the many positions taken regarding his ministry in order to understand the world into which the spiritual Franciscans were born and in which Dante might have been affected by them at an early age.

Bonaventure, born John of Fidanza in Bagnoregio in 1221, joined the Order of Lesser Brothers in Paris (or the Friars Minor, Minorites, Franciscans) in 1243. He was taught under the four Franciscan “masters”:²⁶ John de la Rochelle (+1245), Odo Rigaldus (+1275), William of Middleton (+1260), and Alexander of

Hales (+1245). Alexander Hales, a professor before he joined the order, was a secular English priest and Bonaventure's main influence. Hales was also the first head of the Franciscan school at Paris. As a "master of arts" Bonaventure wrote commentaries on *The Sentences of Peter Lombard*, a practice introduced to the Franciscan school by Hales.

Throughout the 12th century important ancient philosophical texts were translated into Latin and became available to European scholastics. By the beginning of the 13th century Avicenna, Averroes and Aristotle were available for study in the newly formed universities. However, it was the rise of the two mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, which contributed most to the intellectual ferment of the time. The new religious orders set up schools within the new universities of Europe, and top mendicant scholars gained their reputation there, including Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, both from the University of Paris.²⁷

In 1248, Bonaventure was granted a license to teach theology, and in 1253 he became head of the Franciscans in Paris.²⁸ Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, his Dominican friend, would become involved in substantial debates on the governance of their orders, as well as the allowance of Aristotelian teaching in the

²⁶ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Introduction" of "The Legends and Sermons About Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1255-1267)": 495

²⁷ Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy: Volume II: Medieval Philosophy*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 54-57

²⁸ Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, 61. However, in the *Early Documents: The Founder*, it is stated: 'In 1254 John of Parma the General Minister of the Franciscan Order granted Bonaventure the license to teach theology.' Introduction to "The Legends and Sermons About Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1255-1267)": 496.

University. Pope Alexander IV (1199-1261) agreed with Bonaventure and Aquinas on the use of the classical authors and contributed to their rise in the ranks of Christendom's foremost theologian.

In 1257, when Bonaventure replaced John of Parma, the order was divided and it was necessary for him to mediate between the differing factions. Scholars differ in their interpretations of Bonaventure's handling of the spirituals situation.²⁹ In 1257, during John of Parma's trial, Bonaventure attacked John. Bonaventure, who was personally close to John of Parma and whose career had greatly benefited from John of Parma's support, openly rebuked him for his Joachimite beliefs. He sentenced John to life imprisonment, which was later reduced by the intercession of the pope.³⁰ It is possible that John's and Bonaventure's opinions may have been more similar than one has supposed, but

²⁹ There is a range of differing scholarly opinions. Some scholars, such as Joseph Ratzinger's reading believe that Bonaventure did what was necessary to preserve the order: "Without feeling any infidelity to towards the holy Founder, Bonaventure could and had to create institutional structures for his Order, realizing all the while that Francis had not wanted them. It is too facile and, in the final analysis, an unlikely method to see this as a falsification of true Franciscanism. In reality, it was precisely the historical accomplishment of Bonaventure that he discerned the true historical situation in the controversy between the visionaries and the laxists and that he submitted himself in humble recognition of the limits demanded in reality." [Ratzinger, *Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 50-51]

Others contend that Bonaventure did the opposite and divided an order that had few openly dangerous heretical members, such as Gerard. David Burr argues: "In the *Legenda major* we encounter a Francis more to be venerated than imitated, as several modern historians have observed." Later Burr discusses Bonaventure's reactions to John's trial: "...Angelo acknowledges that the hearing was aimed at John's Joachimism and not at his views on observance of the rule; yet it calls for explanation, because it portrays a Bonaventure driven by something between pathological rage and demonic possession. That is not the man usually encountered by history books" [Burr, 33]

"Bonaventure, faced with an endangered order and an inflexible John, may well have lost patience and done something Bonaventure scholars would later regret. These considerations may fall short of excusing his behavior, but they go a long way toward explaining it." [Burr, 37-38] John H. R. Moorman stated that Bonaventure "never really understood the Franciscan ideal." [Moorman, *Sources*, 141] Whatever these differences may be, we know that Bonaventure's position toward John of Parma was firm and harsh.

John's open agreement with Gerard de Borgo and Joachimism caused scandal and so made him a target. Bonaventure's main task was to repair the scandal and reunite the order. Thus, Bonaventure may have wanted to begin his leadership of the Franciscans with a tough and intolerant stance on Joachimism.

i. Bonaventure's Writings

Bonaventure was a prolific writer, philosopher and theologian before he joined the Franciscan order in 1243. His initial contributions as a Franciscan are his sermons. But as a thinker, Bonaventure stands out as a first-rate scholastic theologian. He was a traditionalist, trained at Paris in the height of the scholastic enlightenment, when the writings of Aristotle and other pre-Christian philosophers were becoming part of the curriculum. Bonaventure we know agreed with some of Joachim's writings, primarily because Joachim's writings helped to spread the Franciscan order's renown. Joachim's theory of the *viri spirituali* inspired many people to believe that the apocalypse was imminent and that the Franciscans were the *spirituali* who would lead believers to paradise. Bonaventure's delicate balance therefore was one where he needed to affirm discrete elements of Joachim's theology along with Lateran IV's rejection of Joachim's writings.

Bonaventure's initial harshness at John's trial placed him firmly on the side of the anti-Joachimites, and it allowed the pope to intervene on behalf of John, thereby setting precedent for beneficent papal intervention. His political

³⁰ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 38-39

skill and brilliance seemed the right formula to contain the crisis of the spirituals. Bonaventure's governance set the path for future minister generals of the Franciscans, and many scholars believe that because of his strong positions and forceful maneuvers he saved the order from ruin. However, it is also arguable that in doing so he changed the original purpose St. Francis had for his band of brothers and their mission. Much of what the spirituals attempted to preserve were those elements of the congregation of Francis which they saw as essential to St. Francis's vision and way of life and thus fundamental to the order he left to posterity. Bonaventure would thus become the father of the renewed Franciscan movement, and despite his manipulations (or perhaps because of them) it may well be said he saved the order and furthered its success beyond the 13th century.

Bonaventure's sermons of 1255 represent his first writings on St Francis. Although not yet minister general, his sermons on Francis would serve as liturgical prayers within the order. His *Soul's Journey into God (Itinerarium mentis in Deum)* of 1259 is one of the prime mystical texts of the 13th century and gained Bonaventure much respect as a spiritual teacher as well as a scholastic theologian. Bonaventure wrote this work during his stay at LaVerna, the site where Francis had received his stigmata. This was a mystical experience for Bonaventure, and from his stay at LaVerna Bonaventure developed a deeper appreciation of Francis's stigmata. Bonaventure himself had a vision of the six-winged Seraph which had appeared to Francis, and it appears to have

strengthened Bonaventure's conviction of the centrality of the crucified Christ to Christianity and Franciscan spirituality.³¹

But Bonaventure's most important works touching on St. Francis were his *Major Legend* and *Minor Legend*, which were commissioned by the Second Council of Narbonne in 1260. In these works the St. Francis of the past undergoes significant changes.

Throughout the years after Francis' death many works were written on his life. The official hagiographer of Francis was Thomas of Celano, whom pope Innocent III (1198-1216) had first commissioned to write a life of Francis in 1228, *The Life of St Francis* (1228-1229). Thomas of Celano would later write two other works on Francis: *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (1245-1247) and *The Treatise on the Miracles of St Francis* (1250-1252). These works constituted the earliest official Franciscan documents on the saint; however, the emphasis in each life shifts in response to the demands of the period in which it was written. We shall return later to Thomas of Celano's works on St. Francis.

In 1240/41, John of Perugia wrote a book on the life of Francis: *The Beginning or Founding of the Order* and *The Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers Who Were the First Companions Of Blessed Francis In Religion*. John was one of Francis's first followers and his book was initially published anonymously.³² The book describes the initial group of brothers as the "fraternity." When in 1241, one

³¹ Introduction to "The Legends and Sermons About Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1255-1267)," 499

of the original brothers, Sylvester, died, his passing and John of Perugia's writing made the brothers of the order aware that the original companions of Francis were beginning to pass away and that their words and recollections were priceless and needed to be preserved for posterity.

In 1241 (after the 1239 Chapter of Rome), the Chapter of Definitions was commissioned from every province of the Franciscan order to settle the controversial disputes over the interpretation of the Rule of St Francis. The 'Four Masters' at the University of Paris appealed for the "intention of the Testament" to become the basis for the order's organization and common practice. This attempt failed; and before a final decision on the interpretation of the Rule could be reached, the minister general, Haymo of Faversham (minister general 1239-1243/44), died. Consequently, the interpretation of Francis's Testament still lay open and increasingly caused dissention within the order.

By the death of Haymo of Faversham the order had gone through fundamental changes, including the exclusion of lay brothers from positions of power. It had created an organized structure, including, significantly, the establishment of a monastic way of life. In 1244, Crescentius of Iesi (minister general, 1244-1247) remembered the issues raised by the dying brothers of Francis; and before a decision on the interpretation of the Rule could be reached, he asked for recollections from all the brothers who had known Francis. From his

³² From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, 31: "The book was anonymous until the 17th century when evidence was found on its author, John of Perugia. The Jesuit Daniel Papebroch discovered a manuscript in the friary of San Francesco al Prato in the Italian city of Perugia..."

request came two highly important works: John of Speyer's *Legend of Three Companions*³³ (1241-1247) and *The Assisi Compilation* (1244-1260).

John of Parma succeeded Crescentius of Iesi as minister general from 1247 to 1257, and then was followed by Bonaventure for the next seventeen years (1257-1274). By the time Bonaventure was elected minister general (age 36), the crisis over Francis's intentions had grown acute. The two most potent involved the issues of the influence of Brother Elias (1180-1253)³⁴ and the influence of the writings of Joachim di Fiore.

Three years later at the Council of Narbonne (1260), Bonaventure was asked to write a new hagiography on St Francis, between 1260 and 1263. He compiled and wrote the two lives of the saint which would become the official Franciscan portrait of their founder Francis of Assisi. By writing a life Francis that would presumably harmonize the disagreements within the order, the Franciscans could find common ground in Bonaventure's representation of their point.

The Major Legend

Bonaventure began his life of St Francis, *The Major Legend*, with the claim:

³³ Brother Leo, Brother Angelo, and Brother Rufino

³⁴ Brother Elias was one of the first companions of Francis. He was also the first minister general; however, he was soon replaced due to his radically different views on *usus pauper* from Francis's. His prominence in the order created controversy and many brothers were upset with Elias. He had played a prominent role in the beginning of the order and was thus prominent in the *Life of Francis* by Thomas of Celano; however, with the updated writings on the life of Francis in the 1240s, Elias was written out of Franciscan history.

For when I was a boy, as I still vividly remember, I was snatched from the jaws of death by his [Francis's] intervention. So if I remained silent and did not sing his praises, I fear that I would be rightly accused of ingratitude.³⁵

Bonaventure therefore begins by establishing a personal connection with Francis. Francis somehow must have held Bonaventure as special because he intervened on his sake and also somehow selected him as minister general of his order. This literary maneuver legitimized his account of Francis's life, not as one who had personally walked with him, but as one who was personally saved by him. Thus he continues:

...I visited the sites of the birth, life and death of this holy man. I had careful interviews with his companions who were still alive, especially those who had intimate knowledge of his holiness and were his outstanding followers.³⁶

He presents *The Major Legend* as a researched compilation of those who knew the truth of Francis from the hand of a man who benefited from Francis's holiness and heavenly intervention, himself.

The Major Legend incorporates much of Thomas of Celano's trilogy on the life of St Francis, as well as the other writings that followed upon Francis's death, specifically John of Speyer's, *The Legend of Three Companions* and *The Assisi Compilation*. But Bonaventure introduces significant changes. His entire text is clearly slanted towards affirming the preeminent role of the church, one which never entered the first writers' accounts. Bonaventure centers Christ within the Franciscan order, and presents Francis as a spiritual mirror to Christ. He also

³⁵ Bonaventure, *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Major Legend," 528

uses the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Thomas Gallus to represent the structure of a human being's spiritual growth through three stages of purgation, illumination, and unification. However, rather than centering the work on the importance of the "historical" Francis as a group leader and spiritual guide, Bonaventure characterizes Francis as a man "sent by God." Much of the text revolves around Francis's incorporation into the church. Francis becomes a humble subject of the Church – an obedient monk who obeyed sinlessly the voice of his hierarchical superiors. In contrast, the "historical" Francis of Thomas of Celano and Francis's earthly brothers do not present Francis at all in this role of submissive monk and now heavenly intercessor.

The Minor Legend

Within the same three-year period, Bonaventure also wrote *The Minor Legend* on the life of St. Francis, which was meant to be used in the same way as Thomas of Celano's *Use in Choir*,³⁷ a liturgical hagiography. And between 1266-1267, he also published a series of sermons. These were his final sermons on Francis. He preached all four in commemoration of the translation of Francis's body to the basilica of Assisi. He relied heavily on biblical passages to heighten the image of Francis he had conveyed in his two earlier works. His final work, *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (1273) (*Collations on the Six Days*), synthesized

³⁶ Ibid, 528

³⁷ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Introduction" to "The Legends and Sermons about Saint Francis by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1255-1267)," 502

Bonaventure's interpretation of Francis as "one lying beyond our reach yet drawing us after it."³⁸

ii. Joseph Ratzinger's Interpretation of Bonaventure's Writing³⁹

Joseph Ratzinger analyzes Bonaventure's writing on the theology of scripture and of the three-ages as proposed by Joachim di Fiore. He uses all of Bonaventure's writing, but principally focuses on Bonaventure's lectures on the *Hexameron*, which he delivered at the University of Paris in 1273, one of his last works.

Ratzinger points out the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius and the "secondary" role of Augustine's *City of God* (*De civitate dei*), and characterizes Bonaventure's Augustinian theology of history as firmly based on Scripture.⁴⁰ Bonaventure's understanding of our historical consciousness provides a solid argument for how it is that we in the final age can see this more clearly now than the holy prophets and saints of old. Bonaventure extracts history from Scripture, but not as Joachim, and he divides it into numerous ages: a) the seven ages, Adam to Christ, as Augustine writes; b) the five ages, Adam to Noe to Abraham to Moses to Christ, according to the homily of Gregory the Great; and c) the three ages, as reflecting the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, from Joachim's

³⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 37

³⁹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure. Collationes in Hexameron* was the prominent source for Joseph Ratzinger's commentary on the theology of history in Bonaventure.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9: "As the physical world contains seeds so also Scripture contains 'seeds'; that is, seeds of meaning. And this meaning develops in a constant process of growth in time. Consequently, we are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things still lay in the dark future while for us they are accessible as past history. Still other things remain dark for us. And so, new knowledge arises constantly from Scripture."

writings.⁴¹ Bonaventure uses three divisions of history, as found in biblical prophecies by theologians before him, as Ratzinger notes: “Bonaventure uses none of these schemata as his own...”⁴² Rather, he combines the writings and findings of writers before him to formulate a new scheme of history, which reflects his interpretation of history in Scripture as a constant process of unveiling. As the writers before him revealed the prophecies of Scripture, Bonaventure is able to use their teachings in combination with one another to present his own more developed theology of history.

Bonaventure’s views of history play a decisive role in his management of the controversies of his administration. The great division within the Franciscan order mainly revolved around different interpretations of Francis’s original teachings and many of their interpretations dealt with the understanding of the past and the future:

The exegesis of Scripture becomes a theology of history; the clarification of the past leads to prophecy concerning the future.⁴³

Some Franciscans believed, as Brother Elias did, in creating a worldwide order, a position which greatly deviated from the humble, poverty-driven Francis, while others believed in adhering strictly to the radical poverty and simplicity Francis’s way of life. Bonaventure sought to unite the two, creating a middle ground. To do this he used writings that had experienced both views and which attracted many

⁴¹ Ibid, 11

⁴² Ibid, 11

⁴³ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 9

young men to become Franciscans. And these writings were those of Joachim di Fiore.

Whereas Thomas Aquinas came out directly against Joachim, Bonaventure relied greatly on Joachim's division of history, and he could use this to contextualize Francis's role within the great sweep of salvation history.⁴⁴ Whether or not Bonaventure actually believed Joachim's theories, it was important for him to address the works of Joachim, since the Franciscan order was so greatly influenced by his beliefs and scheme of history. In using Joachim together with the works of others, Bonaventure significantly altered the meaning of Joachim's ideas – a change that was not missed by the spirituals. As the leading followers of Joachimite theory, the spirituals were Bonaventure's main target, however, Ratzinger argues that Bonaventure did not do much to correct the spirituals, but was aware of their positions and marshaled arguments against them in his writings.

Bonaventure also reshaped the organization of the Franciscan order, making it a hierarchical one of clerics and lay brothers. This radical change subverted the very life and ideals of the earthly Francis, who was not a cleric, who preached "independent" of the papacy and other clerical and ecclesiastical controls, and who saw himself as his companions' brothers. Ratzinger recognizes the problem with this for Bonaventure: "Francis's own eschatological form of life

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18: "The Augustinian tradition remains as the broad framework; but for the actual interpretation of history, it is superseded by new ideas."

could not exist as an institution in this world...”⁴⁵ The life of abandonment to God that Francis practiced was not suitable to the development of a huge organized order, and thus Francis’s historical ministry was no longer a suitable model for his Franciscan progeny. Bonaventure therefore shifts the spiritual significance of Francis to that of a saint for a reorganized, institutionalized Franciscan order. The importance of Francis’s life was now no longer as a humble teacher in a simple earthly ministry, but was a gift from God. The central most important function of Francis’s life was the gift of the stigmata the very impression of the crucified Christ’s wounds. Ratzinger suggests that this was central to Bonaventure’s reading of Francis’s life and was thus central to Christian history.

In *Hexaemeron XXII*, Bonaventure gives a picture of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is one of his major contributions, as well as defenses, against the spirituals. He divides the order into three subdivisions, reflecting not Augustine’s seven age schemata, but Joachim’s. He uses Joachim’s historical division of ages according to the age of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He positions the Old Testament as parallel to the New Testament and ranks the hierarchical positions within each. He places Francis as part of the higher rank - the *ordo seraphicus* (the highest of the angelic orders) - and places the Franciscan order itself in the *ordo cherubius* (the second highest of the angelic order), which places Francis’s life and ministry totally outside the realm of the current functions of the order, and effectively disregards his earthly practices as irrelevant to the present

⁴⁵ Ibid., 51

practice of the order.⁴⁶ Christ stands at the center of Bonaventure's history, thus Francis's stigmata is the most important feature of his life,⁴⁷ because Francis so perfectly mirrored Christ's virtues that he was deemed privileged to receive the imprint of his savior's wounds. Francis's importance is to remind all of us to conform to Christ and embrace his cross.

Bonaventure saw that, since the final age had not come in 1260, rather than one group to lead believers, the two groups, the Dominicans and the Franciscans as prophesized by Joachim, should work together to lead the people.⁴⁸ There would now no longer be a Franciscan belief in its unique mission.

iii. A Comparison of Bonaventure's Writings with Thomas of Celano's Writings

Although Bonaventure used much of Thomas of Celano's writings on Francis, he displays clear differences and noteworthy deviations. These will become significant later as Dante will refer to Thomas of Celano's writing on the history of Francis, preferring his over Bonaventure's, especially regarding the matter of Bonaventure's placement of Francis within the hierarchy and the omission of Thomas's emphasis on Francis's physical earthly ministry.

The Major Legend:

Bonaventure states in the prologue of *The Major Legend*: "The grace of God our Savior has appeared in these last days in his servant Francis..."; "having

⁴⁶ Ibid, 52

⁴⁷ Ibid., 118, "Christ is the center of all. This is the basic concept of Bonaventure's historical schema, and it involves a decisive rejection of Joachim."

⁴⁸ Ibid., 55

the sign of the living God”; and “messenger of God.” This is similar to Celano’s work; however, Bonaventure places a much heavier emphasis on drawing the picture of Francis as having been sent by God as “another Christ” for which Francis was rewarded with the stigmata.

Among the differences between Thomas of Celano’s and Bonaventure’s writings, I shall focus on two particular features that I found to be the most strikingly different: that of Francis’ mother freeing him from his father’s bondage and the depiction of Francis’s companion Clare. Compare the following two descriptions of Francis’s mother releasing him: the first from Thomas of Celano and the second from Bonaventure:

His mother, who had remained at home alone with him, did not approve of her husband’s action and spoke to her son in gentle words. After she saw that she could not dissuade her son from his proposal, she was moved by maternal instinct. She broke his chains and let him go free. Thanking Almighty God, he quickly returned to the place he had been before.⁴⁹ (Thomas of Celano)

After a little while, when his father had left the country, his mother, who did not approve what her husband had done and had no hope of being able to soften her son’s inflexible determination released him from his chains and permitted him to leave. He gave thanks to the Almighty Lord and went back to the place he had been before.⁵⁰ (Bonaventure)

Bonaventure’s different depiction of Francis’s mother is subtle, but effective. Bonaventure removes the “maternal instinct,” so and instead depicts the mother more as a mere agent removing his chains, whereas Thomas of Celano

⁴⁹ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis” (1228-1229). *The Francis Trilogy*. eds. Regis Armstrong, et al. (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2004), 32

⁵⁰ Bonaventure, “The Major Legend,” 537

uses words such as “broke his chains” and “maternal instinct” endowing her with a greater strength of understanding and human love for her son. Thomas of Celano’s greater emphasis on the proactive nature of Francis’s mother suggests that he followed a traditional hagiographic trope of the saint’s goodly mother which reflects the role of the Virgin Mary in the life of Christ. Thomas of Celano’s portrait of Francis’s mother also suggests a greater emphasis on the active role of women in the life of Francis. In the early years prior to papal intervention, women, particularly Clare of Assisi, had greater freedoms as Francis’s companions. Thomas of Celano’s image of Francis’s mother setting him free is perhaps an allusion to the freedoms originally maintained by women. Francis, too, sometimes, referred to himself as “mother,” suggesting his own maternal nature, which might further allude to a “maternal” desire of freedom for his order, one that’s not subject to a father’s domination. Bonaventure’s exclusion of these elements from the story suggests his adherence to the hierarchical church tradition in enforcing limitations on women, especially on those engaged in spiritual ministries.

The next reference for comparison is that of Clare of Assisi. The first selection is from Celano:

The Lady Clare,
A native of Assisi,
The most precious and strongest stone of the whole structure,
Stands as the foundation for all the other stones.⁵¹
(The First Book, Thomas of Celano)

⁵¹ Thomas of Celano, from *The Francis Trilogy*, “Life of St. Francis,” 37

The Lady Clare!
 Clearly a woman of true brilliance and holiness,
 The first mother of all the others,
 The first plant of the holy Order:
 She comes with her daughters
 To see the father
 Who would never again
 Speak to them or return to them,
 As he was quickly going away.
 They looked upon him,
 Groaning and weeping with great anguish of heart.⁵²
 (upon Francis's death, The Second Book. Thomas of Celano)

Virgins, too, were drawn
 To perpetual celibacy,
 Among whom was the virgin
 Especially dear to God,
 Clare.⁵³ (Thomas of Celano)

Thomas of Celano depicts Clare as among the first of the order, and a kind of co-founder and early companion of Francis. He elevates her as "noble," granting her an equality with Francis. Bonaventure, on the other hand, buries her in the text, presenting other brothers before her, as though the Franciscan order were far under way before she enters into Francis's acquaintance.

Virgins, too, were drawn
 to perpetual celibacy,
 among whom was the virgin
 especially dear to God,
 Clare.
 As the first tender sprout,
 she gave forth a fragrance
 like a lustrous untouched flower
 that blossoms in springtime,
 and she shone
 like a brilliant star.

⁵² Ibid., 125

⁵³ Bonaventure, "The Major Legend," 553

Now she is glorified in heaven
 and fittingly venerated by the Church on earth,
 she who was the daughter in Christ
 of our holy father Francis, the little poor man,
 and the mother of the Poor Ladies.⁵⁴ (Bonaventure)

The difference is subtle, but Bonaventure has subtracted the proactive nature of Clare that Thomas of Celano had portrayed. Thomas of Celano's image of Clare is as the "foundation"; Bonaventure's is of Clare as a flower "sprouting." The difference is not only in the language, but in the interpretation. It appears that to Bonaventure Clare was no longer a stone building a strong foundation for the order, but rather a seed which had sprouted from the pre-existing foundation. Clare is merely a spiritual daughter of the great spiritual father Francis. This is a far more limiting presentation of the woman who earlier had been called "the foundation for all the other stones." It is here that we can see why the spirituals and Dante might have valued the writings of Thomas of Celano over those of Bonaventure: the role of women, as maternal, as companions, and as foundations preserved the integrity of the order and mission which Francis had intended, and was thus, of greater spiritual utility for all those who wished to stay true to the Francis they loved.

iv. Controversy with Spirituals

One of Bonaventure's main arguments aims specifically at Gerard of Borgos's argument about Francis and the seraph of the sixth-seal, a prophecy of the final age.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Bonaventure, "The Major Legend of Saint Francis," 553-554

In Joachim's writings, the angel of the apocalypse (14:6) becomes the symbol of the coming of the final age, in Scripture the sixth age.⁵⁶ Gerard uses the angel as a sign that Joachim's writings were a truly prophetic work, and he also uses this to interpret Francis and the Franciscans as the spiritual leaders of the final age. Bonaventure rejects this proposition, as does the church. This reading in fact becomes the main reason for Gerard's condemnation. Bonaventure does not deny that Francis symbolizes the final age, since he bore the 'seal' of the sixth age, the stigmata of Christ. But Bonaventure, according to Ratzinger, rejects Gerard's statement by positing a difference between the "Francis of faith" and the "Francis of history." Bonaventure's schemata of ecclesiastical positions and historical parallels of the order advances his argument against the spirituals, and particularly against Gerard's interpretation of the angel of the apocalypse.⁵⁷ Bonaventure makes the distinction between "the Franciscan Order (the spiritual branch) and the *ordo* of the final age."⁵⁸ The spirituals' belief in the importance of imitating the historical Francis counters Bonaventure's belief in the "Francis of faith" and the need for members of his religious order to follow the heavenly Francis. They are to venerate the saint in heaven and imitate his saintly virtues,

⁵⁵ Gerard saw Joachim's writing as supposed to replace the New Testament and become the eternal Gospel, as Ratzinger's reading: "Gerard considered Joachim to be the Angel of the Apocalypse 14, 6 about whom it is stated: 'I saw another angel flying in mid-air with an eternal Gospel...' The writings of Joachim were seen to be this eternal Gospel which was supposed to take the place of the temporary New Testament message." (Ratzinger, 23)

⁵⁶ Isaiah 6:2, "Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying."

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, 33: "The understanding of St. Francis as the 'Angel who ascends from the rising of the sun' (Apoc. 7,2)..." and "Four angels stand at the four corners of the earth and create a great silence by holding back the four winds. At this moment, 'another angel' ascends from the rising sun 'with the seal of the living God.'" (34)

but not his earthly excesses and independent lifestyle and radical poverty. Instead, they were to place themselves obediently within the bosom of the church, and not preach the imminent coming of Christ and their own unique role as Christ's vanguard before the Apocalypse arrives.

v. Bonaventure in *Paradiso*

That Dante places Bonaventure in *Paradiso* has been used as an argument against Dante's attraction to the spiritual Franciscan movement. But there may be more here than scholars have noticed. Bonaventure's authority as representing the authentic characters of the Franciscan order became secure during his later years and after his death in 1274. Although he was not canonized until the 16th century, the authority of Bonaventure's life of Francis grew over the course of Dante's life. By the time Dante wrote *Paradiso*, most likely between 1316 and his death in 1321, Bonaventure's writings had become the official theological doctrine of the Franciscan order and the official word on Francis's life and legacy. Regardless of Dante's agreement or disagreement with Bonaventure, it would have been unorthodox and politically inappropriate not to place Bonaventure in *Paradiso*. Bonaventure was regarded as saintly and an outstanding theologian, and Dante rightly places him with the theologians in the circle of the sun (Canto X-XII). Bonaventure had become one of the age's most influential and brilliant theologians, and his work, independent of his positions within the Franciscan order, deserved recognition in itself.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 46

Another argument is more controversial: had Dante agreed with Bonaventure's depiction of Francis and the role of Francis in the church, he would have placed Francis in a different circle than that of the theologians. But this can be refuted because Dante carefully places St. Dominic and St. Francis in the circle with Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, insinuating that these two saints are also theologians as well as the inspiration for the most renowned theologians of their respective orders. Bonaventure would not have agreed with Dante's placement of Francis among the theologians, as Ratzinger's analysis of Bonaventure's commentaries demonstrates. Bonaventure saw Francis as a God-sent reflection of Christ and thus as a martyr (witness) to his sufferings and crucifixion. He saw the stigmata as the essence of Francis's life and the reason for his existence on earth. Francis's life mirrored this central mystery of the faith; Francis was not a theologian here to expound its meaning. Bonaventure therefore places the crucifixion as the center of the Christian faith and Francis as a divine sign of this great **mystery**.

Bonaventure writes constantly throughout his works on Francis about God's agency in Francis's life and function on earth, whereas Dante makes a point to give the historical figure substantial credit for his own actions, which in turn merits him a particular rank or position in the afterlife. Dante's Beatrice, for example, as one of the central figures of the *Commedia*, is most likely based on a real person⁵⁹ and she is also the divine embodiment of love. However, her first

⁵⁹ Bice di Folco Portinari, 1266-1290; See Lino Pertile, "Dante," 42

function in the *Commedia* it is to intervene on behalf of Dante and ask Virgil to save Dante. Love moves Beatrice: but is not the only function of Beatrice, she is also a living spirit of Dante's memory who at one time played a significant role in Dante's own transformation. Thus, there is a duality to Dante's characters, sometimes, the earthly person predominates and at other times the spiritual role she or he plays in the afterlife.

vi. Historical Controversies and Arguments over Bonaventure's Position

Despite the authority of Bonaventure's writing, controversy continues, even today, around his interpretation of Francis. Bonaventure is considered the father of the Franciscan movement for many important reasons. He is credited with making decisive actions for the direction of the Franciscan order, which may have saved it from obscurity. Many of his contemporaries and historians believed he did what was necessary to preserve the order by submitting it to papal authority and that he was acting on precedents. A select few, however, believed and believe that he did so by compromising the wishes and visions of the historical Francis:⁶⁰ one fact all can argue is that Bonaventure transformed the Francis of Thomas of Celano into a regular monk, confined mostly to a monastery, living under a superior's discipline, and subjected to the authority of the hierarchical church.

⁶⁰ See footnote 4.

III.
THOMAS OF CELANO:
 The First Hagiographer of St. Francis

“[H]e could discern the secrets of the heart of creatures like someone who has already passed into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”⁶¹

“[H]e was a lamp burning and shining, a chosen arrow ready at the right time.”⁶²

III. Thomas of Celano

Thomas of Celano was the first official author of the earliest life of St. Francis. He was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX in 1228, two years after the saint's death, to write a hagiography of Francis. Thomas's first *Life of St. Francis* gives readers an emotionally charged portrait of a man the author had known personally and followed for years. There is a large measure of historical information about Francis in this earliest document, which is important to recognize when going back to the earliest origins of the Franciscan movement. Thomas of Celano's work is far less well known than Bonaventure's, and it is only in recent years that the significance of his works has become clear.

Thomas of Celano continued to write on the life of Francis over the course of his own life. From 1228 to 1263 his three books were recognized as the official hagiographical works on St. Francis. However, after Bonaventure wrote his *Major Legend* and *Minor Legend* on Francis, Thomas of Celano's works were officially banned. Fortunately twenty-two copies of his works were preserved by the

⁶¹ Thomas of Celano, *The Francis Trilogy*. “Life of St. Francis,” 91

⁶² *Ibid.*, 109

Cistercians.⁶³ Despite the prohibition and disappearance of so many copies of Thomas of Celano's writings on Francis we know his texts were still read and still recognized as authoritative by some Franciscans. Scholarly comparisons of Thomas of Celano with Bonaventure's lives suggest that Dante may have relied more heavily on Celano, than Bonaventure.⁶⁴

Of particular importance, as we have noted earlier, is Thomas of Celano's portrait of St. Clare and the interactions among Francis, Clare, and their earlier associates. Thomas of Celano's words are also closest in time to the death of the saint.

The work and importance of Thomas of Celano has been underappreciated for years. Only within the past century has extensive study been done on the independent influence of Celano's work and the impact it may have had. His influence is usually mentioned in reference to Bonaventure, partly because of the disappearance of his works after the official approval of Bonaventure's works on Francis, and partly because of their general popularity in narrating the life of the saint. Still, it is unclear how many people read Celano's works and who had access to his works. Recent research has recognized Thomas of Celano's work as

⁶³ *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Introduction" to "The Legends and Sermons about Saint Francis by Bonaventure Bagnoregio (1255-1267)," 503: "The editors of the *Analecta Franciscana* discovered less than twenty-two manuscripts of Thomas's *Life of Saint Francis* and most of these were in the possession of the Cistercians. There were only two of Thomas's *Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul*."

⁶⁴ Enciclopedia Dantesca, s.v. "Chiara di Assisi, Santa," 954: Più che il Celanese («Dicta domina... ad Deum conversa... multis exstitit ad profectum et innumeris ad exemplum », 1 Cel. 18; cfr. 19-20), è meglio presente a D. s. Bonaventura: «Virgo Deo clarissima Clara... tamquam stella praefulgida radiavit. Haec nunc glorificata in caelis, ab Ecclesia digne veneratur in terris» (Leg. Maior IV 6); «virgo illa nobilis clara, nunc gloriosa in caelis » (XV 5). Donde probabilmente il neologismo dantesco inciela (v.97), che non ricorre più nel poema.

completely independent of Bonaventure's and as having exerted a separate influence. It is then very possible that Dante might have read Thomas of Celano's work, since he studied with the Franciscans in Florence. The spirituals there may have had access to Thomas of Celano's writings, especially considering their dedication to preserving the true testament of Francis and those who knew him. And as we shall note later, the spiritual Franciscan Ubertino da Casale's quest for Brother Leo's writings also presents strong circumstantial evidence that Casale would have felt equally concerned about preserving Thomas of Celano's writings and would have sought them out as well.

i. Biography

Thomas of Celano was a relatively unknown brother of the Franciscan order when Francis died; however, that changed when, in 1228 after Francis's canonization, Pope Gregory IX asked Thomas to write the official life of Francis.

Since there are no scholarly studies of the life of Thomas of Celano,⁶⁵ much of the beginning of his own earthly life is debated. Scholars believe he was born at the end of the 12th century⁶⁶ to a noble family in Celano in the mountains southeast of Rome. He was well educated in the curriculum of the Middle Ages, the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, and shows extensive knowledge in his writings on 'monastic literature' and theology.⁶⁷ In 1221, he probably went on the Franciscans' mission to Germany, where he was elected to office. He later

⁶⁵ From *Thomas of Celano St. Francis Trilogy*, "Introduction," 11

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, between 1185-1190

became vicar of Germany and was most likely in Assisi in 1228 and witnessed Francis's canonization.

Thomas of Celano's first work on Francis, *Life of St. Francis*, is an important document for the early history of the Franciscan order. Thomas of Celano emphasizes the role of the church in his own spiritual formation and the roles of three historical figures other than Francis: St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253); Brother Elias Buonbarone (1180-1253); and Pope Gregory IX (born Hugolino dei Conti di Segni, who reigned from 1227-1241). Although it is difficult to extract an accurate historical account of Francis's early life and career, it is fairly certain that the depiction of Francis and his early companions by Thomas of Celano so soon after Francis's death is the more historically accurate than the account by Bonaventure.

Because Thomas of Celano's text was officially commissioned by the pope, we might suspect too that the role of the church is far more involved than what the historical Francis would have wanted, if we can judge by Francis's final writing, the *Testament*. Pope Gregory IX had known Francis as a friend, not as a monastic subject, and thus his dealings with Francis may not have been as politically nuanced as later popes seemed to prefer. Thomas writes an eloquent account of the spiritual importance of Francis's life and the importance of his teachings. He uses theological and monastic texts as well as the Old and the New

⁶⁷ Ibid., 11: Here it is also suggested that Thomas of Celano probably studied at the Benedictine monastery of Saint John the Baptist near Celano, and possibly at Monte Cassino, Rome or Bologna.

Testaments to signal Francis's spiritual mission on earth. His characterization of Francis is rich as a portrayal of one who knew him, as a human being and as a divine messenger. Thomas of Celano unites these two images of Francis, conveying the spiritual importance of both.

Thomas of Celano also writes about Francis as directing Christians to the true path of Christianity, reflecting the Franciscans belief in the need for a 'spiritual renewal within the life of the Church.'⁶⁸ As the fundamental politics and events of the 12th and 13th centuries threatened the church with the rise of heretical movements, Francis was seen, particularly as constructed by Thomas of Celano, as someone sent to reinvigorate the church through a spiritual reawakening of its members, and not to change the institutional structure of the church itself.

Thomas of Celano then wrote the *Legend for the Use in the Choir*, which was confirmed by Pope Gregory IX in 1229. In the work he divided selections from the *Life of St. Francis* into nine sections, which he composed as teaching material and readings for feast days. His residence during the period of his writings, 1229 through his death in 1260, is open to speculation. The only traces we have are found in his writings. It is known, however, that he occasionally traveled to Assisi.

Thomas of Celano's next writing on Francis came fourteen years later with *The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul*, dedicated to Crescentius of Jesi.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15

Crescentius had called for a collection of all the writings of the brothers' who had known Francis, and asked Thomas of Celano to write a collection of the stories. Thomas of Celano's final work was the *Treatise on Miracles*, commissioned by John of Parma in 1254, minister general of the Franciscan order (1247-1257).

Thomas of Celano's later works on Francis bear a strikingly different tone from his first *Life of St. Francis*. Over the fourteen year period between the publication of his works, the Franciscan order had begun to divide ideologically. The climate within the order was very different than it had been in 1228 when Thomas of Celano first wrote, one of the biggest differences being the exclusion of Brother Elias. Elias, who had been one of Francis's closest followers (if not closest), and minister general for seven years (1232-1239), was excommunicated by the pope in 1239. He was accused of having abused the wealth of the order for his own gains and turning the order into a profitable organization spread throughout the world. Because many of his ideas were seen as diametrically opposed to Francis' wishes, the brothers worked together to have him removed. Thomas of Celano's and most other authors' writings about Francis after 1239 completely write Elias out of the history of Francis.

Thomas of Celano, we know, spent the remainder of his life with the order of the Poor Clares, but it is debatable whether he wrote the *Life of St. Clare* in 1253. He died on October 4, 1260 in Tagliacozza in the Marche of Ancona and was buried at the monastery of San Giovanni di Val dei Varri. In the last few

years of his life he was chaplain to the Poor Ladies, St. Clare's followers, at their convent in Tagliacozza.

ii. Thomas of Celano's Works on Francis

a. The *Life of St. Francis* (1228-1229)

The work commissioned in 1228 upon the canonization of Francis, is one of the most beautiful hagiographies ever composed. Thomas of Celano draws on traditional hagiographical formats while crafting a unique piece of literature. He represents a strong emotional attachment to the saint and writes not only of the impact of the life of the saint on the entire brotherhood, but of the importance of Francis's life as a brother. The work captures the mind and imagination and was and is an inspiration to many, Franciscans and non-Franciscans alike. The *Life of St. Francis*, as his first work on Francis, is much more limitless than his later works. Although he identifies many dealings Francis had with the church, Thomas depicts Francis more as an independent agent separate from the ecclesiastical order. Francis's Christian path is seen as leading to a more spiritual, renewed church, a direction it is clear Francis wanted the church to take. Thomas of Celano would have had access to the early writings of the Franciscan order, which is evident in his text, for he quotes Francis's *The Canticle of Creatures*.⁶⁹

The *Life of St. Francis* is divided into three books. The first two books describe the life and death of Francis and the third describes the canonization

⁶⁹ St. Francis of Assisi, from *Early Documents: The Saint*, "The Canticle of the Creatures," 113

ceremony of the saint. The first book illustrates Francis's early life and his spiritual awakening. Thomas of Celano also describes the founding of the order, Francis's 'rebuilding' of churches, and the first brother and sister of Francis, Elias and Clare. Thomas of Celano portrays Francis as one who came to "repair" not only the physical structures of the church but the spiritual ones. Thomas emphasizes Francis's humility and life of poverty as the two functions of his life. Francis is also seen as a mirror perfectly reflecting Christ. Thomas refers to Francis's respect for all creatures as being brothers and sisters. Through specific instances such as these Thomas remembers and conveys the Francis he knew, the historical man as well as Francis the saint.

The second book deals only with the two years leading up to Francis's death. The main focus lies in Francis's reception of the stigmata and his visions of his predestined death. Francis's wounds are revealed to his followers only upon his death, for he had wanted them to remain hidden until he had died: only two witnesses knew, Brother Elias and Brother Ruffino. The second book is written in a slightly different mode than the first.⁷⁰ It follows the visions of Francis and emphasizes the importance of his stigmata, and is more related to the importance of his "reincarnation" than his life as a spiritual father and teacher. The tone of the second book also seems more related to the reasons for his canonization. Thomas wants to insure that future Franciscans will read his work and fathom the true importance of Francis's life and why they have chosen this calling. It is thus the

⁷⁰ From the "Introduction" of *The Francis Trilogy*, 17

two books together which explain the events of Francis's life and as a whole contribute to the importance of his life for future generations to recall.

Thomas of Celano's third book relates the process, event and importance of Francis's canonization from one who must certainly have been present. Although we do not have positive proof that Thomas of Celano attended the canonization ceremony, it has been argued that, based on the detail of the account, he was there.⁷¹

b. *The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul* (1245-1247)

The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul was written at the direction of Crescentius of Jesi, the minister general of the Franciscans, who wanted a compiled recollection of all the brothers who had known Francis. Thomas of Celano wrote his recounts of Francis using *The Assisi Compilation*, *Anonymous Perugia*, and *The Legend of Three Companions*, all collected from other brothers of the order. Crescentius had come to realize that the order was very different from when Thomas of Celano had first written his life of Francis some fourteen years earlier. Part of Crescentius's motive for the compilation was to ascertain Francis's wishes for the direction of the order. As the new practices of the order had become contentious, the compilations were meant to placate all parties. Thomas of Celano's writing therefore was motivated by the need to maintain a sense of unified peace. The work focuses on the practices of the order more than

⁷¹ From the "Introduction" of *The Francis Trilogy*, 12

the life of the saint. And this is, most certainly, the piece on which Bonaventure relied most heavily in his writings on Francis.

The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul is divided into two books. The first book deals with the importance of baptism as the central fountain of grace in Francis's life; the second book describes the actions for achieving grace, the actions of the brothers, and their way of life. The meaning of Thomas of Celano's title is unclear, and it is unique to the literary style of the time. His work, however, was seemingly influential on Dante whose entire *Commedia* is written from 'memory.' The beginning of *Paradiso* brings this into light most clearly.⁷² Thomas of Celano also used selections from his own earlier works, including the depiction of Francis's death.

c. *The Legend for the Use in the Choir* (1253-1259)⁷³

This is a liturgical piece which addresses the two years after the canonization of Francis and the translation of his body to the new basilica at Assisi. A strange feature of this piece of Thomas of Celano's writing is the favorable depiction of Brother Elias, who had died the year it is believed Thomas of Celano began this work. Another important feature of the work is Thomas's emphasis places on Francis's stigmata at La Verna. It follows his depiction of the

⁷² Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto I, 3: "The Glory of the All-Mover penetrates through the universe and reglows in one part more, and in another less. I have been in the heaven that most receives of His light, and have seen things which whoso descends from up there has neither the knowledge nor the power to relate, because, as it draws near to its desire, our intellect enters so deep that memory cannot go back upon the track. Nevertheless, so much of the holy kingdom as I could treasure up in my mind shall now be the matter of my song."

event in *The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul* and in Julian of Speyer's writings.

d. *The Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis* (1250-1252)

The *Treatise on Miracles of St. Francis* was written between 1250 and 1252. Sixty-three of the 198 paragraphs of the work are taken from Thomas' earlier work, mostly from his first writing, *The Life of St Francis*. The *Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis* is divided into nineteen chapters, the first dealing with his life and the last after his death. The description of miracles is similar to many in Christian hagiographical tradition and is somewhat repetitive.⁷⁴

iii. The Impact of Thomas of Celano's Work on Dante and The Spiritual Franciscans

Thomas of Celano's fluid writing style captured not only the spirit and life of St. Francis but also the style of Franciscan preaching. The Franciscans were poets. (St. Francis had even inspired a French troubadour to become one of his early brothers.⁷⁵) Their poetic style and spiritual depth inspired many followers

⁷³ This was sung on feast days and in choir; it is a liturgical piece which emphasizes the poetic beauty of Thomas's language; Bonaventure uses this extensively for his liturgical writings on St. Francis. From the "Introduction" of the *Early Documents: The Founder*, 397.

⁷⁴ From the *Trilogy of St. Francis*, "Introduction," to the "Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis," 316. Six studies have been done on miracles; the translation is complicated due to its repetitive nature

⁷⁵ Thomas of Celano, from the *Trilogy of Francis*, "The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul" 234: "In the Marche of Ancona there was a man of the world who had forgotten himself and did not know God, and who had prostituted himself entirely to vanity. He was known as the "King of Verses," because he was a prince of bawdy singers and creator of worldly ballads...While in this way, he was walking in darkness and in the harshness of vanity pulling iniquity, the divine piety had pity on him and decided to call back the miserable man, so the outcast would not perish. By God's providence blessed Francis and this man met each other at a monastery of poor enclosed women...But although the blessed Father at first preached generally to everyone he pointed the sword of God's word on that man. He took him aside and gently reminded him about the vanity of society and contempt of the world, and then pierced his heart warning him about divine

appealing to those in the countryside, to whom they preached in the vernacular. Although the Mass was recited in Latin and Biblical texts were available only to those who had the means and education to learn Latin, St. Francis, much in the style of Christ, preached to all in an idiom they could comprehend. It is for this reason that many scholars believe the Franciscans greatly inspired Dante's use of the vernacular.⁷⁶

The spiritual Franciscans also greatly relied on Thomas of Celano's works for much the same reasons. Thomas of Celano relied on the spirit and beauty of Francis and the refreshing individuality of his words and accommodation to his audience, an approach quite different from that of the church's hierarchy. Unlike Bonaventure, the spirituals, did not believe in the intervention of the church hierarchy within the affairs of the Franciscans. Their views mirrored those of the earthly Francis who sought to keep his order from falling under clerical control. The spirituals, for the most part, were not as zealous in their leanings as Gerard of Borgo, but were rather like Thomas, seeing Francis as a part of the movement for the renewal of the church, but seemingly separate and outside its ecclesiastical structure of governance. Francis, like the spirituals, believed in teaching in nature and maintaining poverty, not teaching in basilicas or monasteries. Thomas of Celano gives much evidence of this early Franciscan direction in his writings, particularly in his descriptions of the spiritual path of the brothers.

judgement. At once the man replied: 'What's the point of piling up any more words? Let's move on to deeds! Take me away from people, and give me back to the Great Emperor!' 234-235.

⁷⁶ Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the 'Commedia'*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.

It is also evident from the spirituals' search for documents about Francis from the brothers who knew him that the texts of Thomas of Celano would be invaluable for them, as these were the first recollections of Francis's life. As such they seemed to mirror the authentic mind and testament of their founder and his earliest companions.

iv. Why Thomas of Celano Does Not Appear in the *Commedia*

Thomas of Celano does not appear in Dante's *Commedia*. He is not one of the spirits in *Paradiso* as we perhaps might expect. However, his writing clearly influenced Dante's, and separately from Bonaventure. One of the best pieces of evidence for this is in Dante's presentation of St. Clare. Bonaventure gives very little credit to Clare, whereas Thomas treats her as an equal to the brothers in his *Life of St Francis*, and his dedication to her, as one of Francis's closest friends, remained throughout his life. Thomas would die amid her companions and sisters, the Poor Ladies (or the Poor Clares, Clarisses).

IV. THE SPIRITUALS

The Rise of the Spiritual Franciscans in the Context of 13th Century Italy

Christ Jesus is the eternal wisdom of the Father. He wanted His Spirit of Life renewed in the Church to lead in the exalted saint, the confessor Francis, through His paths. Along those same paths, that pious Jesus deigned to walk during the course of His life.⁷⁷

The Spiritual Franciscans

The writings and philosophy of Dante bear in some ways a strikingly similarity to the writings and ideology of the mid-13th century dissident movement of the spirituals. Over the past few decades some historians have begun to identify geographical and poetic connections between Dante and the spirituals; however, all measure regarding the impact and the substance of these connections remain tenuous. Nick Havely has recently written a thorough history on the relationship between Dante and the Franciscans; however, he refrains from outwardly drawing any distinction between Dante's allegiance to the spirituals and the main body of the order. But here I shall argue that a fresh investigation of Dante's works, above all the *Commedia*, might suggest that Dante was, to some extent, a proponent of the spirituals' ideas and that he embedded their message within his writings. To have come out openly in their favor would have had serious political implications for Dante, who was already living in exile. His efforts at concealment – if he did so – seem to have been quite successful, for – if

⁷⁷ Ubertino da Casale, from *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus," 202

this argument is correct – his views may have lay hidden for centuries, obscured by the beauty of his prose and the complexities of his life.

It is important before we begin to recall the difficulty of defining a “spirituals” movement,⁷⁸ for within the movement there were conflicting opinions; and it is thus difficult to pinpoint which position Dante may have held. The intricacies of the beliefs of the movement varied; however, there was at least one clear distinction, which the recent work of David Burr has brought to light: between the order and a group collectively labeled the “spirituals,” there was at its core the question of the meaning of the Franciscan vow of poverty (*usus pauper*). This core question integrates not only the later life of Dante and the spirituals but the early movements of the spirituals which, this paper asserts, likely influenced Dante as early as 1274, when he was a boy of nine years.

It has been argued conclusively that there is a historical link between Dante’s life and that of the Franciscan order.⁷⁹ Dante states in his *Convivio* that from 1291 to 1294 he studied in Florence at the *scole religiosi*, the Franciscan Santa Croce and the Dominican Santa Maria Novella. It was a period that would

⁷⁸ As David Burr notes in *The Spiritual Franciscans*, “Preface,” vii: “A topic like the spiritual Franciscans presents its own difficulties when it comes to deciding how narrowly the limits should be set. It is not easy to decide precisely what one means by the term and whether it can be applied to a single identifiable group.” He continues, viii: “The term ‘spiritual’ was certainly used before the first decade of the fourteenth century...We find thirteenth century rigorists, and we find some of them described as pretending to be more spiritual than others, but we will see that such evidence is rendered problematic by the fact that it is found in substantially later documents that may reflect later terminology. In short, we can speak of the term ‘spiritual Franciscans’ from the early fourteenth century on and enjoy at least some degree of confidence that we are using a category that would have made sense to those in the order at the time, but we should have remarkably less confidence that this would have been the case in the thirteenth century.”

⁷⁹ Most recently by Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the ‘Commedia’*

greatly influence Dante's life. In these years he received a typical 13th century education and was spiritually brought up by these two prominent mendicant orders. By the late 13th century, the spiritual Franciscans had sharply separated themselves from the theology of the general order and were at trial defending their beliefs. It is likely Dante would have experienced some of these debates first hand while he studied at Santa Croce, especially because two of the leaders of spirituals the movement, Petrus Iohannes Olivi and Ubertino da Casale, had been lecturing at Santa Croce in the 1280s,⁸⁰ just a few years before Dante began his studies. By then the issues were well aired.

During Francis of Assisi's own lifetime the Franciscan order quickly spread. However, at the time of Francis's death in 1226, members of the order were philosophically divided on certain fundamental principles, most importantly, the provision allowing for the intervention of the pope in the affairs of the order and the boundaries of the vow of poverty, *usus pauper*.⁸¹ Prior to 1274 there was no simple definition of the spirituals movement within the order,⁸² but afterwards

⁸⁰ The argument for Dante's awareness of and attendance at these debates is speculative, but Havely and others, such as Charles T. Davis, strongly believe that Dante must have known of the debates. Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans*, 35: "Although Dante in *Convivio* 2.12.7 implies that he began to frequent the 'schools of the religious' only after 1290 (the year of Beatrice's death), it is conceivable that he might have done so earlier, and virtually certain that he would have heard something about Olivi's and Ubertino's ideas at Santa Croce during the early 1290s, a time when the divisions between Spirituals and Conventuals were intensifying and when the Spirituals movement looked set to achieve some degree of support and recognition." Charles T. Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," 426 : "But even if Dante's formal studies in theology did not begin until this time, it is likely that in previous years he heard some of Olivi's and Ubertino's sermons and felt the force of the strong Spiritual movement in Florence before 1280."

⁸¹ Franciscan poverty, 'simple' or 'poor' use, as put forth in the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis.

⁸² Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, "Preface," vii: David Burr goes into detail as to the complexities of defining the 'spirituals' as a divided faction before 1274. He also begins his book, about the history of the spirituals, by stating: "A topic like the spiritual Franciscans presents its own difficulties when it comes to deciding how narrowly the limits should be set. It is not easy to

the differences grew pointed. Essentially, the spirituals disagreed with the direction of the order under Bonaventure. However, the term was originally (and loosely) applied to Franciscans who had an “unconventional closeness to God” or believed in the teachings of the Calabrian abbot Joachim di Fiore (d. 1202). Joachim had written of a third age in which a group of spiritual men would lead the world into heaven. Following Joachim’s exegesis of the Apocalypse, which he saw occurring in 1260, these Franciscans believed that the Franciscan order was that group of spiritual men (*viri spirituali*) that Fiore had foretold; and thus they regarded themselves as those spiritual men.

After 1274 the definition of spirituals became more complex. Burr finds difficulty with a strict application of the term as pertaining to specific individuals and with establishing strict parameters of the definition. However, he does see them generally as a group, after 1274, of men and women who did not follow the official practice of the Franciscan order regarding the practice of poverty. The spirituals had stricter regulations regarding poverty and corporate ownership. (Within the group of spirituals there were also different opinions and different practices.) As the division grew between the order and its spiritual hard-liners, the identifiable character of the spirituals’ practice was its insistence on returning to the life of the historical St. Francis: the true followers of Francis would hold to his teachings on poverty and his way of life rather than embracing the practices instituted by Bonaventure.

decide precisely what one means by the term and whether it can be applied to a single identifiable

Petrus Iohannes Olivi (1248-1298) and Ubertino da Casale (1259-1330), two of the three prominent leaders of the ‘spirituals’ movement, represent the fundamental position of the spirituals, even though they did not fully agree with one another and were involved in debates at Santa Croce during the 1280’s. It is possible that Dante heard some of their debates and perhaps even spoke with them.

Nick Havely⁸³ establishes historical connections between the teachings of the Franciscans and the politics of the period. He also seeks to relate the “*Commedia*’s politics by reading it in relation to Franciscan controversies, particularly those involving poverty and the role of the Papacy.” Havely considers Dante’s literary career in light of the Franciscan debate on the role of poverty, and investigates the possible influence of the spiritual Franciscans on Dante’s awareness and interpretation of Franciscan theology, particularly as it pertains to poverty. However, Havely’s study “objective is neither to identify Dante as a crypto-Spiritual nor to revive the legend of his ‘Franciscan vocation.’” But he does urge readers to consider reading the *Commedia* within “The Franciscan traditions and discourses that informed the controversies about poverty,” which he sees “not as a code but as a context for reading the poem.”⁸⁴ Havely is reticent to argue specifically for the impact of the spirituals on Dante. But there are some hints that suggest Dante was indeed closer to the spirituals in his sympathies than to the

group.”

position of the other Franciscans and that these are not limited exclusively to the concept of poverty.

Though we know very little about Dante's life before 1291 and the publication of his *Vita Nuova* (thus many studies of Dante examine his life essentially beginning in 1291), we can establish some connections with the Franciscans in the twenty-seven years prior to 1291, and these connections may have some weight in aligning his sympathies with the spirituals' movement.

i. Francis and the Crusades

The impact of the crusades on 12th and 13th century Europe was immense. Thomas of Celano's first life of Francis recalls a dream the young man had of arms in a house, which he would reject; and Celano also speaks of Francis's early dreams of being a warrior attached to some noble. For whatever reason Francis rejects this way of life. He does, however, have experience of the crusades, a highly unusual one. In 1212,⁸⁵ he and his brothers embarked on a peaceful pilgrimage to the Sultan of Egypt, to preach peace.

Thomas of Celano says that "burning with desire for holy martyrdom, he [Francis] wished to take a ship to the region of Syria (i.e., Egypt) to preach the Christian faith and repentance to the Saracens and other unbelievers."⁸⁶ Francis met the sultan, or the Miramamolin,⁸⁷ spoke with him, and returned home

⁸⁴ Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans*, 2

⁸⁵ Thomas of Celano, from *The Early Documents: The Saint*, "The Life of Saint Francis," 229: Footnote (a): gives date as probably 1212

⁸⁶ Ibid., 229

⁸⁷ Ibid., 230: Footnote (b): Miramamolin, or Amir al-Mu'minin, which translates to "Commander of the Believers."

unharméd. Then he came back to the church of Saint Mary of Portiuncula where “literate and noble men joined him,”⁸⁸ one of whom may have been Thomas of Celano.

In 1218 or 1219 (the 13th year of his conversion), Francis again decided to return to Syria where, as Celano says, “bitter and long battles were being waged daily between Christians and pagans.”⁸⁹ Francis was “not afraid to present himself to the sight of the Sultan of the Saracens.”⁹⁰ This man was Malik al-Kamil (1180-1238),⁹¹ Sultan of Egypt. The Fifth Crusade of 1219 had captured the Egyptian port of Damietta, but al-Kamil held the crusaders off from his new camp at al-Manssura for two years. Finally, in 1221 the combined forces of the Ayyubid army encircled the crusaders, who surrendered within 27 days. Francis sought to visit al-Kamil at his camp before the Ayyubid forces reached Damietta. While on his way to meet the sultan, Francis was captured and beaten, but was not frightened, as Celano says. Soon afterwards, al-Kamil “received [Francis] very graciously,”⁹² offering Francis many riches. When Francis refused, the Sultan was very impressed and listened to Francis’s words. Francis did not receive martyrdom at the hands of the Sultan, nor did he convert these men; however as Thomas says:

In all this, however,
the Lord did not fulfill his desire,

⁸⁸ Ibid.,231

⁸⁹ Ibid.,231

⁹⁰ Ibid.,231

⁹¹ Ibid.,231: Footnote (c), identifies the sultan as Malik al-Kamil (1180-1238).

⁹² Ibid.,231

reserving for him the prerogative of a unique grace.⁹³
(Thomas of Celano)

This grace would be Francis's stigmata. Francis was not a crusader, and had in fact talked with the sultan and showed him there was an alternative to violence. Francis and the sultan had a peaceful meeting. The crusade would eventually fail, but episodes in the life of Francis such as this inspired many to listen to the words of the Franciscans and to follow a similar path. Francis was the true follower of Christ. Mirroring Christ's action, Francis reminded the world that Christ had come in peace and to bring peace.

The image of Francis and the Sultan stands contrary to that of the church and the crusades which it sponsored. The church funded and sponsored these bloody battles, which by the early 13th century, seemed more and more to be a fruitless endeavor. The life of Francis, as portrayed by Celano, creates a contrary ideal – a man going to the region of the crusades in hopes of martyrdom, not by brandishing the sword but by preaching peace. It was a picture of a saintly man who clearly contradicted the theology of the crusades that the popes had advanced for more than a century.

Francis's itinerant, independent life followed the path of Christ, wandering from town to town, penniless, abandoning himself to God. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." (Mark 8:20) They each brought a message of peace for everyone, regardless of

⁹³ Ibid.,231

wealth or status. It was a life contrary to the established hierarchy of the Church, which was insistent on keen divisions in church and society, assigning each person to his or her divinely appointed place in the cosmic order. Francis and his brothers, the “lesser brothers,” followed a life of humility and made no claims of distinction or for recognition. The spirituals sought to return the Franciscan order to this model which Francis had intended, outside the hierarchy of the church, so they might continue to preach to all people and spread the word of peace. The spirituals rejected all compromise with the life of property owners and the demands of the papacy which their Franciscan brothers had adopted: a subverted lifestyle, differing from the lifestyle of their founder.

iii. Prior to 1274

Although, the term ‘spiritual’ was not commonly used until the 1274 incident in the Marche of Ancona, which we shall relate in detail below, another reference to the term dates back to the writings of the Calabrian Abbot Joachim di Fiore⁹⁴ (1135-1202). He wrote three books analyzing Scripture and prophecy in Scripture.⁹⁵ Fiore divided history into three ages and believed that third age would be ushered in by ‘spiritual men’ (*viri spirituali*).⁹⁶ He believed that the emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) was the Antichrist foretold by the Apocalypse and would die in the year 1260, which would initiate the events of the final time. The spiritual men would somehow function above the church, superseding the

⁹⁴ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, Chapter 1

⁹⁵ The *Concordia Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*, the *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, and the *Psalterium Decem Chordarum*, see Bernard McGinn, “The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore.” *Church History*, 40, no.1 (1971): 31.

ecclesiastical hierarchy. They would be the new leaders who would not take direction from the papacy but lead the faithful of Christ.

Francis's last writing, the *Testament*, which could be interpreted in this Joachimite sense, stated that he firmly rejected the intervention of papal authority. In 1230, certain members of the order found it very difficult to uphold this position of Francis and went to Pope Gregory IX, asking that they not follow such an order. Pope Gregory agreed to this and issued the papal bull *Quo elongati*, which stated that the Franciscans did not have to obey Francis's final wishes that they stay independent of the papacy. It also allowed Franciscans to use material resources as long as they "do not exceed the standard of poverty." This is one of the first wedges to divide members of the order: there were now those who agreed with this papal decision and those who disagreed.

For years the spirituals would share many common beliefs, but there was no unified ideology. Prior to 1274 the term spirituals referred to men "unconventionally pious in a way that brought them closer to God."⁹⁷ But differences among these individuals abounded. The term might also refer to certain Franciscans as Joachimites, but the two definitions were not consistently used together. Bartolomeo Guiscolo was a Joachimite, who was also regarded as an "unconventionally pious man"; whereas, Gerard de Borgo was an avid Joachimite, but he was not regarded as "spiritual" in the same sense as Guiscolo.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 40

⁹⁷ Ibid., 40

⁹⁸ Ibid., 39-40. This refers to Burr's 13th century definition of the spirituals as differing from the 14th century. "While the term may not have been applied to a distinct faction, it was nevertheless

There were multiple meanings of the word within the order. The papal condemnation of Joachim of Fiore's writing made the second definition nearly synonymous with heretics after the year 1260 passed without issue. Those who believed in the apocalypse set for that year were promptly disregarded. Such figures included John of Parma, the minister general of the order until 1257.⁹⁹

In 1274, a rumor spread through the Marche of Ancona that Pope Gregory X (1271-1276) was going to rule on the role of poverty in the Franciscan order.¹⁰⁰ Although this rumor turned out to be false, it caused a public division between those who favored obedience to their vows than to the pope. Most Franciscans who favored obedience to their vows quieted down since the rumor was false; however three men did not: Thomas of Tolentino, Peter of Macerata, Traimondo or Raimondo and Peter of the Monticulo. They adamantly refused compliance with the pope over their vows and "were condemned as schismatics, deprived of their habits, and sent to hermitages."¹⁰¹ The next year the three condemned were summoned and the debate grew stronger and more divided. An older brother intervened on their behalf and saved them, for a while. However, this incident made clear there was a divide. In the next provincial chapter meeting five ministers, some from neighboring provinces, sentenced the original three "and

used in a way that would affect its later application."; "Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, whose obstinacy earned him perpetual imprisonment, is described as a Joachite, an honest man, and even a good man, but not as a spiritual man."

⁹⁹ He was out before 1260.

¹⁰⁰ See John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 188-204.

¹⁰¹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 44

some others,”¹⁰² to “perpetual imprisonment,” under the accusation that they were “schismatics, heretics, and destroyers of the order.” One of the imprisoned was Angelo of Clareno (1247-1337), one of the most important voices of the spirituals movement. The revolt of 1274 gave impetus to the movement, forcing members to decide for or against the provision of papal intervention in the order.

After 1274, the ‘spirituals’ would be identified as Franciscans who sought to preserve the original intentions of Francis:

The commands and words of the saint himself, therefore, make it clear that he received the Rule and the Testament by revelation from Christ, and that the correct, true, pure, faithful, and spiritual understanding and observance of the Rule is the literal observance.¹⁰³ (Angelo Clareno)

The spirituals were interested in preserving the “historical” Francis through the writings of ‘those who were with him.’ The “historical” Francis would be the image of Francis expressed through the writings of Thomas of Celano, *The Assisi Compilation*, and Brother Leo.¹⁰⁴ The most important characteristic of those dedicated to this “historical” Francis would be this adherence to the writings of the saint, from which the spirituals saw the order deviating.¹⁰⁵ Burr suggests that Ubertino da Casale disagreed with Bonaventure’s

¹⁰² Ibid., 44

¹⁰³ Angelo Clareno, from *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, “The First Tribulations or Persecution of the Order of Blessed Francis,” 420

¹⁰⁴ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 19-20: “The spirituals hoped that recourse to the person of Francis described in the writings of those ‘who were with him’ would resolve many of the conflicts that increasingly divided the Order, especially those about poverty.” (*usus pauper*)

¹⁰⁵ In the 1260’s there is evidence that the Franciscans were involved with the politics of Florence and the divided factions between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. (see Burr, 8) However, this area requires more research, but so far there is no obvious connection to the spirituals and political parties in Florence in the 1280’s which would have impacted Dante and his relationship with the spirituals.

writings because, as he saw it, “the *Legenda major*, suppressed certain elements of tradition in order to conceal recent decay in the order.”¹⁰⁶

a. Thomas of Celano

The writings of Thomas of Celano, as mentioned in the previous chapter, differed strikingly from the writings of Bonaventure. Although writing at papal request, Thomas of Celano was the first to record a history of the saint whom he had known personally. To the spirituals who strongly believed in the preservation of documents relating to Francis, long before Bonaventure’s generalate, Thomas’s writings of Francis were held in particular esteem. Thomas was also a strong supporter of St. Clare, and he had written a life of St. Clare of Assisi. His last days were spent as spiritual director at the convent of the Clarisses in Tagliacozzo where he died sometime between 1260 and 1270.

The Clarisses were followers of St. Clare and had grown in popularity with the Franciscan movement. Francis and Clare had most likely first known one another in Assisi, where she became one of his first followers. Little is known about the actual preaching practice of Clare,¹⁰⁷ but we do know that Francis

¹⁰⁶ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 34. Burr is synthesizing Ubertino’s argument found in *Arbor Vitae*.

¹⁰⁷ We know that Francis protected her from her family when she decided to enter the order of Francis, and we know that he brought her to the Portiuncula, where she established the Poor Clares. This was a branch of the Franciscans but for women. See Joan Mueller, *Clare’s Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources*, (N.Y: The Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure University, 2001); “Introduction,” 9-10: “Having been caught in the currents of noble politicking and intrigue, Agnes knew the emptiness of the propertied life, and desired to embrace with all her heart a Rule that would soundly preserve Francis and Clare’s ideal of living without property. Both she and Clare received their wish when Innocent IV approved Clare’s Rule on August 9th, 1253, just two days before Clare’s death. Clare’s Rule, the first ever to be approved that was written by a woman, solved for a time ecclesiastical interference concerning the practice of poverty that both Clare and Agnes had promised to follow.”

considered her an important figure within the order and so did many of the brothers, including Thomas of Celano. However, when the order became officially recognized by the papacy under Innocent III (1216), Clare's freedoms were greatly limited. She still observed the Rule of Francis, particularly in regards to poverty, but her integral role within the order became less important and virtually blotted from memory; and eventually with the ministry of Bonaventure she had become little more than a footnote to the early origins of the Franciscan order.

Because the spirituals sought to preserve the original intentions of Francis, some scholars hold that these included the involvement of women mystics among the brethren.¹⁰⁸ So, the spirituals high esteem for Thomas of Celano may have as much to do with his involvement and love of the Clarisses as it does with his first life of Francis.

b. *The Assisi Compilation* and *The Legend of the Three Companions*

The Assisi Compilation was commissioned in 1244-1260 by Crescentius of Iesi, minister general of the Franciscan order (1244-1247), along with *The Legend of the Three Companions*.¹⁰⁹ The genesis and evolution of this text is complicated. However, it is necessary when examining the spirituals to include this work, particularly when suggesting a connection between Dante and the

¹⁰⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 48 and Appendix 317-346

¹⁰⁹ *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Legend of The Three Companions (1241-1247)", 61-110

spirituals.¹¹⁰ The growing tensions in the order over the observance of Francis's true wishes led Crescentius to seek out testimony from the brothers who had known Francis. Because the brothers who had known Francis were getting older and beginning to pass away, Crescentius sought to preserve their writings and knowledge of the saint before they were all gone. The work is comprised mainly from the testimonies of brother Rufino, Angelo and Leo,¹¹¹ those who were with him (Francis). After its completion the spirituals regarded *The Assisi Compilation* as the true representation and testimony of the saint and his life. They held this work as the authentic statement of Francis's wishes of and would base most of their arguments on its materials.

c. Brother Leo

Brother Leo became the person whom the spirituals relied on most for substantiating their view of Francis. Leo was one of the first followers of Francis, and quickly became one of the saint's most beloved comparisons. Although he was one of three of the contributors to *The Assisi Compilation* and *The Legend of the Three Companions*, his writings became the most important to the spirituals.¹¹² Burr suggests that further research be done to explain Leo's predominance over the other two brothers. But the consensus is that Leo had been particularly strict in his adherence to Francis's Rule. A document known as the

¹¹⁰ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Introduction" to "The Assisi Compilation (1244-1260)" 116

¹¹¹ Ibid., 114: In 1970 Rosalind Brooke identified these three men as those implied in the line: 'we who were with him.'

¹¹² Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 18-19. Burr is unclear as to why this is.

*Scripta Leonis*¹¹³ circulated and was eventually attributed to Leo.¹¹⁴ Other documents which were thought to be written by Brother Leo and stored in Santa Chiara at Assisi had gone missing, or so Ubertino had heard. These too were eagerly sought for because of their relevance in reconstructing the portrait and mind of Francis. Ubertino mentions these lost writings in *Arbor Vitae* in 1305, and in 1311: and he re-discovered them and viewed them as the source of his own writings on Francis and the progress of the Franciscan order.

Brother Leo was also a follower of Clare and remained with her until her death in 1253. As with Thomas of Celano, Leo's attachment to Clare also may have contributed to the spirituals' love for Brother Leo.¹¹⁵ Joan Mueller's work¹¹⁶ on the life of Clare sheds further light on the situation of Leo and the spirituals. Mueller's work on the letters of Clare claims they strongly respect Clare's wishes to preserve the discipline of her order in keeping with Francis's direction. Brother Leo's connection to Clare then lends a further insight into the spirituals' agenda. Because Leo and Clare were connected spiritually, Leo becomes a key link in the chain connecting the spirituals to Francis and to Clare.

After 1274, the meaning of the spirituals became more precise. The definition of the spirituals would come chiefly from the writings and arguments of three Franciscan men: Petrus Iohannes Olivi, Ubertino da Casale, and Angelo Clareno. The three would become the new fathers, spokesman, and defenders of

¹¹³ Ibid., 19, This is Brook's "abridged form, [of] the title"; it is in reference to the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18-19. Rosalind Brook suggests that the *Scripta Leonis* fits the Greccio letter, which she also relates to Leo.

¹¹⁵ This may answer the question, why Leo?

the spirituals movement; and they each may have crossed the path of Dante Alighieri and been known to him.

ii. The Three Great Spirituals: The Fathers of the Movement

a. Petrus Iohannes Olivi (1248-1298)¹¹⁷

Petrus Iohannes Olivi was born in 1258 at Sérignan, near Béziers, in today's southern France. He attended the University of Paris and became a renowned Franciscan theologian. Olivi entered the order in 1259 or 1260, when he was twelve years old, and by the mid-1270s he was a lecturer in Paris. His thoughts on Franciscan theology were controversial from the beginning. Angelo of Clareno states that some of his writings on the Virgin Mary were burned for their potential threat to orthodoxy. Early on Olivi began to hold a deep respect for the prophecies of Brother Leo, and from 1279 to 1283 he became embroiled in a controversy over his views on the Franciscan vow of poverty (*usus pauper*). In 1283 he was censured. However, in 1287 Olivi was sent to lecture at Santa Croce in Florence, where he would meet another leader of the spirituals, Ubertino da Casale (1259-1329). In 1289, Olivi was reassigned from Santa Croce to Montpellier, in southern France.

¹¹⁶ See Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes: Texts and Sources*

¹¹⁷ Olivi's primary works used by the spirituals: *Lectura* (the date of the work is uncertain); and his *Commentary on the Book of Revelations* [*Lectura super Apocalypsum*], composed in 1296/97, it is in this work where Olivi accepts Joachim di Fiore's structure of the seven ages. Olivi sees that he was living in the sixth period. He sees himself as living at the transition of the fifth age to the sixth age. See David Burr, "Mendicant Readings of the Apocalypse," *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 89-102

In 1295, within the first months of his papacy, Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) removed Raymond Geoffroi as minister general of Franciscan order, and replaced him with John of Murrovalle, one of the members of the committee who had censured Olivi in 1283. Olivi saw that the order was going in the wrong direction and he began his commentaries on the Apocalypse. His theological arguments would become the basis of the spirituals' tenets long after Olivi's death in 1283. The complexity of his argument surrounding the role of Franciscan poverty and his understanding of the role of the historical Francis articulated for the spirituals a coherent vision of their purpose, and his writings and his principles on Francis's Rule constituted the theoretical basis of the spirituals movement. Although he was less critical of the papacy than Ubertino and Angelo, Olivi's beliefs were the most universally agreed upon within the spirituals movement. He, more than any other, had given the fullest definition to the meaning of the spirituals.

b. Angelo of Clareno (1255?-1337)

If Olivi is the major theologian of the spirituals movement, it is from Angelo of Clareno that much of the spirituals' history comes to light. Angelo is also the first member of the three great spirituals to partake in action contrary to the collective views of the general order. Born around 1255 at Fossombrone in the Marche of Ancona, Angelo entered the order in 1270. In 1274, he was among the

three spirituals arrested for opposition to the papacy in the Marche of Ancona.¹¹⁸ His “life sentence,” most likely began in 1278, was cut short with the intercession of Raymond Geoffroi, the new minister general of the order in 1290. Geoffroi was not a member of the spirituals, but did not agree with their persecution. In 1295, he was dismissed by Pope Boniface VIII as minister general. Geoffroi’s view over the years would eventually become Olivian, and he would defend the spirituals in 1309. In 1312, however, Geoffroi suddenly died, and soon after his death two, perhaps three, more spirituals died, leading Angelo of Clareno to believe they had been poisoned, a common charge for this period.¹¹⁹ There is, of course, no evidence for this. But Clareno would take up that charge. As one of the most prominent spirituals, he argued at subsequent trials of the spirituals and constantly appealed on their behalf. Clareno later took up residence with Cardinal Giacomo Colonna until the Cardinal’s death in 1318. Much of the spirituals history is based on the writings of Clareno. In 1323, he published *The History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of the Minors*, a document which traces the history of the spirituals. Although Dante would not have known this work, from it we can gauge the attitude of the spirituals in the later years of Dante’s life, while he was finishing the *Commedia*. Angelo of Clareno died in 1337.

¹¹⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 253-254 and footnote *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, “Introduction” to “The Book of Chronicles or of the Tribulations of the Order of Lesser Ones (Prologue and the First Tribulation) By Angelo Clareno”, 375-376

¹¹⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 113

c. Ubertino da Casale (1259-1329)

Ubertino da Casale was the most vociferous of the three spirituals and became their spokesman in the beginning of the 14th century. He was born in 1259 in Casale, a small village near Vercelli, Italy.¹²⁰ He entered the order when he was fourteen and spent several years seeking to live as a good Franciscan, most of the time probably in Genoa. He then studied at the University of Paris for nine years.¹²¹ In 1287, Ubertino lectured at Santa Croce in Florence, along with Olivi. There they debated the issues of the Franciscan vow of poverty (*usus pauper*) and the observance of the Franciscan Rule. During this period the spirituals movement became clearly defined and these three major leaders emerged as the spirituals' spokesman. Although they did not all hold the same view, they all agreed on the importance of preserving the documents of the early brothers and living out the intentions of the founder. However, Ubertino, unlike Olivi, was ardently opposed to the provision allowing papal intervention to settle disputes within the order.

Ubertino was also the most closely associated with the female contemplatives. He was however often lax in the practice of his principles, whereas Olivi practiced scrupulously much of what he preached. One of Olivi's main problems with the general order had been the lax practice of the Rule of Francis; he believed his brothers should all practice a daily routine of what the Rule laid out. Ubertino also preached this, but did not practice this. This may have

¹²⁰ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 46 and *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "Introduction" to "The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus", 141

¹²¹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 46: It is unclear as to when he studied in Paris, but probably between 1274-1283 or 1289-1298; many questions surround these dates.

been one of Dante's reasons why Ubertino is mentioned in the *Paradiso* as diverting from the path.¹²²

Ubertino's famous publication, *Arbor Vitae crucifixae Jesu Christi* [Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus], was most likely published in 1305 and may have inspired segments of Dante's writing; and Dante in turn may even have inspired Ubertino. Ubertino is the spiritual most likely to have had a relationship with Dante. After Dante's exile, both traveled throughout Italy and may have come into contact with one another. They were both around the same age and both increasingly hostile toward the papacy and John XXII in particular. Ubertino, however, in his later years became increasingly fervent; and as he defended Olivi's principles, he also continued to advance them.

iii. 1274: Dante and the Spirituals

In 1274, when the revolt of the spirituals occurred in the Marche of Ancona, Dante was nine years old and living in Florence. It was around this time, after the death of his mother Bella, that he notes in *Vita Nuova* he first met Beatrice. The time at which the "spirituals" movement was born occurred at the moment Dante's greatest experience of love took place, just after he became motherless. The news of the Anconan upheaval would have likely had a sizeable impact on the citizens of Florence, and on Dante's family in particular. Geographically the Marche of Ancona is not too far from Florence. And because of its later involvement as center of the spirituals in the 1280s and 1290s it is

¹²² Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XII, 129-139

plausible that some of the restive spirituals would have been in Florence at the time, or later relocated there.

The controversy within the order leading up to the 1274 reaction and imprisonment of three spiritual Franciscans was never categorized specifically as one inspired by the spirituals. Many Franciscans up to this time disagreed with the direction of the order, but none had been as severely punished as those in 1274. John of Parma, considerably one of the most notable Franciscans, had been either dismissed or forced to step down amid the controversy and a subsequent trial was held. However, he was not distinctly classified as a spiritual and his sentence was not nearly as strict as in 1274, due to the esteem he had with the pope and within the order. But Angelo of Clareno, Petrus Iohannes Olivi, and Ubertino da Casale had openly separated themselves from the general direction of the order, had now begun a potentially dangerous movement.¹²³

iv. Post-1300: The Spirituals History in the 14th Century

a. The Writings of Brother Leo and the Lost Scrolls

Brother Leo was of primary importance to the spirituals because of his close relationship with Francis. The following passage is from a letter of Francis to Brother Leo and reflects the tenor of their relationship:

I am speaking, my son, in this way — as a mother would — because I am putting everything we said on the road in this brief message and advice. In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do it

¹²³ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 45: Burr mentions many references to pre-1274 Franciscan history as potentially related to “spirituals” and possible movements against the official practices of the order; however, he classifies Clareno, Olivi, and Ubertino as: “the three great spirituals.”

with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience. And if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come.¹²⁴

Although this letter was not fully authenticated until the 15th century,¹²⁵ it was very important for the support of the spirituals' position. This letter was written personally by Francis to Brother Leo, and it appears that Leo carried it everywhere he went throughout his life. The language recalls that of Dante as it echoes the wishes of the spirituals in their commitment to adhere to the strict life of poverty Francis prescribed. Although the general order of the Franciscans did not know of its existence, the spirituals may have, since the letter was in the possession of the Poor Clares.

Both Ubertino and Angelo believed that the writings of Brother Leo were the authentic source of the historical teachings and life of St. Francis. In 1305, Ubertino heard that the writings of Leo were missing from the church of Santa Chiara of Assisi, and it prompted him to search for these writings in order to “re-establish a conversation” with the original Franciscans. The spirituals saw Leo as the link to the original followers of Francis. In 1311, Ubertino claims to have rediscovered these writings again. Dante also may have been interested in the history Brother Leo presented, since Leo had had the strongest relationship with St. Clare and remained with her until her death in 1253.

¹²⁴ Francis of Assisi, *The Early Documents: The Saint*, “A Letter to Brother Leo,” 122.

b. 1312: *Exivi de paradiso*

In 1312, Pope Clement V (1305-1314) issued a papal bull, *Exivi de paradiso*, in an attempt to end the controversies within the Franciscan order. The principle points of *Exivi de paradiso* address the Franciscan vow of poverty, corporate ownership of property, and especially matters regarding food, clothing, and shelter. Although the spirituals, specifically Ubertino, agreed with certain aspects of the bull, they were ultimately dissatisfied since they did not believe in the right of the pope to intervene in the affairs of the Franciscan order.¹²⁶

c. 1318: Pope John XXII

With the death of Clement V, John XXII (papacy 1316-1334) came into power as pope, and his papacy would bring about the execution of the principal spirituals and the dissolution of their movement. The controversies over *usus pauper* and Franciscan obedience to the pope became one the spirituals could no longer overcome. John XXII and the Avignon papacy would no longer tolerate dissention and disobedience. John offered the spirituals an ultimatum: submit to the papacy and practice the vow of poverty according to the directions laid down by the papacy or face the consequences. Most spirituals complied, but four did not: Jean Barrau, Deodat Michel, Pons Rocha, and Guillem Sancton.¹²⁷ These

¹²⁵ See Ibid., 122, footnote (a)

¹²⁶ See *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, “Constitution *Exivi de Paradiso* of Pope Clement V (1312),” 767-783; The bull which consists of 20 articles, was a result of the 1311 Council of Vienne and was meant as a compromise between the spirituals and the order. There were restrictions placed on the spirituals and their use of *usus pauper*, but the bull also recognized that the brothers were bound to Francis’s rule of poverty.

¹²⁷ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 206: “We know little else about them.”

four were burned at the stake in Avignon in 1318. By the end of the 14th century the spirituals movement had been eradicated.

V.
DANTE: 1265-1301
 The Formative Years

“Incipit vita nova.”¹²⁸

I. DANTE: 1265-1290

Since to dwell too long on the passions and actions of my early years may appear frivolous, I shall leave them, and omitting many things which could be copied from my book of memory whence these derived, I turn to those words which are written in my mind under more important headings.¹²⁹

The details of Dante’s early life from his birth until his publication of the *Vita Nuova* are sketchy. Most historical analysis of Dante’s life and works begins with his publication of the *Vita Nuova* in 1293 and, more recently, with his thirty month stay at Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, where he studied under the tutelage of the Franciscans and Dominicans between 1291 and 1294. The twenty six years of his life prior is also relevant. There are some known facts, although the dates and figures are debatable. However, it is from his own writing that we learn the most about Dante, and later from his political office. There are few details of his life that have not been combed through, however, due to the limited knowledge of and resources for the period from 1265 to 1291; much less has been written on this period of his life. It is important to note these years in Dante’s life and associate them with the political landscape of Tuscany.

¹²⁸ Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, translator Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3. Appears in the text in Latin. [Here begins a new life]

¹²⁹ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 5

The mid to late 13th century was a time of intense political change and controversy in Italy. And even though Dante was young, it is undeniable that Dante was affected by it.

Dante, the eldest of three siblings, was born in 1265 in Florence, either in May or June. He was baptized in 1266 in the church of San Giovanni. The noble Alighieri family sided with the Guelphs in the warring factions of Florence. The Guelphs were both supported by and were supporters of the papacy, and the Ghibellines were supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor. His father, Alighiero de Bellincion sided with the White Guelph faction.

Some time between 1270 and 1275 Dante's mother, Bella (Donna Gabriella degli Abati), died. Not much is known of her death, but we might assume that the loss of his mother would have had a deep impact on the young Dante. The loss of his mother would find him seeking the love of a woman and seeking comfort. Had the spirituals been preaching during this time, their liturgies, hymns, and spiritual conversations would have appealed to him. They were also supportive of woman contemplatives whom Dante may also have met and been inspired by. Between 1281 and 1283 his father died, leaving Dante the head of his family. This, we might suppose, further contributed to his awareness of politics early in life, since he was the head of the family at a young age.

In 1285, Dante was married to Gemma Donati, to whom he had been betrothed since 1277. She was the daughter of a Ghibelline family, the opposing faction. Together they had three or four children, beginning in 1287 with Pietro,

then Jacopo, and Antonia. He is believed by some scholars to have had a third son, Giovanni, but this is disputed. Although Dante married Gemma Donati before Beatrice's death, his love for Beatrice continued. He never wrote of his marriage to Gemma or of their children.

II. DANTE: 1291-1300

“...this vernacular of which I speak is both sublime in learning and power, and capable of exalting those who use it in honor and glory.”¹³⁰

“Three mountains separated by two valleys will strike a man who sees them from a great distance as a single mountain...”¹³¹

The nine year period from 1291 to 1300 found Dante very active. He published his first works, gained an education and a reputation, held public office, and was subsequently exiled from his home city of Florence. This period established Dante as one of the most influential writers of his age. Politically his importance in and around Florence also grew until, as one of the representatives of the White Guelph faction, he was exiled.

The early part of the 1290s saw the publication of his *Vita Nuova*, his first influential text. The early years were also important for his academic life. For thirty months he trained with the Franciscans and Dominicans in Florence. This education introduced him to a world of academia which would influence his later works, most dominantly the *Commedia*. His education and the *Vita Nuova* may also provide some clues for understanding his relationship to the spiritual Franciscans. It was in this period when the spirituals dominated Florence and the

¹³⁰ Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia* (I, xvii, 1-7)

top members of the movement held lectures and debated, possibly, in Dante's presence.

i. Publication of the *Vita Nuova*

The *Vita Nuova*, a collection of thirty one poems, was written over the course of several years, probably between 1292 and 1294.¹³² The *Vita Nuova*, relates the impact of the entrance of Beatrice in Dante's life. In 1274, Dante met Beatrice, the woman who would inspire his writing and encapsulate the spirit of love. Beatrice was most likely Bice di Folco Portinari (1266-1290.)¹³³ Dante refers to her throughout the work as a symbol of divine love: "She did not seem to be the daughter of any ordinary man, but rather of a god."¹³⁴ Dante presents her in a bold and fresh way. His use of the number three and triads predominates: he saw Beatrice three times; he divides his book into three "movements" which follow the journey of the poet's love;¹³⁵ and the number nine (three multiplied by three) becomes the crucial symbol of perfection and the connection between the spiritual and the earthly.

Dante tells the story of his love through poems and recollections. He recounts the three moments when he saw Beatrice and also the moments when he had visions of her. Before her death he had a vision of her death, which he writes

¹³¹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 79: Burr is quoting from Olivi, *Lectura*, 101-102

¹³² Musa, "Introduction," to *Vita Nuova*, vii

¹³³ Pertile, "Dante," *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand et al. (Cambridge and N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 41: "If she actually existed, she is likely to have been Bice, the daughter of Folco Portinari, who was born in 1266, married Simone de' Bardi in 1287, and died in 1290." This reference first appears in Boccaccio's life of Dante.

¹³⁴ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 4-5

of in the poem.¹³⁶ However, one of the most powerful moments in the poem is his address of her death, when he lists three reasons why he will not explain her death fully and why the number three was so important to her life and her death and afterwards. He writes of her as if she were a saint, declaring that his language is wholly insufficient to describe her wonder. The number nine is “synonymous with Beatrice,” for she is a miracle rooted in the Holy Trinity.¹³⁷

ii. Education

As part of the upper nobility of Florence, Dante would probably have begun his education as a child. It is difficult to ascertain the specifics of a child’s education in Florence in the 13th century. However, there are extensive notary records that provide information about the practices of Florentine primary education. The records of 1275 speak of Latin taught to children by *doctores*

¹³⁵ Musa, “Introduction” to the *Vita Nuova*, viii: ‘*First Movement I-XVI; Second Movement XVII-XXXI; Third Movement XXXII-XLII.*’ viii

¹³⁶ Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 46-47: “Then sighing loudly, I said to myself: ‘Some day the most gracious Beatrice will surely have to die.’ I went so out of my head that I closed my eyes and became convulsed as one in a delirium and began to have these imaginings: how the out of my head that I closed my eyes and became convulsed as one in a delirium and began to have these imaginings.” – “As my imagination wandered in this fashion, I came to such a point that I no longer knew where I was. I seemed to see ladies amazingly sad, weeping as they made their way down a street, their hair disheveled; I seem to see the sun darken in a way that gave the stars a color that would have made me swear that they were weeping; it seemed to me that the birds flying through the air fell to earth dead, and that there were great earthquakes.” – “You do not know then that your miraculous lady has departed from this life?” At that I began to sob most piteously, not only in my dream, but with my eyes that were wet with real tears.”– “Then it seemed to me that my heart, in which so much love had dwelt, said to me: ‘True it is that our lady lies dead.’ And so it seemed to me that I went to see the body in which that most worthy and blessed soul had dwelt, and so strong was the hallucination that it actually showed me this lady dead. And it seemed that ladies were covering her head with a white veil, and it seemed that her face was so filled with joyous acceptance that it said to me: ‘I am contemplating the fountainhead of peace.’”

¹³⁷ Ibid., “Introduction,” xiv

puerorum (teachers of boys).¹³⁸ A notary record from 1277 lists Romanus, a Latin master, who taught children in Dante's neighborhood.¹³⁹ Although this is not conclusive evidence, such records provide examples of the early education Dante may have been exposed to. As a child Dante would have been in tutorials sometime in the 1270s. The "grammar" school he would have attended would probably have been small, with one professor and one assistant. Larger schools were yet to develop.¹⁴⁰

Dante writes in the *Vita Nuova* of his second meeting of Beatrice in 1283. Two years later, in 1285, he marries Gemma Donati, and four years later had a child. In 1289, Dante was present at the battle of Campaldino and the siege of Caprona. Beatrice died in 1290, and within the year Dante began his attendance of the Franciscan and Dominican schools in Florence.

a. Studium Generale

I began to go where she [Lady Philosophy] was truly revealed, namely to the schools of the religious orders and to the disputations held by the philosophers, so that in a short period of time, perhaps some thirty months, I began to feel her sweetness so much that the love of her dispelled and destroyed every other thought.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," 417

¹³⁹ Ibid., 417: Davis also suggests that women taught grammar: "In 1304 a *doctrrix puerorum* named Clementia was teaching a pupil to read Donatus, the Psalter, and notarial instruments, and also to write."

¹⁴⁰ Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

¹⁴¹ Alighieri, *Convivio* II, xii, 7: *E da questo imaginare cominciai ad andare là dov'ella si dimostrava veracemente, cioè nelle scuole delli religiosi e alle disputazioni delli filosofanti; sì che in picciolo tempo, forse di trenta mesi, cominciai tanto a sentire della sua dolcezza, che lo suo amore cacciava e distruggeva ogni altro pensiero.*

Dante writes in the *Convivio* that he began to study at the “*scuole delli religiosi*.” The two primary educational religious institutions in Florence in the late 13th century were Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce. Although, the churches and cathedrals did not provide the same extensive education as universities, such as the University of Paris, they offered many of the courses found in the new universities of Europe.

The foundation of schools of learning at places such as Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce was the monastery tradition of the *scuola*. There is a relationship “between the friars’ *studia generalia* and the secular *studia generalia*,” which is difficult to determine. The term “*studia generalia*” is as much a legal term as it is a descriptive term. Malchahey states that: “a ‘general’ *studium* implied a school which was able to attract students from afar through its reputation.”¹⁴² The first appearance of the term is in 1237 in reference to the center of studies at Vercelli. The first papal usage of the term was in 1244/45 by Pope Innocent IV when he spoke of founding a school at the Roman curia.¹⁴³ There are two principle privileges associated with the term: first, “the right of beneficed clergy to be dispensed from residence for purposes of study in a *studium generale* while continuing to receive the revenues from their benefices for their support”; second, the term *ius ubique docendi* (the right to teach anywhere), a legal term, which implied the quality of the product of education.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² M. Michele Malchahey. “*First the Bow is Bent in Study...*” *Dominican Education before 1350*. (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998.), 354

¹⁴³ Ibid., 353-355: Malchahey offers a longer discussion of the term and usage.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 357-359

There were three ranks of *studium*: the *studia principalia*, where the top schools in theology were Oxford, Cambridge and Paris; the second rank was the *studia generalia*, such as the convents of Toulouse, Cologne, Bologna, and Florence; the third rank was of convents, including, those at Asti, Pisa, Rimini, and Todi; and then there the *studia grammaticalia, logicalia et philosophica*,¹⁴⁵ which were for the specialized subjects, grammar, logic, and philosophy respectively.

b. Santa Croce

At the church of Santa Croce, in Florence, was “an important school in its Order’s educational hierarchy.”¹⁴⁶ The church was first occupied by the Franciscans in 1228, two years after the saint’s death. In 1258, the Franciscans began a new educational program in the church. Sometime prior to 1287, Santa Croce was made a *studium generale*.

Santa Croce was not only an important educational institution but an equally important center of popular devotion.¹⁴⁷ In 1254, Santa Croce was also made home to the tribunal, an office of the Tuscan Inquisition, which oversaw the dioceses of Florence, Fiesole, Pistoia, Pisa, Lucca, Arezzo, Siena, Volterra, Chiusi, Grosseto, Massa, and Luni.¹⁴⁸ And, by the end of the 13th century, with the tensions between the spirituals and the general Franciscans order growing, Santa Croce became the center of the spirituals movement.

¹⁴⁵ Davis, “Education in Dante’s Florence,” 425

¹⁴⁶ Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans*, 32

¹⁴⁷ Davis, “Education in Dante’s Florence,” 422

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 422

The *scuola* at Santa Croce was furnished with the basic texts of theology and philosophy; it held approximately forty-five major manuscripts;¹⁴⁹ and the intellectual direction of the school was most likely neo-Platonist and Bonaventurian.

Two of the most influential members of the spirituals movement were also lecturers at Santa Croce. In 1287, Petrus Iohannes Olivi and Ubertino da Casale both lectured there. Olivi left shortly after, in 1289, but it is thought that Ubertino stayed on for another ten years.¹⁵⁰ Dante did not enter the school until 1291, as he states in the *Convivio*. This places him there two years after Olivi's departure, but during the years of Ubertino's activity.

Along with Angelo Clareno, Olivi and Ubertino were the most powerful voices of the spirituals, and from their words came the articulation and inspiration of the movement. Olivi and Ubertino's tenure at Santa Croce demonstrates that

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 423-424: Books listed in Santa Croce:

Gratian's Decretum, Huguccios's Commentary, Gregory IX's Decretales, Bernard of Parma's Casus super Decretalibus. Such texts were studied along with the Bible and commentaries by Basil, Ambrose, Gregory I, Peter Lombard, Peter Tarantasiu, William of Mara, Hugh of St Clare, William of Melton, and Walther of Chateau-Thierry. Early theological study included the texts of Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory I, Didymus of Alexandria, Quodvultdeus, John of Damascus, and Paul the Deacon; later theology, Anselm, Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, Hugh Etherianus, William of Auxerre, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas. Philosophy was studied through the texts of: Aristotle and Aquinas' commentaries, the *De Causis*, and the *De Anima*. Grammatical texts included: John Aegidius, William of Mara, John of Garland, Alexander of Villedieu, Huguccio and Gilber of Tournai's educational theory. The Biblioteca Laurenziana and the Biblioteca Nazionale presently hold part of Santa Croce's former collection, treatises which also held by Aristotle, Porphyry, and Boethius. A selection of dictionaries and grammatical texts included Priscian, Isidore, Papias, and Eberhard. Virgil's Aeneid and other "classical auctores" were also in the library of Santa Croce.

¹⁵⁰ Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," Davis references Barbi's conclusion that Ubertino left in 1289 when Olivi did. However, in *Francis of Assisi: The Prophet*, "Introduction" to "The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus," 141, the editor has stated that Ubertino was at Santa Croce for a decade.

Santa Croce and Florence were places friendly to spirituals, the radical Franciscans, and it suggests that Dante's dealings with the Franciscans there brought him, to some degree, under the influence of the spirituals' teachings.

Some scholars propose that prior to his entrance into the schools Dante may have contemplated joining the Franciscan order. Davis suggests that Dante, in his youth, intended to join the order, "but left before taking his vows."¹⁵¹ If he were so attached to the Franciscans, it might imply that even prior to his known entrance into the religious *scuole*, Dante might have already known of and heard Olivi and Ubertino's lectures, whether as an interested layman or as a potential entrant into the order. Regardless of Dante's precise relationship with Olivi and Ubertino, we might safely conjecture that at Santa Croce he would have been exposed to the radical ideas of these spiritual Franciscans, whether directly through lectures or indirectly through their disciples or their writings.

In 1295, Olivi was put on trial in Paris for his controversial ideas on the *usus pauper*. The subsequent proceedings and Olivi's defense marked the first significant articulation of the spirituals' position. After his death in 1298, Olivi and his writings would become a predominant force in the spirituals movement, but in 1299 Olivi's writings would be condemned by the general chapter of the Franciscan order and the minister general would order his writings burned.¹⁵² However, it wasn't until 1318 that decisive action was taken against the deceased Olivi and the spirituals with respect to their persons.

¹⁵¹ Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," 425

Although it is difficult to draw a direct chronological and geographical connection between Dante and Olivi at Santa Croce, it is highly plausible that Olivi had an influence on Dante, based on Dante's later reflections. Olivi had focused chiefly on the *usus pauper* and the apocalyptic prophecies of Joachim di Fiore, the controversial prophet of the 12th century.¹⁵³ Olivi followed Joachim's division of the world's history into three ages. He further followed Joachim's division of history into seven parallel ages between the Old and the New Testaments, and he references Joachim's prediction of the coming of the *virī spirituales*. David Burr notes,¹⁵⁴ however, that Olivi avoids relating the Franciscans specifically to these *virī spirituales* of Joachim, since he was not interested in portraying the *spirituales* as surpassing the power of the church and also because Olivi had much in common with Bonaventure. Bonaventure had also made use of these differences in the divisions of history. However, there were some distinctions. Ratzinger notes¹⁵⁵ that Bonaventure incorporated the three primary divisions of history into his overall thesis: 1) the three ages; 2) five ages; 3) seven ages.¹⁵⁶ These divisions became a particularly powerful theological format, particularly in helping to grasp the eschatological expectations of the 13th century.¹⁵⁷ Olivi, like Bonaventure, was drawing from a well charted field of theological study, and he was also structuring his argument on the *usus pauper*

¹⁵² Peter Olivi, from *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "Lectura," 813

¹⁵³ Refer to Chapter I

¹⁵⁴ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 80

¹⁵⁵ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in Bonaventure*, 11

¹⁵⁶ Refer to Chapter II

within the language of eschatology that was popular in the 13th century. However, Olivi goes further than Bonaventure. Burr sees an interesting new argument particularly in Olivi's commentary on the Apocalypse, suggesting that what Olivi has done, so elegantly, has been to stand back at the "mountain" of world history and address how we see further than we had ever seen before:

Olivi is more able than Augustine to see the pattern of history because he has more history to work with, and the development he sees there enables him to read the prophets with new understanding.¹⁵⁸ (Burr)

Burr refers here to Olivi's commentary on the Apocalypse where he speaks of the knowledge available to the prophets of the Old and New Testaments. Olivi writes that the "first five periods of the church" were not available to the saints, but were clearly visible in the sixth and seventh ages. The prophets of the Old Testament were limited, and were only able to see the first five periods of history.¹⁵⁹ This is further elucidated in Olivi's description of "progressive revelation":

Three mountains separated by two valleys will strike a man who sees them from a great distance as a single mountain. Those, however, who shall be placed in the sixth period or who see it in the spirit distinguish it from the first and the last. Then they see this distinction in the prophetic books, and also in those things said by Christ and the apostles about Christ's final advent and the final age of the world. Then they also see the concordance of various

¹⁵⁷ See Bernard McGinn "The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore." *Church History*, 40, no.1 (1971)

¹⁵⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 79

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 79, from Olivi, *Lectura*, 564 : "In the first five periods of the church it was not conceded to the saints, however illuminated they might be, to open the secrets of this book, which were to be opened more fully only in the sixth and seventh periods, just as in the first five periods of the Old Testament the prophets were not given the ability to open clearly those secrets of Christ and of the New Testament which were to be opened and actually were opened in the sixth age of the world."

events in the first five ages of the world with those in the first five periods of the church, as well as the concordance of the seven periods under the law with the seven periods of church history.¹⁶⁰

Olivi's pattern of the church's progression and "progressive revelation" is further identified as corresponding to "various grades of purgation, perfection, or contemplation."¹⁶¹ The *virī spirituales* of the third age would be the contemplatives who act as guides for mankind in the final age on how to achieve spiritual closeness with God.

This argument of Olivi's suggests a model for Dante's *Commedia* who would himself emerge from his own troubled life as a kind of *vir spiritualis*, a contemplative who could guide others through the perilous ascent in the next world awaiting our death. The work, divided into three books, *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, *Paradise*, marks the beginning of a progressive movement for the wayfarer Dante who begins: "midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost."¹⁶² He continues:

I cannot rightly say how I entered it, I was so full of sleep at the moment I left the true way; but when I had reached the foot of a hill, there at the end of the valley that had pierced my heart with fear, I looked up and saw its shoulders already clad in the rays of the planet that leads men aright by every path.¹⁶³

These opening lines recall Olivi's description of history as "three mountains" initially seen as "one." We later learn that the mountain Dante sees is the mountain of purgatory, and he cannot get to it by going through the wood; he

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 79: from Olivi, *Lectura*, 101-2

¹⁶¹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 80

¹⁶² Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, 3

¹⁶³ Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I, 3

must go through the Earth's center, through Hell, and climb back up to the mountain. With this Dante gives us a visual imaginary of Olivi's perspective on history: a progressive purgative journey leading to enlightenment and the reward of the blessed.

c. Santa Maria Novella

The Order of Preachers (Dominicans) provided a scholastic education to their followers as a means to promote an understanding of God's creation and intervention in history and thereby to further appreciate the love of God for humanity. The local Dominican convent was a place for education and a place for the common brothers (*fratres communes*). Through expanding their intellectual knowledge of the divine, the Dominicans envisioned the growth of their unity with one another and with God. Their church of Santa Maria Novella, founded in Florence in 1231, would draw upon the works of the leading light of the Dominican order, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who lectured in Paris and in Rome. Although Thomas's own lectures were lost, his curriculum was followed in Dominican schools around Europe and certainly in Florence. His *Summa Theologiae*, one of the basic texts read by the Dominicans, would hold a chief place at Florence, especially after 1262, when the Dominicans began to integrate more philosophical works into their system of education, especially Aristotle's *Ethics*. The library at Santa Maria Novella was similar in size to that of Santa Croce, and the school itself rivaled its Franciscan sister institution.

It was not until 1303 that the Roman Province chose Santa Maria Novella as a *studium generale*.¹⁶⁴ However, already in 1281 the school at Florence was included by the Roman chapter as a host for the theology program, making Santa Maria Novella one of the first priories to host a *studium particularis theologiae*. This program grew steadily and Santa Maria Novella became one of the prime locations for the study of theology. Santa Maria Novella has an interesting history, which provides insight into the breadth of the Dominicans' theological studies. One reason for its historical significance is that it was never associated with a secular university, although it did follow a curriculum similar to that of the University of Paris.

The exact curriculum of the Dominicans at Florence is not entirely certain. Mulchahey suggests that one influence was the education model of the University of Paris, since many of the Dominican lecturers had studied at the University of Paris, and the methods of the University of Paris became a model for educational institutions elsewhere. The Dominicans of Florence wanted to compete with the education at Paris and seemed to have modeled this system of study on that of Paris in hopes of attracting more students, especially more local students.¹⁶⁵ A regent master presided over the central lecture cycle and the ordinary lecture (*disputationes ordinariae*), which focused on the theological implications of Scripture. Debates were also part of the regular curriculum. Two bachelor

¹⁶⁴ Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study..." *Dominican Education before 1350*, 387; and Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," 421; Davis suggests that in 1288 Santa Maria Novella received the rank of *studia*.

¹⁶⁵ Mulchahey, "First the Bow is Bent in Study..." *Dominican Education before 1350*, 378

students would lead a second afternoon lecture on the master's teaching from the first lecture in the morning. There were two focuses for the lectures. The first was Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, the *cursor Sententiarum*. Over the course of two years, four were selected. The second focus was a selection from the Old and New Testaments, *cursor biblicus*. A student's education was further encouraged through exercises, such as repetitions (*repetitiones*) and mock disputations.

A striking difference between the two Florentine schools of theology is that the course of study at Santa Maria Novella required only one year, not two years, on the *Sentences*, as was the practice at Santa Croce.

A piece of evidence for the method and context of the Santa Maria Novella curriculum is the extensive records kept by Remigio de' Girolami, head of the Dominican school, over the course of his twenty-year tenure. Remigio kept a collection of his teaching records, which provides rare detailed information on the curriculum of a non-secular 13th century university. Remigio de' Girolami was considered the father of Santa Maria Novella. He frequently performed eulogies for the city's elite. He had been educated at Paris and was taught by Aquinas. From his writings we can piece together a course outline for the students of Santa Maria Novella.

From selected books of the Old and New Testament, the first four books of the *Sentences*, and sermons on "*super finitionem libri sententiarum*" and "*super scientiam in generali*," a Dominican *studium generale* emerged as a cycle of fundamental lectures (*principium*). Remigio highly regards the educational model

laid out by Thomas Aquinas, which suggests that much of Remigio's style derives from Aquinas's own methods of teaching.

Remigio was a lecturer, but was first a priest and a friar. His educational structure and techniques contributed to the theological reputation of Santa Maria Novella, and his vision of a university education at a religious school attracted many students. The Dominicans had taught the laity for decades, but Remigio made it a particular point to draw in students from the laity. Although the school specialized in theological studies for members of the Dominican order, at Santa Maria Novella there was also a school for the laity, which Dante would have attended. It is perhaps because Remigio was so encouraging of the laity that Dante would have chosen an education at Santa Maria Novella. Although Dante had spiritual connections with the church, friars, and spirituality of Santa Croce, the appeal of Remigio and the curriculum of Santa Maria Novella would likely have had a great appeal to him. Remigio may also have been one of the formative figures in Dante's life, particularly in generating his interest in the field of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy and theology, because in Dante's writing he presents arguments that are strikingly similar to those of Remigio.¹⁶⁶

v. Exile

In 1301, Dante was officially exiled from Florence since he was a member of the White Guelph faction, and was also held responsible for the exile and subsequent deaths of several members of the Ghibillines (including his friend

¹⁶⁶ Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," 433-435

Guido Calvalcanti.) Boniface VIII (1294-1303) removed members of the Florentine priory who did not support him. Dante was included in those exiled. He never returned to his city and to this day his body remains in Ravenna where he died. In his later writings, most notably the *Commedia*, Florence is an integral motif of his poetry and his exile a recurring theme in his writings.

VI.
DANTE: 1301-1323
 In Exile

“We should fear those things alone
 that have the power to harm.
 Nothing else is frightening.”¹⁶⁷

“...if a servant of God always strives to have and preserve joy
 internally and externally which proceeds from purity of heart, the
 devils can do him no harm.”¹⁶⁸

Dante, a prolific writer in the years following his exile, never again returned to Florence after 1300. There is great historical debate as to where Dante traveled during his exile. Most modern sources suppose he stayed in Italy. That he remained in Italy is of significance in pursuing the question of his relationship with the spiritual Franciscans.

By 1300, the spirituals were a distinct sub-group within the Franciscan order and were clearly separated. Following Olivi's death in 1298, his writings became a source of passionate debate and were closely embraced by the spirituals because Olivi's writings articulated the theology the spirituals followed as specifically different from the general Franciscan order.

The intertextuality between Dante's and the spirituals' writings is refined in this period and particularly borne out in the *Commedia*. As this essay argues, the earliest influence of the spirituals on Dante started in 1274 and their ideas became a progressive, lifelong interest for him. The year 1274 therefore marks a kind of watershed in Dante's writing: his works prior to the *Commedia* are

¹⁶⁷ Alighierei, *Inferno*, Canto II, 19

primarily philosophical; it is in the *Commedia*, which he begins writing between 1304-1308,¹⁶⁹ where Dante creates an imaginary world beyond earthly experience through which he takes the reader on a journey with him, and where we find the influence of the spirituals become more manifest. One can argue that the *Vita Nuova* was also an early piece of Dante's work influenced by the spirituals.¹⁷⁰ Although Dante's other works provide insight into his relationship with the spirituals, it is in the structure, arrangements, connotations, and the purpose of the *Commedia* that we seem to find Dante's closest connection to the spirituals.

The exile, which changed the life of the poet, closed the life Dante knew in Florence, but at the same time it tightened his bond with the exiled and ostracized spirituals. Dante the wanderer was left with his anger and his pen to go from one court to another of his patrons, and it is through these wanderings that the poet, reminiscent of St Francis's own peregrinations, develops a unique, somewhat mystical, bond with the Franciscans, particularly the spirituals. In exile, Dante could allow his anger to expose his idea of how we arrive at truth, as this quotation from *De Monarchia*, written approximately in 1317, demonstrates: "In order to arrive at a truth we are seeking, we must understand that the divine judgment in human affairs is sometimes revealed and sometimes hidden. It can be

¹⁶⁸ From *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "The Assisi Compilation," 230

¹⁶⁹ Modern consensus follows Petrocchi's conclusion that Dante wrote and released the three books of the *Commedia* separately; the *Inferno* between 1304-1308, but probably 1306-1308, *Purgatory* between 1308-1312, and *Paradise* between 1316-1321, or the last three years of his life, 1318-1321 (Pertile). See Lino Pertile, "Dante," 57; and See Robert Hollander, *Dante a Life in Works*. (New Haven and London: Yale University, 2001), 91.

¹⁷⁰ Refer back to Chapter V

revealed in two ways: to reason and to faith.”¹⁷¹ It would be his journey now, aided by faith and reason, to seek the meaning of God’s judgment on himself in the years of his exile.

The 14th century was a turbulent period. The papacy of Clement V (1305-1314) was important because it marked the beginning of the pope’s residence at Avignon on the Rhone. In 1309, Clement moved the seat of the papacy to Avignon, where it stayed until 1377. This move exemplifies the change in the political fortunes of the pope. Although the wealth and the prestige of the papacy had grown since the time of the first crusades, in a world with rapidly changing political and economic dynamics, many Christians questioned the claims of the pope over temporal affairs. Emperors had allowed the pope to maintain much control throughout the 12th and 13th centuries, aside from Frederick II, but by the 14th century critics questioned the unprecedented wealth and political assertions of the papacy. Much of Dante’s writings and political life address the question of the papacy’s claim to supreme temporal power. Dante reasoned that one authority should maintain the divine and another authority should maintain the temporal as his work *De Monarchia* would argue.

Between 1315 and 1317, a widespread famine in Europe played into the apocalyptic fears of the population which had been active since the time of Joachim. The spirituals were more in tune with the sentiments of the people and aligned themselves with the starving, poor. The spirituals’ vow of poverty (*usus*

¹⁷¹ Dante Alighierei, *De Monarchia* [*On World Government*], translated and edited by Herbert W.

pauper) seemed to embody the true intent of Francis and their dedication to poverty seemed to enhance their connection to the community of Christians alienated by the wealth and pageantry of the Avignon papacy. As Francis had worked in small towns and enjoyed preaching to all people and all of God's creation and as his work was intended to satisfy the needs of everyone, not just a select few, Ubertino and the spirituals stood in contradiction to the pretensions of the hierarchical church. The spirituals saw the general order of Franciscans building up stores of food and disassociating themselves with the *usus pauper*, contrary to the intentions of Francis, whose mission had been to live the humble life in the footsteps of Christ. The spirituals, although not entirely following Francis's ideas, believed they lived as closely to his wishes as they could, whereas the general order diverged from his path. These disagreements, within a historical context of the famine of 1315, seemed to link the spirituals with the general mass of Christians.

This link is also reminiscent of the *Commedia* itself. Dante wrote the *Commedia* in the vernacular. Although the theme was ultimately salvation through traditionally Catholic methods and judgments, the hope, like the language, was meant for the people, for everyone. Among its many purposes, the *Commedia* was intended to give readers hope for the afterlife and the promise of justice. It was written for anyone to understand. This idea concurs with that of Francis's practice of preaching through poetry. The complicated ideas of

Schneider (15th ed. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1980), 39.

Scripture were meant for everyone and could be said in simple words, though with profound meanings.

The injustice and harshness of his own exile would unite Dante with the friars who wandered throughout Italy in a fashion similar to his own, though not to the courts of wealthy patrons, but to the humble dwellings of cities where they would be welcome. Dante the exile found himself bound to a similar life, one of movement and homelessness. While his exile instigated anger towards those who had condemned him, the exile also stimulated his resolve to create a world where justice was realized. There were those who damned him, those who lived beside him, and those who followed parallel footpaths. Those that walked with him intended to preserve the life of their founder, a life they followed in practice, and a life Dante found himself condemned to pursue. This parallel experience, however, opened a door for Dante. He had been influenced by the spirituals early in his life, but in the years after 1300 he found himself and his own sympathies thrust into the lifestyle of the spirituals and the life style of the spiritual Francis whose memory inspired their own theological construction of history.¹⁷²

Dante found himself connected to the spirituals now in a life journey, which he immortalizes in the *Commedia*, although the message would lie obscurely hidden, suggested however by a multitude of allegorical references. The overarching purpose of the *Commedia* would parallel the vision of the spirituals:

¹⁷² See Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans*, 22: "Like the radical Franciscans who resorted to remote mountain hermitages in Tuscany and the Marche rather than the convents of the cities, or indeed like Dante himself in exile *in mezzo l'alpi*, they help to illustrate the paradox that Dante is exploring the early years of his exile."

there temporal life precedes divine life, and thus, one's actions on earth would become a window into one's soul, which is preserved eternally in the afterlife where memory serves as the history of one's soul; there the love which moves us all determines the memory of our souls in the afterlife.

In constructing his own role as pilgrim in the *Commedia*, Dante begins his journey in the year of his exile, for although exile took him down a different road than Francis and his spiritual friars, it led him to a similar purpose, which would draw him into the spirituals' vision of history and put him on a journey much like the one they were on. Dante, like the spirituals, would become a guide to those who found themselves alienated from the church yet intent on the Kingdom of Heaven.

i. Exile

In 1300, Dante was elected to the office of Prior,¹⁷³ which was the highest office in Florentine politics.¹⁷⁴ He held this position for a short period. In 1294, Dante and the greater Guelph party fought against the Ghibelline party. The Guelphs won and gained political control of Florence, banishing the Ghibellines.¹⁷⁵ The Guelph party then separated into two factions, the Whites (Guelfi Bianchi), Dante's faction, and the Blacks (Guelfi Neri.) The Whites were critical of the claims of papal authority and the Blacks supported papal authority.

¹⁷³ Pertile, "Dante," 46

¹⁷⁴ Gene Brucker, *The Civic world of early Renaissance Florence*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1977).

¹⁷⁵ This conflict begins in the 12th century, but was instigated by the 11th century conflict between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor, the Investiture conflict. The Guelphs (from German

Dante and his faction, the Whites, tried to maintain order by banishing members of the Blacks, including the illustrious Guido Calvalcanti, a close friend of Dante. The political movement failed, and in 1301 Pope Boniface VIII removed the Whites from power and exiled the top political leaders, including Dante. His home and property were seized and he was forced to pay a large fine. The Whites, including Dante, attempted to return to Florence and regain control, but were defeated at La Lastra in 1304. This final defeat ended Dante's hopes of returning to his beloved city, and instead consigned him to the life of a wayfarer traveling through Italy, seeking hospitality at the courts of some of the most powerful families of early Trecento Italy.

ii. Movement During Exile

There is a great deal of uncertainty as to where Dante went during his exile. From 1303 to 1304 it is known that he stayed at the court of Bartolomeo della Scala in Verona.

The following is a timeline of Dante's travels:¹⁷⁶ 1303-1304, Verona; 1304-1306, Treviso at the court of Gherardo da Camino (?) or at Padua and Venice (?); 1306, Lunigiana with the Malaspina family or Rome; 1307-1308, Casentino; 1308-1309, Lucca;¹⁷⁷ 1310-1312, Asti, Poppi, Casentino; 1312-18,

Welf and translated either Guelf or Guelfi) supported the papacy and the Ghibellines (from German Waiblingen, became Ghibellino) supported the emperor.

¹⁷⁶ Robert Hollander, *Dante: A Life in Works*, "Chronology of Dante's Life," xi-xiv; and *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), "Chronological Table of Important Dates," xix-xx.

¹⁷⁷ Hollander, *Dante*, "Chronology of Life of Dante," xiv: Some scholars, such as Hollander, suggest that Dante may have traveled to Paris between 1309-1310, however this is becoming an increasingly outdated theory.

Verona with Cangrande; 1318-1321, Ravenna as guest of Guido Novello da Polenta; 1321, Venice. Dante dies on September 13th or 14th on his way back to Ravenna from Venice.

Dante's travels in the years of his exile confined him more or less to the same area of St. Francis's wanderings. The early Franciscans preached mostly in the Duchy of Spoleto and the Marche of Ancona. It is known that Francis spent a large amount of time in the Rieti Valley, particularly near Greccio, Fonte Columba, Poggio Bustone, and Sant' Eleuterio Contigliano.¹⁷⁸ Although these locations are not identical to the locations Dante traveled, they lie within a close range. Dante's journey may not have followed the exact pilgrimage, but his spiritual odyssey mirrored the spirituals' movements in seeing the temporal world as reflective of God's glory, and in believing the ability of the human spirit to break the bonds of earth and move to the spiritual world of divine light and justice.

With his exile, one of the greatest loves of Dante's life, the city of Florence, was torn away from him, but his exile would lead him on a journey that would mirror the activities and writings of the spirituals, which sought to preserve the historicity of St. Francis's life as they had learned it, primarily through the preservation of the accounts of those closest to Francis (above all Brother Leo and Thomas of Celano); and by preserving the life St. Francis had intended for his followers they would be rigorously observing the life of Jesus and his apostles.

¹⁷⁸ From the *Early Documents*, in all III volumes: Maps Three. [see Figure 1, page 181]

Although Dante found himself in the courts of wealthy patrons, he no longer had a home, and this is the key distinction between the spirituals and the rest of those within the Franciscan order as a whole, a group that would later be known as the Conventuals. The spirituals insisted on no corporate ownership of any type of property, no monasteries, nothing they might call their own. Their lives were to imitate the life of their founder and in this way safeguard their connection with him. The spirituals were dependent on the primary documents of Francis's closest brothers. Dante in exile would become a participant in this historical narrative, so demonstrating the connection between his own life and the intentions of the spirituals.

The literary proof of a connection between Dante and the spirituals can be found in the proliferation of Dante's works while he is in exile. Although there is much scholarly debate as to when he began certain works, Dante's exile would prove to be a great stimulus to his writing, for it was then he wrote the bulk of his works. As some scholars¹⁷⁹ have noted, the theology of the Franciscans lies embedded in the structure of the *Commedia*. The structure of the *Commedia* is fashioned according to a memory Dante relates to his readers. Although the worlds he creates are purely fiction, his presentation ties into the triduum between Good Friday and Easter, which was a popular structure in medieval literature. The recollections of his memory in the *Commedia* unfold over the course of the three solemn days ending with Easter in the year 1300, the year Dante was exiled. He

begins: “Midway in the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.”¹⁸⁰ Despite the imaginary nature of the recollection this accurately expresses the poet’s own state of mind when he was exiled.¹⁸¹

iii. Movement of the Spirituals

The controversies in which the spirituals found themselves between 1301 and 1316 were extensive and complex in nature. Four popes occupied the papacy, and each maintained a distinct position on the spirituals. However, it was not until Clement V (1305-1314) that the spirituals controversy was dealt with openly. Ubertino da Casale was the central figure in the controversies, having become the spirituals’ spokesman¹⁸² upon the death of Olivi. Between 1306 and 1308, Ubertino was employed by Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, traveling to Avignon in 1309, where Clement had set up a commission to reconcile the spirituals with the rest of the Franciscan order.¹⁸³ In 1309, the spiritual Franciscan Angelo Clareno also attended the commission in Avignon.¹⁸⁴ Part of the reason the commission was called was to respond to the request of the officials of Narbonne who had

¹⁷⁹ Mario Aversano, “Capitolo V: Francescanesimo e profezia nel canto XXVII del Paradiso” *La Quinta Ruota: Studi sulla Commedia*, (Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1988), 111-147

¹⁸⁰ Alighierei, *Inferno*, Canto I, 1

¹⁸¹ Singleton *Commentary: Paradiso*, 1: Singleton identifies the age of 35 as the Scriptural age of middle age and Dante was in the year 1300 35 years old; Isaiah 38:10.

¹⁸² Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 116: As Burr defines the position.

¹⁸³ Burr gives a detailed account of the division of the spirituals. He has defined that there was not one distinct order, but rather it can be viewed that division occurred between the Italian spirituals and the Southern France spirituals. Ubertino and Angelo Clareno were technically Italian spirituals, but since Olivi was a Southern France spiritual and Ubertino maintained an extreme defense of Olivi, particularly at Avignon and in the subsequent Council of Vienne, it is difficult to classify his allegiance in 1309.

¹⁸⁴ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 112: Burr cites that Angelo’s patron was one of the two prominent Colonna cardinals, Giacomo; Pietro was the second cardinal.

requested the pope to reverse the condemnation of Olivi's writings. Olivi's writings were the principal source of debate at the commission.

The commission of 1309 led to an official examination of four central questions regarding the spirituals, and it later attempted a reconciliation of the spirituals at the Council of Vienne (1311-1312). Clement called for these questions to be answered in a series of papers by members of both factions. David Burr states that Clement called for an examination of four principle questions of the Italian and Southern France spirituals: 1) whether or not the spirituals were "infected" by the heretical sect of Franciscans which had been condemned, the *spiritus libertatis*; 2) whether or not the spirituals were practicing the rule and the *Exiit qui seminat*;¹⁸⁵ 3) the question of Olivi's orthodoxy; 4) the persecution of Olivi.

Ubertino was one of the first to respond. He spent a great deal of his argument on the second question posed by Clement. The majority of his response addressed the issue of *usus pauper* and the lack of adherence to it by the large majority of Franciscans, particularly in the area of food and clothing. He was also wary of the Franciscans' "laziness" regarding Francis's ideas on working: "The state of the order when I entered it so differs from its present condition that one might as well compare a healthy and handsome man with a sick one."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ *Exiit qui seminat*, issued by Pope Nicholas III (1277-1280), was the fundamental interpretation of the Rule of St. Francis, particularly, regarding the strict observance of Franciscan poverty (*usus pauper*).

¹⁸⁶ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 117

Usus pauper was an argument begun by Olivi for maintaining the original intentions of Francis regarding ‘poor’ or limited use and ownership of goods and properties. It was one of the primary distinctions between the spirituals and the general order. The order, in general, saw that it was necessary to acquire some goods and that the ownership of goods was a way of maintaining power within the community and supporting growth of the order. The spirituals, conversely, saw the possession of goods as completely contrary to the intentions of Francis and thus contrary to the purpose and theology of the order. *Usus pauper* was therefore a major source of contention in the mid 13th century and early 14th century, until the suppression of the spirituals movement.

Burr also cites an interesting remark made by Ubertino on the issue of the general condemnation of the spirituals. Here Ubertino relays what his Franciscan brethren say about the spirituals:

They [the spirituals] are proud and contumacious regarding the demands of licit and honest obedience; are followers [*sectatores*] of dreams and fictitious visions; spend too much time talking with women, especially beguins, under the guise of holiness; and are defenders of perverse dogmas, errors, or new and dangerous opinions.¹⁸⁷

Burr determines this statement to relate to the spirituals’ interest in mystical experience. This would thus provide some insight into their relationship to Dante, who also relates his “mystical” experience (the *Commedia*) in ways strikingly similar to those of the spirituals. Ubertino sees that the spirituals’ emphasis on

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 120, from *Rotulus*

visions and ministering to women was a major reason for the condemnation of their group. This suggests an additional affinity between Dante and the spirituals.

Ubertino argued that the system of education was part of the problem with the general Franciscan order. He saw education as leading to laziness and pride: “because the order is ruled by such people and they almost always participate in the provincial and general chapters, the order is getting worse.”¹⁸⁸ However, Burr points out that this does not mean that Ubertino or St. Francis condemned education. Ubertino was basically attacking the method of “Parisian education” as a “ticket to power and prestige.” He did not appreciate the elitist attitude he saw growing among the Franciscans. Burr notes that “Francis envisaged an order in which study would direct prayer and prayer would illuminate study.”¹⁸⁹

Ubertino saw a lax approach in his Franciscan brothers’ practice of their vow of poverty (*usus pauper*). Since the spirituals were using the writings of Olivi to defend their position on adherence to the *Testament* of Francis and *usus pauper*, it was wise of Ubertino to maintain the arguments presented by Olivi. Ubertino was increasingly concerned with the leadership of the order as run by members of the elite, or *potentes*, as he referred to them. The rule by the *potentes*, as Burr puts forward, is the reason for the condemnation of the spirituals. He sees that the elitist rulers fear the adherence to radical poverty, as expressed by the wishes of Francis, which the spirituals were committed to protect. This does

¹⁸⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 129; Burr is citing from, *Sanctitas vestra*, 73-74; *Rotulus*, 111, 118, 127. [Burr, footnote (38)].

¹⁸⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 129

reflect to some degree Dante's own hostility to clerical wealth and to an elite of the powerful, which he raises in *De Monarchia* because of those who have taken control of the church:

First the supreme pontiff...secondly, there are those whose light of reason has been extinguished by stubborn greed...pretending to be sons of the Church, they are the children of the devil...a third group called Decretalists, who, being ignorant and unskilled in any theology or philosophy whatever, and resting their whole case on their decretals...denounce the Empire in the hope, I believe, that these decretals will prevail.¹⁹⁰

Dante further discusses the importance of a ruler to maintain peace: "It is needful to have the useful teachings of liberty and peace adapted to times and places by one supervisor, to whom the total state of the heavens is visible at once..."¹⁹¹ This follows the same line of criticisms made by Ubertino on the direction of the order as moving away from the peaceful intentions of the founder and the persecution of those seeking to maintain those intentions. Ubertino's argument in 1313 is a precursor to the argument presented by Dante in *De Monarchia* on the issues within the Church and the identification of a peaceful and just path, which was the one that the spirituals attempted to preserve and one that Dante created in the world of his *Paradiso*.

These primary issues would be the source of much debate in subsequent years. However, in 1312 the Council of Vienne did lead to a temporary resolution in favor of the spirituals; and by the end, it seemed they had "won" much of the controversy.

¹⁹⁰ Alighierei, *De Monarchia*, 55

The Council of Vienne led to the temporary merger of the Italian and southern French sects of spirituals and to a heightened regard for the spirituals' spokesman. Ubertino emerged as the loudest, strongest voice in the movement and as the prime defender of Olivian theology. The council ended in 1312, and on May 6, 1312 Clement V issued a papal bull, *Exivi de paradiso*. The great part of the bull was favorable to the spirituals. Clement primarily sides with Olivi, but places certain restrictions on the observance of *usus pauper*, which is the crucial difference dividing these two groups of Franciscans.

The *usus pauper* controversy was one of Ubertino's strongest disagreements, and he did not completely agree with Clement's decision on the issue. Clement had no choice but to resolve the issue, and his restrictions seemed equitable in the eyes of the church. However, one part of Ubertino and Angelo's principal requests was to divide the order between the spirituals and other Franciscans, and Ubertino had further demands: he wanted to maintain exclusively the official name of Franciscans and the authority to interpret the Rule of St. Francis. Angelo, on the other hand, was satisfied with simply maintaining the rule, and introducing a new order, which followed Olivi's wishes. Clement also guaranteed certain earlier privileges, such as the permission granted to the order to disregard Francis's final request in his *Testament*, in which he expressed his wish to be independent of the papacy, which had been a major topic of debate in the original Anconan uprising of 1274. The divide between the Italian and

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 79

southern French spirituals grew wider over such issues after the issuance of *Exivi de paradiso*. Ubertino sided with the Italian spirituals.

Immediately after *Exivi de paradiso* Clement V issued another papal bull, *Fidei catholicae fundamentum*, which affirmatively stated that the lance, spoken of in John 19, pierced Christ's side only after He died, contrary to the spirituals argument.¹⁹² In 1311, he had commissioned a group of theologians to examine the writings of Olivi in order to resolve the issue of his condemnation. The three principal issues taken up in the bull were Olivi's position on divine nature, the rational soul, and Christ's wounds. Clement resolved that the three principle obligations of the spirituals were "living obedience, living in chastity, and *sine proprio*" (i.e. without property). As Clement envisioned, it would be the obligation of obedience to compel the spirituals to define their allegiances. Olivi was never mentioned by name in the bull, and the criticism, which Burr considers as another "win" for the spirituals under Clement since Olivi was left out of the controversy, was merely nominal.

By the end of the council and this final official attempt by a pope to reconcile the Franciscans with their spiritual brethren, certain issues were resolved, but there was, nonetheless, great discontent, particularly among the

¹⁹² One of the questions during the Council of Vienne regarded the condemnation of Olivi. The spirituals wanted to clear Olivi's name, which became controversial since Olivi's writings had become central to the spirituals debate, and Olivi had been condemned calling the church a "great whore" in his final writing, *The Apocalypse Commentary*. Olivi had never affirmatively said that Christ died after the lance pierced his side; however, he had over the course of his life disagreed with the church on a number of theological issues. *Fidei catholicae fundamento* was Clement's attempt to definitively state the church's position on a number of issues, including the lance piercing Christ. It is heresy to deny a statement which is recognized by the church and through this

Tuscan spirituals. In 1312, the Tuscan spirituals of Florence, Siena and Arezzo banded together with the intention of forming a community separate from that of the Franciscan order. Angelo was, of course, positioned himself with the Tuscan spirituals; and Ubertino eventually followed the Tuscan spirituals, who continued to debate the resolutions of the Council of Vienne.

In 1312 the Tuscan spirituals became particularly rebellious and separated themselves from the other spirituals. In the same year, the spirituals from Florence, Siena, and Arezzo took over the convents of Arezzo, Asciano, and Carmignano, forming their own group and electing their own general. Burr suggests there were about eighty “rebels,” one of whom was from southern France. The situation worsened. In 1312, eight members of the group were asked to answer certain accusations against them. They refused, saying they were protected by the resolutions of Vienne and by the pope. However, in 1313 Clement wrote to the archbishop of Genoa and the bishops of Bologna and Lucca asking for help to restrain the Tuscans. In 1314, Bernard of S. Fidelis in Siena excommunicated thirty-seven of the rebel spirituals. The Tuscan rebels then escaped to Sicily under the protection of its king Frederick III (reigned from 1295-1337). But the argument of the Tuscan spirituals eventually became that of the Italian spirituals movement, of which Ubertino and Angelo were a part. The general order and the papacy held that the spirituals should follow the Franciscan vow of poverty (*usus pauper*) as the papacy defined it. Accordingly, the whole

bull the church found that Olivi had disagreed and was condemnable. This was also a means of

Franciscan order would follow it, thus no one would be breaking his vow of poverty because all were doing this under obedience to their superiors and the popes who had made the judgment. Their obedience, as both the Italian and French spirituals would deem it, should be given to the institution of Francis, not the papacy. This sentiment became the primary argument of the spirituals and would eventually lead to their destruction.

When pope Clement died in 1314, with him died the last partial ally of the spirituals. In the same year pope, John XXII was elected and would reign until 1334. John was not kind to the spirituals, and through him they would be persecuted and eventually dissolved. John immediately modified Clement's *Exivi de paradiso* with the bull *Quorundem exigit*, which required formal submission of the spirituals to the papacy. Some spirituals openly disputed John's bull, including Michael of Cesena, who had been a minister general of the order. Sixty-four spirituals were called to Avignon for an inquisition. In 1318, four of those spirituals were condemned for heresy and burned at the stake.¹⁹³

iv. Additional Writings of the Spirituals

a. The Documents of the Spirituals

Around 1307, Ubertino da Casale published his famous treatise, the *Arbor Vitae*, which shares distinct similarities with Dante's exile writing. In it Ubertino discusses the problems with the direction of the Franciscan order, and he reexamines the life of Francis and the life of Christ, as contrary to the life

attacking the position of the spirituals. See Burr, 151-158

followed by his non-spirituals Franciscan brothers. He wrote the work in 1305 at LaVerna after Boniface VIII sent him there. In this work we may notice an intertextuality with Dante's writings which can be identified in certain passages.

According to St. Francis, humility, obedience, and poverty were the three most important characteristics his brothers should display. From this simple teaching numerous conclusions evolved. One further distinctive characteristic of Francis to come from this, one which is important when comparing Dante and the spirituals, is his stress on the "great fervor of spirit and joy"¹⁹⁴ of body and soul that all his brothers should display. The joy Francis carried with him was expressed through his love of poetry:

He used to say: "What are the servants of God if not His minstrels, who must move people's hearts and lift them up to spiritual joy?" And he said this especially to the Lesser Brothers, who had been given to the people for their salvation.¹⁹⁵

b. *Rime* (lyrics poems composed between 1280s and 1306/7?)¹⁹⁶

This wide collection of Dante's lyric poetry poses some problems. It was organized after his death in 1321 and includes all his lyric poems excluding *La Vita Nuova*. It is difficult to use this as a definitive comparative text since the selection is so varied. It includes poetic correspondences with Guido Calvalcanti and suggests the influence Calvalcanti had on Dante's work.

One broad approach to establishing connections between Dante's *Rime* and the spirituals' writings is to compare how both deal with the theme of

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¹⁹⁴ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Assisi Compilation," 119

humility in love. Dante's lyric poems center on the emotional, intellectual, philosophical meaning of love. It is love that begets humility. As the *donna gentile* becomes the object of affection after it is first sparked by sight, which sends a message to the brain, it initiates a reaction stimulating the heart into a burning desire of love. Here Dante's conception of love differs from his contemporaries' chivalric poetry and troubadour poetry, where the image of the *donna gentile* begets love that is unrequited. But for Dante the love that inspires the greatest reaction of the body and the soul cannot be attained. So the lover must go through the rest of his life suffering from the memory of love and the unattainable nature of love, which further engenders the feeling of humility. Humility, the primary characteristic of Franciscan spirituality, is also the primary characteristic of love, which is in constant longing for union with the beloved and generates a profound feeling of one's own unworthiness.

Dante's *Rime LXXXI* exemplifies these elements of the Franciscan process of beholding the object of one's love and experiencing humility because of the overwhelming goodness of the beloved, which is particularly appreciated by the spirituals:

Love, speaking fervently in my mind
of my lady, often utters such things
concerning her that my intellect
is bewildered by them. His speech sounds
so sweetly that the soul, as she attends
and hears, says: 'Alas that I am unable
to express what I hear of my lady!...

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 186

¹⁹⁶ These dates are from Lino Pertile. Hollander places the composition from 1283 to 1308.

Therefore let every woman who hears her beauty
 slighted for seeming to lack gentleness
 and humility, gaze at this lady, the very model
 of humility! She it is who brings back
 to humility whoever strays from it. She was in
 the mind of Him who set the universe in motion.¹⁹⁷

Lino Pertile suggests that in the last of Dante's *Rime* he is reconciled to his exile and uses the allegory of three women symbolizing divine justice, human justice and the law. These also represent his exile, which mirrors the "emblematic and symptomatic of a crisis affecting the whole world."¹⁹⁸ Here we can see perhaps that Dante has reconciled his anger at exile with a resignation and new view of the world to which he reacts now in deep humility as it is God's action that must be acknowledged. In much the same way, the spirituals who felt rejection and experienced exile from the Franciscan brethren had to see the divine hand working among them, testing their humility. In this we can begin to see perhaps a historical link not just in Dante's movements in the Italian landscape, but in a kind of topography of his mind. His writings after the 1304 period of exile seem to testify to his state of mind and his near acceptance of his condition. In the years after the judgment of his exile, Dante tried to return to Florence, but after failed attempts he eventually came to peace with the loss of his home. This peace mirrors the teachings of Francis; Dante's path ultimately leads to an acceptance of his condition in much the same way as the writings of the spirituals embrace the renunciation of all earthly goods in imitation of Francis. The

¹⁹⁷ Selection from *Rime* LXXXI:

¹⁹⁸ Pertile, "Dante," 50

experience of exile brought Dante to a place of acceptance and perhaps reawakened those desires of a youth who had once been inspired by the spirituals. The destinies of Dante and the spirituals led them to a shared experience of humility and union with God, which opened itself to a love of the spirit and the love of divine justice.

c. *Convivio* (1294-1307, roughly)

The *Convivio* expounds Dante's philosophical ideas. In it scholars have extracted certain facts of his life and some of his early thinking. Here it is where we learn that he was educated at the religious schools of Florence. The work is also an early representation of his vast knowledge. Dante wrote this in the vernacular to express his intellectual abilities to a greater audience. The *Convivio* encompasses a great array of knowledge and is "open" to any who seek the feast of knowledge, which is the meaning of the title, "banquet."

d. *De vulgari eloquentia* (1304)

This work was meant to establish Dante as a master of the Latin form. He intended to comprise this work of four books but only completed two. This work was meant "to convince even the most conservative among the literati of the worth of vernacular"¹⁹⁹ In this work he addresses the history of language and the primary importance of the vernacular over the use of Latin. The work would be significant in the centuries to come because it sets the stage for the debates on the comparative values of Latin and Italian. But here perhaps its significance lies in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 48

its shared value with the Franciscans in their ministries, which were conducted in the vernacular tongue. It was in Italian that Francis preached and spoke the word of God to all creatures.

e. *De Monarchia* (1317)

In the *De Monarchia* Dante articulates the fundamental distinction between the powers of church and those of the state and how these ideally should function. He divides the work into three books. Justice is the key element upon which the whole world order turns. Dante explores a world in balance and harmony where the powers of church and state respect each other's sphere.

The chronology of the text is debatable. However, the date of 1317, if correlated with the trials of the spirituals in 1317 and the subsequent execution of several spirituals in 1318, suggests an astonishing relationship. Dante was greatly dissatisfied with the order of the government during this period, as he had always been. But here it is noteworthy that he wrote this piece at the height of the spirituals controversy. One might draw the conclusion that Dante was using his weapon of words and philosophical analysis to examine the workings of divine justice and to condemn the actions of the papacy; if justice was not realized on an earthly plane, then surely justice would take place in the divine realm; ultimately justice would prevail. Dante, as he did in the *Commedia*, used history to remember the good and the bad. The spirituals, the men of God who fought to preserve the "truth" of their founder, would be tried in an unjust temporal world;

but Dante wrote of a world in which justice would be everywhere; but because it was not now, it would surely be in the divine world above.

De Monarchia, if written when scholars suppose, could be seen as a passionate defense of the injustice to the spirituals. The trials in Avignon that John XXII was conducting were underway by 1317, and within one year four of the French spirituals would be put to death for their unwavering obedience to their convictions. They maintained their adherence to the Franciscan teachings in the *Testament* and the *First Rule* and did not yield to the orders of the pope. For this they were killed in 1318. The direct and strong tone of *De Monarchia* might likely have been inspired by these trials. Dante had for years questioned the legitimacy of the pope, and with the move to Avignon in 1305 he would have been further outraged. The papacy, as he saw it, was ignorant of the needs of the people. Clement V and John XXII were guilty of hoarding wealth when people were dying of famine. These two popes busied themselves with the consolidation of the church by attacking the spirituals, instead of turning to the needs of the people.

In the three books of the *De Monarchia*, Dante clearly argues for the order of the world under one government, a world-government, ruled by a just leader. This just leader would be a reflection of the perfection of God's creation:

But mankind is the son of heaven, which is most perfect in all its works; for 'man is generated of man and sun,' according to the author of the *Physics*. Hence mankind is best when it follows in the footsteps of Heaven as far as its nature permits. And as the whole heaven is governed in all its parts, motions and movers by a single motion, the *primum mobile* and by a single mover, God as is very

evident to a philosophizing reason if it syllogizes truly it follows that mankind is then at its best when in all its movers and movements it is governed by a single mover or government and by a single motion or law.²⁰⁰

This image corresponds to the image of the ideal characteristics of the minister general of the Franciscans, which Francis describes in *The Assisi Compilation*:

It especially pertains to him to discern what is hidden in consciences and to draw out the truth from its hidden veins. Let him never weaken the manly norm of justice, and he must feel such a great office more a burden than an honor. And yet, excessive meekness should not give birth to slackness, nor loose indulgence to a breakdown of discipline, so that, loved by all, he is feared nonetheless, by those who work evil.²⁰¹

Dante understood that God intended that humans live to the fullest of their capabilities. He mentions certain characteristics the one ruler should have:

And since of all human goods the greatest is to live in peace, as we said above, and since justice is its chief and most powerful promoter, charity is the chief promoter of justice--the greater charity the more justice.²⁰²

Charity is one of the most important characteristics of Franciscan spirituality, and it is found in the critical depiction of the great ruler of Dante's *De Monarchia*. This further suggests the impact of Franciscan spirituality on Dante's picture of the just ruler.

Dante further describes his interpretation of the just ruler as one who would bring universal peace:

²⁰⁰ Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, 11

²⁰¹ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Assisi Compilation," 145

²⁰² Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, 15

Man's work is almost divine. ("Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels") and it is clear that of all the things that have been ordained for our happiness, the greatest is universal peace.²⁰³

In correspondence with the virtues of the spirituals this ultimate idea of peace and unity is responsive to their wishes and to the wish of Francis:

Praised be by You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
And bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
For by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.²⁰⁴

Within the section where Dante depicts the one ruler, he critiques the limitations of the human character:

Justice suffers from the limitations of human ability; for since justice is a virtue affecting others, how can a person act justly when he lacks the ability of giving to each his due?²⁰⁵

The language and ideological principles are those of Franciscan spirituality: "In the intention of God every creature exists to represent the divine likeness in so far as its nature makes this possible."²⁰⁶ This line corresponds to one of Francis's most beautiful and most famous poems, *The Canticle of the Creatures*:

Praised be to You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
Especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
And bears a likeness of You, Most High One.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Ibid, 7

²⁰⁴ From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Assisi Compilation," 187

²⁰⁵ Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, 14

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 11

²⁰⁷ St Francis, from *The Early Documents: The Saint*, "The Canticle of the Creatures," 113

Within *De Monarchia* Dante uses the language of the Franciscans to describe the ideal nature of man: "...all who seek the good of the commonwealth seek the goal of right..."²⁰⁸

Dante also describes the nature of man as comprised of two parts:

Man has two essential parts, soul and body...the bliss of this life, which consists in the functioning of his own powers, and which is typified by the earthly Paradise; and the bliss of eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of that divine vision to which he cannot attain by his own powers, except aided by the divine light, and this state is made intelligible by the celestial Paradise.²⁰⁹

Dante continues by explaining the ways by which these two parts are taught:

For we come to the first as we follow the philosophical teachings, applying them according to our moral and intellectual capacities; and we come to the second as we follow the spiritual teachings which transcend human reason according to our theological capacities, faith, hope and charity.²¹⁰

The ideal set forth of course does not find its fulfillment on this earth where justice and benevolence are perverted. So it was with the spirituals who were denied justice from the one whose duty it was to administer it:

Hence, the world-ruler, who has the greatest love for men, as I have explained, desires that all men be made good, which is impossible among perverted politicians.²¹¹

This aligns the spirituals with the desire of love and peace against the "perversion" of Pope John XXII who condemns them. Despite all the earthly machinations against them, the spirituals still carry on in the spirit of their founder.

²⁰⁸ Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, 36

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 78

Dante echoes the sentiments of *The Assisi Compilation*:

If a servant of God always strives to have and preserve joy internally and externally which proceeds from purity of heart, the devils can do him no harm.²¹² (*The Assisi Compilation*)

What should I fear? When the Spirit of the Father, coeternal with the Son, says through David's mouth: "The just shall be in everlasting remembrance: he shall not fear the evil hearing."²¹³ (Dante)

²¹⁰ Ibid, 78

²¹¹ Ibid, 17

²¹² From *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Assisi Compilation," 230

²¹³ Alighieri, *De Monarchia*, 52

VII.
DANTE:
The *Commedia*

“His desire seeks to fly without wings.”²¹⁴

As our chronology of Dante's life indicates Dante was completing his fictitious spiritual journey of *Paradiso* as four members of the waning spirituals movement were found guilty of heresy and burned at the stake. The paths of Dante and the Franciscan spirituals merged early in Dante's life, but it is in the *Commedia* that we may note their convergence. As the structure of the *Commedia* mirrors the theological tenets of the spirituals, so does the time of its composition, sometime between 1304 and 1321,²¹⁵ which coincides closely with the period in which the spirituals were under greatest trial and faced destruction. The final purpose of the *Commedia* is perhaps related to the aim of the spiritual Franciscans: to guide followers on a path to God, using the teachings of Francis in their original form and meaning, and independent of hierarchical direction. The possible connection between Dante and the spirituals was their desire to preserve the intentions of Francis and to use his message to guide humanity. As the spirituals were beginning their own journey to the world beyond, Dante was completing the *Commedia*, with the hope that divine justice would bring lasting peace, the peace described in the world of *Paradiso*.

²¹⁴ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 371

²¹⁵ Between 1306 and 1318

This chapter examines the efforts of the spiritual Franciscans' to preserve what they believed to be the authentic intention of Francis of Assisi compared with Dante's own similar concerns and vision of the past embedded in his *Paradiso*. I argue that Dante's placement and portrait of St. Francis and St. Clare in paradise follow the purpose and writings of the spiritual Franciscans, who worked to preserve the intentions of Francis which they extracted from his true testament. The spirituals sought to preserve Francis's humble life and the divine mission of his spiritual offspring. Through this argument my aim is to present a reading of Francis in the *Commedia* which follows that of the spirituals, not of Bonaventure. I believe that Dante was strongly influenced by the spirituals and this influence comes through in his grand work, the *Commedia*.

I. The *Commedia*

The entire *Commedia* is written as an exercise of the "memory."²¹⁶ Dante the wayfarer serves as the protagonist of the *Commedia* for Dante the writer. This technique is not uncommon for medieval literature, and the journey itself is intentionally similar to that of Virgil's protagonist, Aeneas, who travels through the underworld in search of his father. Dante, however, has three guides to lead him through the three successive stages of his journey. In the first, *Inferno*, Virgil, the Roman poet and author of the *Aeneid*, leads Dante, but leaves him in *Purgatorio* XXX, because as an unbaptized pagan he can go no further. Beatrice, the love of Dante's childhood and the woman to whom Dante's first published

²¹⁶ Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto II, 12: "che ritrarrà la mente che non erra"

work, *Vita Nuova*, is dedicated, then comes as Dante's second guide. Beatrice guides Dante through the last terrace of *Purgatorio* and through *Paradiso*. The third and final guide is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who does not enter the journey until the final stages. Bernard, a twelfth century monk, known as the mellifluous doctor (*doctor melifluus*), is also known as the theologian of the Virgin Mary and father of Mariology. Bernard wrote many prayers to the Virgin. Bernard was also known for his many mystical treatises on the love of God, particularly the *De diligendo Deo* (1126).

In the following parts of this chapter, we shall examine certain cantos which convey rather hidden, yet important, references to Francis or the spirituals, whether directly or indirectly. With each subsequent canto relating to the Franciscans we should find ourselves further drawn into associations with the spirituals and their unique vision of the church, Francis, and the final age. Each canto relating to Francis and the spirituals should build to a crescendo to *Paradiso* Canto XXXII, where Dante has placed Francis.

Through an analysis of the cantos dealing with Saint Francis, we can perhaps arrive at a fuller message than that conveyed by any one canto. Such a message might suggest there is a coded message of the spirituals. What seems particularly striking is that this pattern, found within the cantos pertaining to Francis, seems to suggest an ever more pervasive meaning within the entire text, structure, and purpose of the *Commedia*, that relates directly to the central concerns of the spiritual Franciscans. It is this through this method of textual

construction, I believe, that Dante could conceal his own views from the watchful eyes of the papacy and his political adversaries. A direct reference to and suggestion of sympathy with the spirituals during their time of persecution would no doubt have proven detrimental to Dante, detrimental to his great work (and most likely to his other works as well).

One such hidden message of the *Commedia* is suggested by the scholar Mario Aversano, who claims that the Franciscans' model of "divine love and glory are comprehensible through "*sapienza*" and "*umiltà*" and that charity and justice are opposite to "*cupidigia*" (cupidity).²¹⁷ This he finds in *Paradiso* Canto XXVII, where St. Peter displays anger at the papacy for abusing the position which he held first. Aversano reads in this canto that the direction St. Peter would like to see the papacy follow is that of charity and divine justice, which follows the theology of Francis.²¹⁸

Aversano, however, sees this Franciscan influence as a more general one, without noticing its particular application to the theology of the spirituals. Aversano discusses the relationship between Dante and the Franciscan ascetical practice by examining particularly the text of *Paradiso*, canto XXVII. But he further omits looking for the possible spirituals' influence on Dante at this point in the *Paradiso*. It is here I believe we can push Aversano's argument further.

²¹⁷ Aversano, from *La Quinta Ruota*: Capitolo V: "Francescanesimo e profezia nel Canto XXVII del *Paradiso*," 127

²¹⁸ Ibid., 127: "...sfidando il rischio di vedere oltre il consentito, che nella modalità dell'impiego della dossologia trinitaria fluisca uno dei più chiari rivoli francescani, se Dante ha fatto del *Paradiso* la cantica della Gloria e dell'Amore divino, comprensibili per via di sapienza e d'umiltà."

A large part of the spirituals argument was based on the documents that had apparently disappeared or been destroyed. Central to these documents were those of Brother Leo and the writings of Thomas of Celano. Even today we do not know the location or existence of all of either of these men's works. It is fair to say that Dante was perhaps fearful of such an attack on his own work; so instead of watching his work disappear in the smoke of the ages, his message had to be concealed in his poetry.

Scholars argue that Dante intentionally arranged for each canto to relate to one another in order to get across his complete poetic vision. Cantos from *Paradiso* with their corresponding cantos helps complete Dante's possible intended meaning from the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. In the end the full conception of the poet would become clear when the interrelated parts are seen together, thus contributing to the meaning of the whole.²¹⁹ This technique, too, allows the poet freedom to work with the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses of the text.²²⁰ When we apply this methodology to the Franciscan references in the *Commedia*, the elusive message should reveal not only the Franciscan spirituality but the spirituals' theology as well.

The first references to Francis and the Franciscans occur in the *Paradiso* in Canto III (the first sphere, the moon, St. Clare); Canto X (the fourth sphere, the

²¹⁹ Particularly in reading Scripture. Prophets, such as Joachim di Fiore, drew their theories through this method of comparison of the Old Testament and the New Testament: writing which precedes completes the story or prophecy related.

²²⁰ Alighieri, *The Convivio*, book II, ii, 3-4. Dante states there are four ways to read a work: "...it is necessary to know that writings can be understood and ought to be expounded principally in

sun, the theologians, Bonaventure); Canto XI (Aquinas recounts the life of St. Francis); Canto XII (Bonaventure laments the problems of the order); Canto XXII (the eighth sphere, the sphere of the contemplatives, St. Benedict refers to Francis as the embodiment of humility when he discusses problems with the lack of adherence to the Rule); Canto XXVII (a level of the eighth sphere, St. Peter gets very angry at the abuse of the seat and power of the papacy); and Canto XXXII (the ninth sphere, the Primum Mobile, the fixed stars, the celestial amphitheatre). In Canto XXXII Bernard shows Dante the White Rose where all the great saints are seated in the amphitheatre as they look up towards the Virgin and Christ; Francis is seated along with saints Benedict and Augustine and others on the second highest level, beneath John the Baptist. Canto XXXIII, the final vision, although Francis is not mentioned here, ends when Bernard takes Dante to the face of God through prayers to the Virgin.²²¹

a. *Inferno*

Most scholars believe that Dante wrote the *Commedia* in sequential order, beginning with the *Inferno*.²²² The *Inferno*, we might suppose, is thus the earliest work and simpler in form. Dante places a variety of people in hell: politicians, lovers, pagans, Christians and popes; but all have committed some mortal sin, whether it is a blatant or a subtle breach of divine law. There is, however, a

four senses. The first is called the literal...the next is called the allegorical...the third sense is called the moral...and the fourth sense is called anagogical, that is to say, beyond the senses..."

²²¹ Singleton, *Commentary: Paradiso* Canto II, 539: "...Francis is given the highest place after John the Baptist...solely, it would seem on the basis of excellence."

²²² Between 1304 and 1308

hierarchy of mortal sinfulness discernible in the progression from the first to the ninth circle of hell.

Dante's construction of the *Inferno* consists of nine circles which descend to the center of the earth, where stands the frozen home of Lucifer, who, slowly flapping his wings, causes a cold breeze. Lucifer sits chewing the legs of Brutus and Cassius, with their heads facing outward. Dante presents a worse fate for Judas, whose head Lucifer is chewing. These four have committed the most heinous sin: betrayal in the highest order, against Caesar, Christ, and God (Lucifer against God).²²³ The nine circles of the *Inferno* represent degradations and violations of Christian virtues, as related to the seven deadly sins and in a mirror reflection of divine love and trust. Dante, thus, interprets betrayal as the worst sin.

The spirituals saw the Franciscan order as betraying the wishes of Francis, particularly in betraying the *usus pauper* and independence from the papacy. Francis, although he had agreed to papal intervention, made as his last wish for the order the request that it remain independent of the papacy.²²⁴ However, soon after Francis's death the order requested that Pope Gregory IX allow them to dismiss Francis's wish to remain independent. In 1230, Pope Gregory IX issued a papal decree *Quo elongati* which stipulated that Francis's *Testament* was not binding. It is in this action that the spirituals saw a betrayal of Francis. In 1317, when four spirituals were burned for their obedience to Francis over the papacy,

²²³ Brutus and Cassius against Caesar; Judas against Christ; and Lucifer against God.

²²⁴ From *The Early Documents: The Saint*. Francis of Assisi, "The Testament," (1226) "And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: 'They should be understood in this way.'" 125

this may have been the papacy's ultimate betrayal of Francis. In an order founded on the premise of love and peace, four were killed for their unwavering obedience to the man who promoted this message. This violation would merit punishment in the lowest circle of his *Inferno*. This is perhaps a further indication of Dante's sympathy with the spirituals, since they alone were intent on remaining obedient to Francis.

b. *Purgatorio*

Those in *Purgatorio* have the hope they will eventually attain beatification, for they know that most of those now in paradise had first to ascend the mountain of purgatory in order to gain entrance to heaven. *Purgatorio* therefore is a place of hope. It is comprised of seven terraces, each representing a purgation of love in the form of the seven deadly sins, much like in the *Inferno*. But it is open only to those who have been baptized. Virgil cannot go past the terrestrial paradise, and he disappears when Beatrice enters the poem as Dante's second guide.

c. *Paradiso*

The Glory of the All-Mover penetrates through the universe and reglows in one part more, and in another less. I have been in the heaven that most receives of His light, and have seen things which whoso descends from up there has neither the knowledge nor the power to relate, because, as it draws near to its desire, our intellect enters so deep that memory cannot go back upon the track. Nevertheless, so much of the holy kingdom as I could treasure up in my mind shall now be the matter of my song. (*Paradiso*, Canto I, 3)

Paradiso is the final resting place of all the souls who have reached it; they will go no further, nor fall back. *Paradiso* is comprised of nine spheres represented by eight planets and the fixed stars. Each sphere is holy; and although there are levels closer to God and thus closer to beatification, all who reside in *Paradiso* live with hope, glory and divine love:

Then was it clear to me how everywhere in Heaven is Paradise,
even if the grace of the Supreme good does not there rain down in
one same measure. (*Paradiso*, Canto III, 33)

The farthest point Dante reaches is beyond the Primum Mobile, which is where the White Rose amphitheatre is located. Here is the home of God and certain chosen saints. Here Francis resides, as does Beatrice.

a. Canto III: The Moon

In the first two cantos of *Paradiso*, Dante and Beatrice pass through a circle of fire and then pass into the heavens. They then reach the first sphere, the moon:

That Sun which first had heated my breast with love, proving and
refuting had uncovered to me the sweet aspect of fair truth, and, to
confess me correct and assured, I raised my head more erect to
speak, in measure as was meet; but a sight appeared which held me
so fast to itself, to look on it, that I bethought me not of my
confession. (*Paradiso*, Canto III, 27)

As Singleton observes, this is a reference to Dante's first meeting with Beatrice when he was nine years old.²²⁵ This is important to note since Dante begins his chapter on the sphere of the moon with this reference and he will mention St. Clare in this canto. St. Clare links two of the writers whom the

spirituals follow: Thomas of Celano and Brother Leo. St. Clare also provides a link to the spirituals movement, particularly through writers such as Thomas of Celano and Brother Leo, who give her a prominent role in the founding of the order. Dante's recollection of his first meeting of Beatrice when he was nine may provide evidence for the spirituals influence on him when he was nine.²²⁶ Perhaps Dante is asking the reader to recall his meeting of Beatrice in the same canto in which he will mention St. Clare, a figure important to the spirituals, in order subtly to recall his inheritance of the spirituals movement when he was nine years old.

Singleton suggests that Dante has met those who violated their vows in the sphere of the moon, since they are those who were most 'inconstant in life,'²²⁷ the moon being the medieval symbol par excellence for inconstancy. However, as Singleton observes, these spirits can move from sphere to sphere and are not stationary. Later in *Paradiso* when Dante reaches the eighth circle, he sees spirits whom he had seen earlier, now seated together, although he had met them in different spheres. Singleton further emphasizes that Dante is following Thomas Aquinas²²⁸ here in regard to the movement of the spirits in heaven: they cannot

²²⁵ Singleton, *Commentary: Paradiso*, 64

²²⁶ In 1274, Dante was nine and the spirituals movement was born in the uprising in the Marche of Ancona.

²²⁷ Singleton, *Commentary: Paradiso*, 66.

²²⁸ Ibid, 66: cited from Singleton: from *Summa Theologia*, Tertia, Suppl., Qu. Lxix, Art. 3, and Qu. Lxxxiv, Art. I and 2; also in *De Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra Gentiles*, IV, lxxxvi.

lose sight of God regardless of which sphere they are in. This is also confirmed in the above quote.²²⁹

The moon is the lowest of the spheres and thus lowest in received beatitude; it is the slowest moving of the heavenly bodies. This means that the spirits whom Dante places in this sphere are the lowest in the hierarchy of heaven. The spirit whom Dante speaks within the sphere of the moon is Piccarda Donati, the daughter of Simone Donati and sister to Gemma Donati, Dante's wife. Piccarda later reveals that she entered the convent of the Clarisses in Monticelli, near Florence. Here Piccarda speaks of St. Clare and joining the order:

Perfect life and high merit enheaven a lady more aloft," she said to me, "according to whose rule, in your world below, are those who take the robe and veil themselves that they, even till death, may wake and sleep with that Spouse who accepts every vow which love conforms unto His pleasure. From the world, to follow her, I fled while yet a girl, and in her habit I clothed me and promised myself to the way of her order. (*Paradiso*, Canto III, 89-105)

Saint Clare is not in this sphere, as Piccarda says: "Perfect life and high merit enheaven a lady more aloft."²³⁰ Clare was a canonized saint, which one might suspect should grant her far greater beatitude. She was one of the earliest followers of Francis and may have been co-founder of the Franciscan order; given that Francis is in the White Rose, the highest sphere, we might suppose Clare should be near the top too. Regardless of

²²⁹ Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Canto III, 33: "Then was it clear to me how everywhere in Heaven is Paradise, even if the grace of the Supreme good does not there rain down in one same measure."

²³⁰ Singleton, *Commentary: Paradiso*, 71-72: Singleton suggests that this is in reference to St Clare's residence in a sphere closer to God than the spirits in the Moon, or at least than Piccarda

her specific placement, which is not necessarily the importance of paradise, she is given a grand position and is mentioned in the sphere of the moon, which recalls Francis's "Cantic of the Creatures":

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.²³¹
(Thomas of Celano)

Dante's image of Clare is also reminiscent of Thomas of Celano's words in *Life of St. Francis*:

The Lady Clare,
a native of the city of Assisi,
the most precious and strongest stone of the whole structure,
stands as the foundation for all the other stones.²³² (Thomas of Celano)

Dante elevates Clare among the saints as one who inspires others to "accept every vow which love conforms unto His pleasure"; he alludes to the possibility of Clare's placement in a higher sphere, which establishes her with the same grandeur Thomas of Celano endows on her. Her glory and divine love stand as reflective of the love of God. There may also be historical reasons for Dante's lack of precision regarding the placement of Clare in heaven. Clare was "outside" the Franciscan order since she was a woman, and her role within the order was not entirely defined. Yet, Thomas of Celano boldly calls her the "foundation" of the order and suggests she was one of Francis's earliest followers. We might therefore infer that at the beginning Clare was regarded in the same manner as

herself. However, this is the only direct reference to Clare, it is unknown where Dante placed her in *Paradiso*.

²³¹ From *The Early Documents: The Saint*, Francis of Assisi, "The Cantic of the Creatures," 113-114

Francis's male followers. However, this depiction of Clare would shift in the later writings of Thomas of Celano and certainly in those of Bonaventure.

At the heart of the spirituals' argument were the writings of Brother Leo and Thomas of Celano, since they were among the earliest followers of Francis, and each had personal connections with the historical Clare: Thomas of Celano served as director of the Clarisse in Tagliacozza, where he eventually died; Brother Leo spent the remainder of Clare's years with her and was by her side when she died in 1253. He also wrote the life of Clare, and like her died at the Porziuncola outside of Assisi.²³³ After the intervention of the papacy,²³⁴ Clare was not permitted as much freedom within the order as she once had. We might suppose that Dante's placement of her, or rather his lack of placing her in any particular sphere of heaven, intends to convey the idea that she is beyond the jurisdiction of the church and perhaps he is restoring to her the freedom that was taken from her on earth. The spirituals served Clare in a similar way. They kept her intentions alive by protecting her image and historical importance, and by protecting the writings of her followers.²³⁵

²³² From *The Early Documents: The Saint*. Thomas of Celano, "The Life of St. Francis," 197

²³³ The order began at the Porziuncola, near Assisi. In 1211 Francis received Clare there on Palm Sunday. The general meetings of the chapter were held there and in 1226 Francis, while on his deathbed, was brought back to the Porziuncola. This small church holds great religious importance for the order.

²³⁴ Intervention began in 1209/10 with Pope Innocent III, when *The Earlier Rule* was approved, but in 1223 *The Later Rule* received an official papal seal from Pope Honorius III, and since then the papacy approved 1223 document has been the official document used by the Franciscans of the First Order (Conventual, Capuchin Friars and Leonine Union), the Sisters of Saint Clare, and the Religious and Secular Third Order. [see *The Early Documents: The Saint*, "Introduction" to "The Later Rule," 99]

²³⁵ Although her writings were not well preserved, the image Thomas of Celano and Brother Leo preserved of Clare was truer to her nature than Bonaventure's portrait of Clare.

There is also the further description of Clare provided by Thomas of Celano. He continues by explaining the seven greatest virtues of St Clare and her sisters, the Poor Clares:

Seventh,
and finally,
they [the Poor Clares] have so merited the height of contemplation
that they learn in it everything they should do or avoid,
and they know how to go beyond the mind of God with joy,
preserving night and day
in praising Him and praying to Him.²³⁶ (Thomas of Celano)

Dante's mention of Clare in the sphere of the moon may be rooted in Thomas of Celano's description of the Poor Clares: she preserves night and day, as Celano states. Subsequently Dante will mention Francis in the sphere of the sun. Clare and Francis are then mentioned in equal parts in the spheres of the moon and the sun, respectively. Dante makes allusions to Clare and Francis in these spheres, although he does not place them in there. Therefore, Clare and Francis, together, are an allusion to a complete day.

Ending Canto III is one of the 'most resplendent' souls in the sphere with Piccarda, whom Dante singles out as Constance the Norman (1154-98), wife of the Emperor Henry VI (1165-1197), and mother of Frederick II (1194-1250). It is here we must recall, as is the common request of the poet, an earlier canto in order to make sense of the whole structure and the fuller picture. In *Purgatorio* Canto III, Dante places Frederick III (1272-1337),²³⁷ king of Sicily, "the pride of Sicily

²³⁶ From *The Early Documents: The Saint*. Thomas of Celano, "The Life of St Francis," 199

²³⁷ Frederick III died excommunicated

and Aragon,” and “grandson of the empress Constance...”²³⁸ Frederick III had protected the Tuscan spirituals in 1312 when they rebelled against the papacy. He provided them amnesty.²³⁹ This event coincides with Dante’s composition of the *Purgatorio* (1308 and 1312), which falls precisely at the time of Frederick’s protection of the rebellious spirituals. Moreover, it occurred in the area where Dante is thought to have been between 1308 and 1312, Tuscany. Knowing this, we might conclude that Dante is asking the reader first to regard Clare in the literal sense, as a member of the “foundation” of the Franciscan movement and deserving of a high place in paradise; second, to regard Clare in relation to the moon in the allegorical sense, as provided us by the protected writings of Thomas of Celano; third, to regard Clare in a moral context. Again Dante has adopted a message promoted by the spirituals in the protected texts of Thomas of Celano and Brother Leo: Clare deserves the freedom in heaven she had as a teacher on earth. It is Piccarda who speaks of Clare, a member of Dante’s extended family, and a woman whose vows were violated, but who still maintains a place in *Paradiso* because of her love and commitment to Clare; and finally, in the fourth anagogical representation, beyond the senses, it is through this a hidden message to the spirituals may be found.

Canto III of the *Inferno* occurs at the moment just before Virgil and Dante enter through the gate to hell. Here they meet those who are neither good nor evil, but rather did nothing to benefit humanity. One of those is Pope Celestine V

²³⁸ Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, Canto III, 31

whose papacy ended after five months in 1294 with his abdication “who from cowardice made the great refusal.”²⁴⁰ Singleton and others suggest the reason for Celestine’s placement outside hell is that his abdication led to the pontificate of Boniface VIII (1294-1303), who would largely be responsible for Dante’s exile and persecute the spiritual Franciscans. This is relevant to the case of the spirituals because Dante has not arbitrarily chosen a do-nothing pope as the shade at the gate of hell, but rather he has chosen someone who was guilty of inaction, a person who could have saved the eventual judgment of the poet and the persecution of the spirituals.

There still remains the question whether this figure is meant to represent Celestine V. But Singleton cites the biography of Dante’s son, Pietro di Dante,²⁴¹ who wrote:

I believe he [Dante] places among them Frate Pietro da Morrone, who is known as Pope Celestine V. He could have led as holy and as spiritual a life in the papacy as he had in his hermitage: and yet, he pusillanimously renounced the papacy, which is the seat of Christ.²⁴² (Singleton)

This also relates to the spirituals in suggesting that Celestine suffered for his weakness, but lived a ‘spiritual life’ in the end, and is only placed lowly for what he did not do and the lost potential for what he could have done.

Canto III of *Inferno*, Canto III of *Purgatorio* and, Canto III of *Paradiso* all relate to Franciscans, however concealed their message might be. Together they

²³⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 164; and as mentioned in chapter VI

²⁴⁰ Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto III, 60

²⁴¹ Singleton, *Commentary: Inferno*, 58: suggests ‘probably 1340’

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 59

build to a portrait of Clare and those who represented her, the spirituals. In these early cantos of each book, Dante may be asking the reader to look for a concealed message of the spirituals movement.

b. Canto X: The Sun and Canto XI: The Life of Francis

It should be known that just as our most holy father Francis is, after Christ and under Christ, the first and chief founder, initiator, and exemplar of the sixth status and its evangelical rule, so he, after Christ, is primarily designated by this angel. As a sign of this in fact, he appeared transfigured in a fiery chariot in the sun, so that it might be evident that has come in the spirit and the image of Elijah, as well as to bear the perfect image of the true sun, Jesus Christ.²⁴³ (Olivi)

Canto X depicts the circle of the theologians in the sphere of the Sun. Here Dante has given Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the great Dominican theologian, and Bonaventure (1221-1274), his Franciscan counterpart, central positions. Aquinas and Bonaventure are the intellectual fathers of the Dominican and Franciscan orders respectively, as these orders were by the second quarter of the thirteenth century officially integrated within the organization of the Roman church. Dante had received an education from members of both orders at the religious schools of Florence²⁴⁴ and frequently refers to the writings of both Thomas and Bonaventure. In Canto XI, Dante has Aquinas describe the origins of the Franciscan order and the life of Francis, and equally has Bonaventure describe the origins of the Dominican order and the life of Saint Dominic. In Francis's own writings he gives the sun the highest credit of all creatures:

²⁴³ John Olivi, *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "Commentary on the Book of Revelation," 815

Praised be to You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
 Especially Sir Brother Sun,
 Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
 And bears a likeness of You, Most High One.²⁴⁵ (Saint Francis)

The sun is an image particularly associated with Francis, especially because of its association with Christ. However, the relationship between Francis and the sun is not final, for both allude to and signify Christ, the light of the world. In this respect, the spirituals depart from their brother Franciscans and Bonaventure.

In Canto XI Dante depicts Francis by an allusion to the sun, which follows the spirituals' depiction of Francis, as found in *The Assisi Compilation* and in Thomas of Celano's various lives of Francis; and this depiction goes against the Bonaventurian presentation of Francis as a physical reflection of God on earth. In Canto XI, Aquinas describes Francis:

...a fertile slope hangs from a lofty mountain wherefrom Perugia feels cold and heat through Porta Sole, while behind it Nocera and Gualdo grieve under a heavy yoke. From this slope, where most it breaks its steepness a sun rose on the world, even as this is wont to rise from Ganges. (*Paradiso*, Canto XI, 121)

It is here I argue that Dante departs from the official position advanced by Bonaventure and the Franciscan order and sides with the spirituals in their interpretation of Saint Francis and his legacy. Ubertino da Casale's famous work, *The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus* (*Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu Christi*),

²⁴⁴ See chapter VI

published around the year 1305,²⁴⁶ around the time Dante was probably composing his *Inferno*, provides a different interpretation of Francis from Bonaventure's. Ubertino presents the earthly life of Francis as the key to the imitation of Christ, and it is this that Francis prescribed for his followers. It is this life that flourished with Francis, then was abandoned by most members of the order. And yet Francis's order will rise up again at the end of the world.

For if we are to talk of the way he lived, who is capable of telling in full how he sought to imitate the closest likeness to the life of Christ? His whole aim, in public and in private, was to reproduce in himself and in others those footprints of Christ which had been covered over and forgotten.

I who write this am convinced, by the many testimonies of holy brothers of the past, that clear revelations were made to the blessed Francis and to many companions of his – whose apostolic life is beyond suspicion to the mind that is not dishonest, envious, or twisted – concerning the Order from its foundation, through its growth, dreadful decline and fall, to its glorious resurgence; rather like the sun's course, which in turn portrays the life of Christ. These things were revealed not to one person only but to many, and so explicitly that they [those who knew Francis] recounted them with absolute assurance.²⁴⁷ (Ubertino da Casale)

I believe it is in this view that Dante follows the voice of the spirituals and maintains their closely-held image of Francis and of the Franciscan order as following the course of the sun. It had been Francis's fear that the order would not follow his *Testament*, and so it came to pass that only four years after his death the order turned away from his final wishes. But Bonaventure presented the

²⁴⁵ St. Francis of Assisi, *Early Documents: The Saint*, "Canticle to the Creatures," 113

²⁴⁶ From *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "Introduction" to "The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus Book Five (Excerpts) by Ubertino da Casale (1305)," 141

²⁴⁷ Ubertino da Casale, from *The Early Documents: The Prophet*, "The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus," 149-150

matter differently. The “sun” for Bonaventure and the order alluded to Francis because the light of Francis now cast light upon the order from heaven. The Franciscan order did not witness a “decline and fall” as stated by Ubertino, since papal support had provided every opportunity for the order’s growth. The light of Francis shone on them continuously as a heavenly beacon, a sun rising, brightly shining.

Ubertino’s cold words tracing the “dreadful decline and fall” of the order echoed the spirituals’ view. The light of Francis did not always shine for them; it came in cycles; with day comes night. To Ubertino, with the order’s abandonment of *usus pauper* and the revision of the life of Francis under the direction of Bonaventure, the sun had set when the wishes of the mortal Francis had been abandoned. But as with the course of the sun, a new day came with the spirituals who faithfully preserved *usus pauper*, the “true” wishes of the founder, and the special revelations given by God to Francis and his early companions.

The course of the sun and the course of the spiritual Franciscans mirror one another closely. Dante’s placement of Clare in *Paradiso* completes this picture. Clare is not only the other half of the early Franciscan movement, but is the one who dwelled in darkness by not receiving the full light of Francis. But she lived in the night of Francis’s day, when the papacy intervened. She continued to preserve her order as Francis had wished. The spirituals, through a reliance on the writings of brothers close to both Francis and Clare, preserved the light of the sun,

although living in the darkness of the papacy and witnessing the decline and fall of Francis's dream. Rather than Francis being the beacon sun which the order and Bonaventure saw as constantly shining on them in their representation of Christ, Dante adopts the image provided by Ubertino, a cyclical sun rising and setting, and the moon rising. And through this process the sun again rises, being in unity with the memory of the first sun; while in the darkness of the moon, the sun can rise again. It is the spirituals who embraced this picture of the sun and the moon as representing their changing fortune as they awaited the final age.

The sphere of the sun is also a reference to the theologians who brings the light of divine knowledge; they are presented together here to demonstrate Dante's appreciation of the theologians, independently of their orders. It is for this reason as well why Dante will later mention other prominent theologians including Joachim. Of particular interest, however, is his placement of Joachim of Fiore and Siger of Brabant among these theologians:

and beside me shines the Calabrian abbot Joachim, who was
endowed with prophetic spirit. (*Paradiso*, Canto XII, 139)

Bernard McGinn suggests that Dante is subtly challenging Bonaventure and Aquinas by placing them in the circle of theologians with their great opponents: Joachim di Fiore and Siger of Brabant (1240-1280s). It was Bonaventure who examined Joachim's writings and sought to rework them to conform with his theology history, the official position of the Franciscan order. Dante places Joachim, a great opponent of Bonaventure, alongside one another theologian, the monk Siger of Brabant, a fierce opponent of Aquinas. McGinn

suggests this reinforces Dante's picture of heaven as a place of reconciliation, which would further suggest that these cantos are thus meant to illustrate that the theologians do not show a preference for one over the other. Dante displays great respect for these theologians by placing them in the sphere of the sun. Even though in life they disagreed with one another, Dante does not distinguish any rankings in this sphere, so each theologian is deserving of this exalted placement in his own right. After all, one may choose whichever theological view one wishes, as all are infused by the light from heaven. The spirituals chose to follow the theology of Joachim and, perhaps, so did Dante, since it was the spirituals who remained truest to the message of Francis's life and mission.

Although Dante indeed shows equal respect for Aquinas and Bonaventure as theologians, the issue of his closer affiliation with the Franciscan order over the Dominican order is still open to question. Dante shows gratitude to both because of his education, but we might conjecture that his greater spiritual and religious affiliation was with the Franciscans. The messages in these cantos refer to the image of the sun, which is Francis.

This allusion to Francis in Canto XII as allegorically represented by the sun, like Christ, is derived from the role of the saint as the mirror of perfection,²⁴⁸ the reflected image of Christ; and in this respect Francis had much more of an identification with Christ than all other saints. St. Francis's wounds were the first

²⁴⁸ Thomas of Celano was the first to use this term to describe St. Francis: "Rather, overflowing with burning charity, he set out on the way of full perfection, reached out for the peak of perfect holiness, and saw the goal of all perfection." This term became the standard address of the saint, particularly with the spirituals. from *Trilogy of St. Francis*, "Life of St. Francis," 100

recognized case of stigmata by the church. No other saint before him had been granted the impression of Christ's suffering in his very body. This gave Francis a most elevated position in the history of the church, and made him an extraordinarily important figure in the 13th century. Bonaventure and authorities in the Church would interpret the stigmata to mean that this saint was far more than a mortal man and far more than an ordinary saint. Francis was Christ's perfect model on earth; but the physical, earthly life of the saint was to be seen as secondary in importance to the heavenly image and role of the saint:

The grace of God our Savior has appeared in these last days in his servant Francis²⁴⁹ (Bonaventure)

Having the sign of the living God; and "messenger of God",²⁵⁰ (Bonaventure)

The earthly Francis yields to and is transformed into the divine St. Francis. Francis would thus become more important in death than in life. But this reading of Francis the spirituals rejected. They obviously saw the life and works of Francis as critically important. They saw him as a reflection of Christ, but his actions on earth were as important as his actions in heaven. Francis's life and significance were not to be spiritualized so as to render his earthly self merely of secondary importance. Like Christ, Francis was a teacher who embraced the poor and who held nothing for himself, which Francis saw as important to preserve. The earthly life, mission, and legacy of Francis was crucial to preserve as a

²⁴⁹ Bonaventure, *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Major Legend," 525

²⁵⁰ Bonaventure, *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "Major Legend," 527

divinely revealed path to spiritual protection. Thomas of Celano in fact depicts Francis as a signifier referring to Christ through his actions on earth:

The Man of God, the blessed Francis
 had been taught not to seek his own salvation,
 but what he discerned would help the salvation of others.
 More than anything else he desired
 to be set free and to be with Christ
 to live free from all things that are in the world,
 so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed
 even for a moment.²⁵¹ (Thomas of Celano)

Though he often preached the word of God among thousands of people, he was as confident as if he were speaking with a close friend. He used to view the largest crowd of people as if it were a single person, and he would preach fervently to a single person as if to a large crowd.

As he brought forth the word from his mouth,
 he moved his feet as if dancing,
 not playfully but burning with the fire of divine love,
 not provoking laughter but moving them to tears of sorrow.
 For many of them were touched in their hearts,
 amazed at the grace of God
 and the great determination of the man.²⁵² (Thomas of Celano)

Thomas of Celano also recounts a story of Francis traveling through the Marche of Ancona with a companion, Paul, when they came across a shepherd with a flock of goats; but one sheep was grazing alone:

When blessed Francis saw it, he stopped in his tracks, and touched with sorrow in his heart, he groaned loudly, and said to the brother accompanying him: “Do you see that sheep walking so meekly among those goats? I tell you, in the same way our Lord Jesus Christ, meek and humble, walked among the Pharisees and chief priests. So I ask you, my son, in your love for Him to share my compassion for this little sheep. After we have paid for it, let us

²⁵¹ Thomas of Celano, *The Early Documents: The Saint*, “The Life of Saint Francis,” 243

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 244-245

lead the little one from the midst of these goats.”²⁵³ (Thomas of Celano)

They saved the life of the sheep and gave “it to the care of the maidservants of Christ in the cloister of San Sverino.” This is one instance among many which Thomas describes in the *Life of Francis* where Francis is actively seeking to replicate the life of Christ in the action of doing good deeds and inspiring his brothers to do the same. Here Francis comes to save “the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt 10:5-6)

Dante therefore turns to the writings the spirituals use, especially those of Thomas of Celano, which dominate *The Assisi Compilation*. For Thomas of Celano, as the spirituals perceived, Francis was more than the mirror of Christ; and more than God’s messenger; he was a teacher like Christ and it was the purpose of the spirituals to preserve this image of Francis. I believe Dante’s depiction of Francis follows this image of Francis: the mirror of Christ’s earthly ministry, actively living and teaching the life of Christ and guiding them to heaven.

d. *Paradiso*, Canto XII: Bonaventure laments

After Bonaventure describes the origins of the Dominicans, he laments the state of his own order because of the laxness and dereliction of his men.

But the track made by the topmost part of its rim is derelict; so that there is mould where the crust was. His [Francis’s] household, which set out aright with their feet upon his footprints, is so turned about that the forward foot moves to that behind; and soon shall be seen some harvest of the bad tillage, when the tare will complain

²⁵³ Ibid., 248

that the bin is taken from it. Nevertheless, I say, he who should search our volume leaf by leaf might still find a page where he would read, “I am as I always was”; but it will not be from Casale or from Acquasparta, whence come such to the writing that one shuns it and the other contracts it.

I am the living soul of Bonaventura of Bagnorea, who in the great offices always put the left-hand care behind. (*Paradiso*, Canto XII, 137)

Some scholars²⁵⁴ have taken this passage to mean that Dante was against the spirituals, or at least critical of them because of the sentiments Bonaventure reveals about Ubertino da Casale. David Burr uses this passage to suggest that:

[Dante is] also censuring Ubertino da Casale, spokesman for the spiritual Franciscans in Dante’s time...

In any case, these lines suggest that the notion of Bonaventure as defender of the *via media* was already available in the early fourteenth century.²⁵⁵

We might, however, also look at the passage in a different light. It has been Dante’s style for the entire *Commedia* that, in writing what the person he portrays would say, he gives what is reasonable for the figure to say; but this may not necessarily be Dante’s opinion. We can affirm however that these lines are an accurate reflection of Bonaventure’s attitude toward the spirituals, as led by Ubertino, and the lax observers of the rule, as led by Matthew of Aquasparta (about 1235-1302). As general minister of the order from 1253 to 1274, Bonaventure, was intent on steering the order as he saw its mission; and his life of Francis would reflect his own vision of Francis’s theological significance. His writings on Francis would become the official documents on the life of the saint.

Bonaventure's authority would make clear for all Franciscans who Francis was in God's eternal design. As defender of the order, Bonaventure thus defines what the order should be. Ubertino and Aquasparta, on the other hand, were seen by Bonaventure as defiantly arguing for different interpretations of Francis and different modes of adherence to the rule of the order. Thus Dante's depiction of Bonaventure's speech should not be taken to be Dante's own opinion, but rather the traditional view of Bonaventure. Dante finishes this passage with Bonaventure's assertion of his own identity ("I am the living soul and Bonaventura of Bagnorea"), which may further support the argument that Dante is here reminding the reader of his own detachment from the argument put forth by Bonaventure.

It is also important to note that Dante's Aquinas also conveys the distress as to the direction of his own order, the Dominicans. These men are in the circle of the theologians and are representing – and criticizing – their orders, since as theologians on earth they did so much to keep them safe from laxity. We cannot therefore say Dante repudiates the spirituals because he condemns Ubertino; we can say Dante acknowledges that Bonaventure would condemn Ubertino and the spirituals because Ubertino deviated from the image of Francis upheld by Bonaventure. Dante too would be rebuked by Bonaventure, since he too adopted the image of Francis presented by Ubertino and the spirituals. Following this

²⁵⁴ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979), 304; and Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 35-36

²⁵⁵ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 35

argument, Dante's presentation of Bonaventure's lamented over the division in the order regarding the interpretation of Francis's Rule in Canto XII would include Dante himself, since his image of Francis in Canto X and Canto XI strays from Bonaventure's.

Giuseppe Mazzotta comments on this passage of Aquinas's and Bonaventure's attack on the directions of their orders:

This interpretive crisis dramatizes, in a primary way, the moral degeneracy of both Franciscans and Dominicans... the followers of Francis have equally wandered off the path of their founder and have betrayed his message.²⁵⁶

Mazzotta's analysis addresses the glaring fact that it is Bonaventure who speaks, not Dante. Previous scholars had taken this passage as demonstrative of Dante's own attitude. This, however, fails to take into account that much of the *Commedia* consists of political perspectives of figures involved which contradict Dante's own. Mazzotta continues:

...the split between literalists and spiritualists both shows that Francis's followers have converted his message into half-dead significations, and exemplifies the inevitable error inherent in the interpretation of texts.²⁵⁷

Mazzotta's statement represents the traditional interpretation of Ubertino in this passage. However, here I argue that it is inaccurate to claim that Bonaventure's criticism of Ubertino represents Dante's own views of the man. And even if Dante had intended to discredit Ubertino, it would not necessarily mean that Dante was not a follower of the spirituals' movement. The reason could

²⁵⁶ Mazzotta, *Poet of the Desert*, 304

be quite otherwise. Ubertino was less popular within the spirituals for his loud and uncompromising attitude toward the papacy, which would eventually lead to his excommunication in 1325. Ubertino was also famous for not practicing what he preached. He would litigiously demand strict observance to the rule and then intimately converse with women or wear less than a poor man's clothing.²⁵⁸ Dante's "attack" (Bonaventure's attack) on Ubertino should best be viewed in this light: Ubertino, although the spokesman for the spirituals, did not practice or embody the actual life of the spirituals and was thus reprehensible. Dante's creation of a space for Bonaventure to express criticism of Ubertino is fair, but it is a stretch to equate that with Dante's attitude toward the spirituals as a whole. This is, however, contrary to Mazzotta's reading of the canto. As a follower of the spirituals, Dante might well have been discouraged with Ubertino as a spiritual, not because Ubertino was a spiritual.

A further possibility for Dante's reference Ubertino in Canto XII is that in 1317 Pope John XXII ordered Ubertino to enter the Benedictine order. Ubertino had been the spokesman of the spirituals for years; and with John's persecution of the spirituals heightening, he began to give ultimatums to a number of the spirituals brethren. Ubertino, however, remained defiant. He insisted on maintaining strict obedience to the rule as the spirituals interpreted it, and as the spirituals' spokesman this made him very powerful and influential. For this reason Pope John XXII targeted him. Angelo Clareno and the other spirituals reacted

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 304

swiftly, fighting to protect Ubertino; and eventually John decided the best action he could take was to reassign Ubertino to the Benedictine order.²⁵⁹ As this was occurring in 1317, Dante was in the process of writing *Paradiso*. This might well provide yet another reason for Dante's mention of Ubertino in Canto XII, for not only does it address the attacks Ubertino suffered (as declared by Dante's Bonaventure), but it asserts that Ubertino is now no longer a Franciscan and has thus "shunned" the order.²⁶⁰

e. Canto XXII: The Fixed Stars and St. Benedict

In Canto XXII Dante has reached the seventh sphere, Saturn, where the contemplatives reside. Having climbed the celestial staircase, Dante now meets St. Benedict. St. Benedict is indignant at the lack of adherence to his *Rule*:

The flesh of mortals is so soft that on earth a good beginning does not last from the springing of the oak to the bearing of the acorn. Peter began his fellowship without gold or silver, and I mine with prayer and with fasting, and Francis his with humility; and if you look at the beginning of each, and then look again whither it has strayed, you will see the white changed to dark. Nevertheless, Jordan driven back, and the sea fleeing when God willed, were sights more wondrous than the succor here. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXII, 251)

Benedict praises Francis for his humility. Although the concerns voiced here may not be Dante's own concerns, it is important that he has chosen to address the issues of the decline of religious life and the original poor lifestyle of the papacy. Significantly, only the spirituals retained their original fervor, and

²⁵⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 48

²⁵⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 262 and Singleton *Commentary: Paradiso*, 216-217

²⁶⁰ Alghieri, *Paradiso*, Canto XII, 126

now they were under attack for their strict adherence to the Rule of St. Francis. Benedict singles out Francis as preserving the path of humility.

Dante might also allude to the great fortune he had to have been born under the influence of the twin stars of Gemini. As Singleton notes: “the sun, ‘padre d’ogne mortal vita,’ was rising and setting with Gemini when Dante first breathed ‘the Tuscan air.’” (Singleton, *Paradiso: Commentary*, 366)

O glorious stars, O light impregnated with mighty power, from which I derive all my genius, whatsoever it may be, with you was rising and with you was hiding himself he who is father of every mortal life when I first felt the air of Tuscany; and then, when the grace was bestowed on me to enter the lofty wheel that bears you round, your region was assigned to me! To you my soul now devoutly sighs, that it may acquire virtue for the hard pass which draws it to itself. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXII, 112-123)

Singleton notes that Dante had a particular appreciation for astrology. However, this recollection of Dante’s childhood might take also him back to when he first met the spiritual Franciscans.²⁶¹ In the canto where Benedict laments the departure of the Benedictines from his Rule, Dante recalls his childhood and birth in the very region where the spirituals were particularly active. I believe a message lies hidden here: in the voice of Benedict Francis is presented as a model of humility and he is placed together with Peter and Benedict. All this precedes Dante’s recollection of his birth. Dante therefore might be creating an association between himself, Tuscany, and the humility of Francis and his spiritual brethren. The spirituals were the strict adherents to Francis’s Rule, who continued to observe scrupulously the *usus pauper*, the most

important path to humility according to Francis. Dante could therefore be associating Tuscany with the Franciscans original commitment to the Rule and the humility of their founder.

f. Canto XXVII: St. Peter

Canto XXVII does not directly address St. Francis or the Franciscans; however, we can discern a large pattern coinciding with Franciscan ascetical theology. Aversano puts forth a theory on Franciscan theology in the *Commedia*. Although Francis is not mentioned in Canto XXVII, Aversano suggests that the content of St. Peter's *Invective* and Beatrice's statements in this canto follow Franciscan theology.²⁶² Aversano finds this Franciscan theological structure in the attainment of Divine Love through "sapienza" (wisdom) and "umilta" (humility); he sees charity and justice as the opposite of "cupidigia" (cupidity and greediness); and the Glory of God stands opposite to "cupidigia"; "cupidigia" is to avarice both in its material and "intellectual" sense, particularly as manifested through excessive ambition or lack of generosity, especially in the sharing of knowledge.

Aversano examines this canto as reflecting Francis's theology. He states that any strange imagery should not be overlooked and can be viewed as doctrinal in meaning. Aversano suggests that the two planets turning into birds and the redness of St. Peter's face are examples of this weird imagery:

²⁶¹ See Chapter V

Before my eyes the four torches stood enkindled, and that which had come first began to make itself more vivid, [St. Peter] and in its aspect became as would Jupiter if he and Mars were birds and should exchange plumage. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 301)

If I change color marvel not, for as I speak, you shall see all these change color. He who on earth usurps my place, my place, my place, which in the sight of the Son of God is vacant, has made my burial-ground a sewer of blood and of stench, so that the Perverse One who fell from here above takes comfort there. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 301)

Here lies a reference to Ezechiel's prophecy,²⁶³ and Aversano argues that this provides the imagery and language for Dante in this canto. St. Peter is very angry as to how the office of the papacy has gone the wrong direction as it wages war against baptized Christians:

...nor that the keys which were committed to me should become the ensign on a banner for warfare on the baptized; one that I should be made a figure on a seal to sold and lying privileges, whereat I often blush and flash. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 305)

Aversano contends that this prophecy is also based on Franciscan theology, particularly in its emphasis on the themes of divine love and glory as known through "sapienza" (wisdom/knowledge) and "umiltà" (humility.) This message is seen in the words of Beatrice:

...And this heaven has no other Where than the divine mind, wherein is kindled the love that revolves it, and the virtue which it rains down. Light and love enclose it in a circle, as it does the others, and this engirdment He alone girds it understands. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 309)

²⁶² Aversano, "Capitolo V: Francescanesimo e profezia nel canto XXVII del *Paradiso*," 127-133

²⁶³ Ezechiel's prophecies are also referenced in the writings of Thomas of Celano, especially in his first *The Life of Saint Francis* 115, 121, 122-123, 124, 125. This may further substantiate the argument of a relationship between Dante and the spirituals through the Ezechiel references in this canto as relating to the spirituals, particularly in the Franciscan theology of this canto. However, I will not go into this connection further here.

Charity and justice should war against “cupidigia,” and only with their defeat does the glory of God shine forth. Dante, like the Franciscans, understands cupidity in both the material sense and the intellectual sense, particularly in the lack of generosity in sharing knowledge:

O Greed, who do so plunge mortals in your depths and that none has power to lift his eyes from your waves. The will blossoms well in men, but the continual rain turns the sound plums into blighted fruit. Faith and innocence are found only in children...Thus the white skin turns black at the first sight of the fair daughter of him that brings morning and leaves evening.
(*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 309)

Aversano sees Dante as juxtaposing the “wisdom of this world” (*sapientia huius mundi*), which is vain and greedy, with its opposite, the wisdom that derives from the kind of humility and charity that Francis typified.²⁶⁴ Similarly, he sees Dante opposing the “glory of God” with the “glory of man.” In the canto Peter calls on Dante to preach this to the world, to spread the message of change:

And you, my son, who, because of your mortal weight will again return below, open your mouth and do not hide what I hide not.
(*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 305)

Dante ends with the hope that this new path can be found:

But before January be all unwintered, because of the hundredth part that is neglected below, these lofty circles shall so shine forth that the storm which has been so long awaited shall turn round the sterns to where the prows are, so that the fleet shall run straight; and good fruit shall follow the flower.

²⁶⁴ Aversano, “Capitolo V: Francescanesimo e profezia nel canto XXVII del *Paradiso*,” 123 and 132-134: “L’interpretazione del programma di San Francesco d’Assisi (per Dante *padre e maestro* insieme: coppia di appellativi riconoscibile soltanto a Cristo) come milizia culturale contro la *sapienza huius mundi* (anche erectica) può contare sul concetto biblico – cui fa da cassa di risonanza l’esegesi dei Padri e dei filosofi medioevali – dell’opposizione *Gloria Domini-gloria hominis*, che pervade gli *Scritti* e la leggenda del Santo.”

(*Paradiso*, Canto XXVII, 311)

The Franciscan order (the general order) in the early 1300's still professed these religious ideals. However, the spirituals among them sought to make these far more rigorous by demanding a strict adherence to the Rule, because they believed the order had deviated from Francis's intentions and had accepted Bonaventure's interpretations instead.

As Dante was writing this, Pope Clement V began persecuting the spirituals in 1309, and in 1315 Pope John XXII began the extreme attacks on the spirituals. Dante hardly disguises his criticism of the papacy in these cantos of *Paradiso*. Although Dante does not explicitly come out in support of the spirituals he does, indirectly, praise the spirituals, for only they among all the religious orders mentioned still held to the original spirit and letter of the Rule of St. Francis. The spirituals were the only ones loyal to the spirit of their founder.

g. Canto XXXII: Primum Mobile, The White Rose

Canto XXXII is the eighth sphere of the fixed stars where the blessed reside. It is here Dante places Francis. It may indeed be surprising to find Francis placed so high in the celestial amphitheatre of the great saints, together with John the Baptist, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Lucy, St. Anne, and many others.

Dante, like the spirituals, places Francis the man directly beneath John the Baptist (the one who points towards Christ):

On the other side...sit those who turned their faces toward Christ already come. And as on the other side the glorious seat of the Lady of Heaven, and the other seats below it, make so great a partition, thus, opposite does the seat of great John who, ever holy,

endured the desert and martyrdom, and then Hell for two years;
and beneath him, Francis...(Paradiso, Canto XXXII, 365)

Although the mention of Francis is brief, Dante gives Francis the second most prominent place in the amphitheatre of the White Rose, just below John the Baptist. This may be a reference to Thomas of Celano's *Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul*, which describes Francis's mother intervening and prophesizing the future greatness of her child:

As if prompted by divine premonition, "What do you think this son of mine will become? You will see that he shall merit to become a son of God?"²⁶⁵ (Thomas of Celano)

This is far different from Thomas of Celano's earlier work, *The Life of St. Francis [Vita Prima]* where Francis's mother disagrees with her son's spiritual choice, but frees him from his father's chains. Here Thomas of Celano presents a traditional image of the saint in which the mother foresees her child's greatness, further alluding to his likeness to Christ. Following Thomas of Celano's writing, he then readdresses the name John over the name Francis:

The name John, refers to the mission which he received; the name Francis to the spread of his fame which quickly reached everywhere, once his turning to God was complete.²⁶⁶
(Thomas of Celano)

Thomas of Celano presents a clear picture of Francis as following the path to God by retracing the steps of Jesus. Thomas of Celano, as the originator of the term "mirror of perfection" when referring to Francis, then completes his idea

²⁶⁵ Thomas of Celano, *The Early Documents: The Founder*, "The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul," 242

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 242

that Francis was sent by God to follow the path of Jesus in life as an example for his followers. This is the reason the spirituals identified with the writings of Thomas of Celano, for he locates that path of Jesus in the historical facts of Francis's life, placing as much importance on the earthly life of Francis as teacher as he does on the spiritual significance of the saint.

Dante gives Francis a very high seat in Heaven, beneath John the Baptist and it is possible that his reference also comes from Thomas of Celano's text. Thomas of Celano goes on to further explain the significance of the name John as related to Francis:

Thus, he used to keep the feast of John the Baptist,
more solemnly than the feasts of all other saints,
because the dignity of this name,
marked him with a trace of mystical power.
This observation is worthy of note:
among all those born of women
there has never been one greater than John
and among all the founders of
religious communities there has never been
one more perfect than Francis.²⁶⁷ (Thomas of Celano)

Thomas of Celano has also drawn a connection to Francis and John the Baptist, which Dante does in Canto XXXII of *Paradiso*. This clue might also support the argument that Dante was a follower, or literary supporter, of the spiritual Franciscans. At least he seems deeply indebted to Thomas of Celano for stating this relationship between Francis and John the Baptist.

It is evident that when Thomas of Celano wrote *Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul*, the order was confronting the issue of its integration with the

church under the supervision of the papacy. Thomas of Celano needed to present Francis as obedient to the church, but he also wanted subtly to maintain the distinction between the historical life of Francis on earth and that of Francis in heaven. An example of this is the following passage. Thomas of Celano provides a story of Francis's imprisonment in a "massacre" in war between Perugia and Assisi. While others were sad, Francis was happy because he knew he would be a saint, "the whole world will worship me as a saint." It is here we see that although this image follows a pattern of greater reward in Paradise and Thomas of Celano presents Francis conforming to the pattern of "saint" on earth, the author is also clear in the distinction between Francis the man and Francis the saint. Francis recognizes he is holy; however, he recognizes that 'one day' the world will see him as a saint. The importance of his life was in this message to inspire happiness in others, and to teach others the path of Christ, and later he would be rewarded. This passage is atypical of Thomas of Celano, as it presents a less humble Francis. Thomas's earlier writings do not make the claim that Francis even knew he would be a saint. Francis is never aware of this future possibility. He is aware only of the love he has for Christ which compels him to follow Him as perfectly as he can. Thomas of Celano makes this artificial distinction here by writing of Francis's own awareness of himself on earth and how he will be in heaven. But Thomas of Celano's earlier works are clearly different. It is the earthly Francis's

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 242-243

imitation of Christ in the deeds of His life that God rewards; and it is this life that God invites us to follow.

One of the important reasons this distinction needed to be made was to protect the teachings of the founder, such as *usus pauper*, which was the basis of true humility, but also to encourage the brothers to roam freely and preach to the brethren, not in a monk's habit, which the church passionately insisted be worn. The spirituals, in following the tradition of Francis, saw the importance of preaching in freedom to people everywhere. Dante in his conclusion to Canto XXXII may further relate the hidden meaning of his work to this message of the spirituals:

I saw such gladness rain down upon her, borne in the holy minds
created to fly through that height, that all I had seen before had not
held me in suspense of such great marveling, nor showed me such
likeness to God. And that Love which first descended there,
singing "*Ave Maria, gratia plena*," now spread his wings before
her. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXII, 365)

Here we should recall the end of Canto III with its mention of St. Clare, where the angels sing Ave Maria. This is of course a song of praise to the Virgin, but it is potentially significant in Dante's use of a song to engage the auditory sense when writing. The use of song was important to Francis, and when we find song in Dante's cantos on Clare and Francis, we might suspect a connection to the two of them through song. Dante may be asking his readers to recall the practice of the Franciscans in the time of Francis who would both sing and preach to ordinary people outside the walls of a church, in the vernacular. Clare, a woman, most likely was part of this group as well. The men and women singing God's praises

to those who did not know Latin became the practice of the spirituals who roamed free of the confining walls of churches to preach and sing this message of love of God and love of the Virgin. It is possible that Dante is not only asking us to recall this act, but perhaps his theatrical²⁶⁸ writing style is even recreating the performance.

h. Canto XXXIII: The Trinity

Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son, humble and exalted more than any creature, fixed goal of the eternal counsel, thou art she who didst so enoble human nature that its Maker did not disdain to become its creature. In thy womb was rekindled the Love under whose warmth this flower in the eternal peace has thus unfolded. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 371)

Dante's final vision at the end of *Paradiso* occurs through the mediation of Saint Bernard and his prayers to the Virgin. Dante must depart from his beloved Beatrice, for she resides in the celestial amphitheatre. However, Francis too was a strong admirer of the Virgin and wrote exquisite hymns to her, such as "A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary":

Hail, O Lady,
Holy Queen,
Mary, holy Mother of God,
Who are the Virgin made Church,
Chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven
Whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son
And with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,
In whom there was and is
All fullness of grace and every good.²⁶⁹ (Saint Francis of Assisi)

²⁶⁸ Hypotyposis

²⁶⁹ *The Early Documents: The Saint*, "A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,"

Francis also places Mary in this exalted position; this however, was becoming more popular in the church. But to Dante Francis goes even further, seeing Mary as central in the final vision of God.²⁷⁰ Here Dante with Saint Bernard, as the great theologian of Mary, together venerate the Virgin:

Now this man, who from the lowest pit of the universe even to here
has seen one by one the spiritual lives, implores thee of thy grace
for power such that he may be able with his eyes to rise still higher
toward the last salvation. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 373)

Is Dante for one final time asking us to remember the wishes of Francis, as the spirituals had likely taught him, in venerating “the Virgin made Church”?

And hail all You holy virtues
Which are poured in the hearts of the faithful
Through the grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit,
That from being unbelievers,
You may make them faithful to God.²⁷¹ (Saint Francis of Assisi)

Dante concludes:

Here power failed the lofty phantasy; but already my desire and
my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the
Love which moves the sun and the other stars. (*Paradiso*, Canto
XXXIII, 381)

²⁷⁰ *The Early Documents: The Saint*, “Introduction,” 163: ‘This simple collection of titles forms a litany of greetings describing Mary’s role in the plan of salvation.’

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 163

CONCLUSION

This argument is a work in progress and would benefit from further research, but I hope that this goes toward opening the door on the impact the spirituals may have had on the writings of Dante. I believe their influence does not stop with the *Commedia*, but can found as early as the *Vita Nuova* and as late as the *De Monarchia*. Many scholars have examined such issues, but have stopped short of positing a formal historical connection between Dante and the spirituals. More work must be done to examine the revolt in the Marche of Ancona, which occurred in the same year as Dante first experienced a love for Beatrice. Could this be one of the earliest clues to Dante's love of the spirituals? A further area of investigation would be the impact of women mystics. Had time and space permitted, this thesis would have investigated this issue more deeply. I believe the impact of the women mystics may have initially influenced Dante. However, because their history is still so shrouded in obscurity, it will take much research first to discover them and then explore their connections with Dante. This is however extremely worthwhile.

Finally, the intent of this work was to draw connections between Dante and the spirituals through the integration of their works and their lives. The spirituals were an important and often highly vocal movement in the political and religious life of the 14th century as Dante's intellectual and poetic talents were being formed. He learned his theology and experienced his spiritual formation at the hands of many who were strongly inclined to the spirituals' vision, and they

should not be forgotten. I believe Dante did not forget them and his wish was that we never would either.

In conclusion I again remind the reader of the words of the poet Jorge Luis Borges:

“We are made for art, we are made for memory, we are made for poetry, or perhaps we are made for oblivion. But something remains, and that something is history or poetry, which are not essentially different.”²⁷² (Borges)

Perhaps it is a coincidence that many Dante scholars are also poets: Boccaccio was the first, Longfellow the first American translator, and of course Jorge Luis Borges. Perhaps it is a coincidence that poets and historians ask the same questions and find the same answers in the pages of Dante. However, this is perhaps the final purpose of Dante’s *Commedia*: that we do not differentiate between poetry and history, that poetry is for all of us and can protect history. Perhaps it is through this poetic tradition that the historical lives of the spirituals are both preserved and revealed. Perhaps it is not important to find an absolutely conclusive link between Dante and the spirituals, but the inquiring historian always seeks to find an answer, and that answer may live in the words of a poet who left us a hidden message. A part of that answer may be to tell us that we are only a memory, but as memory we live in history and poetry, which are essentially the same. The spirituals thus live in a memory, a memory which will live as long as the *Commedia* is present to the eyes of men and women.

²⁷² Borges, “The Divine Comedy,” 121



Figure 1: From *Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents* (Volumes I-III): Map Three.

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