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**Public Bodies and Private Spaces: locating cloistered  
contemplative discourses in female Franciscan spirituality in  
thirteenth-century Umbria.**

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**Ph.D.**

**Higher Degrees Committee, Faculty of Arts**

**Department of History, University of Glasgow**

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# **PUBLIC BODIES AND PRIVATE SPACES: LOCATING CLOISTERED CONTEMPLATIVE DISCOURSES IN FEMALE FRANCISCAN SANCTITY IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY UMBRIA.**

## **Abstract**

The thesis explores how far enclosure was pivotal in shaping the female Franciscan spirituality in thirteenth-century Umbria as cloistered and contemplative. It focuses on how enclosure influenced the development of representations of female urban sainthood, with particular reference to three Umbrian saints; Clare of Assisi, Clare of Montefalco and Angela of Foligno. The issue of enclosure came to the fore because of the success of the Franciscan movement in promoting the apostolic life, which emphasised the itinerant life, evangelisation and participation within the urban community. However, women who aspired to follow these values were instead directed towards introspective, contemplative seclusion. The claustration of Clare of Assisi exemplified this type of response. Using a combination of a wide range of sources, the nature of enclosure and the processes by which claustration was consistently articulated and promoted are reconstructed.

My research reveals that the creation of the cloistered ideal was a negotiated process. The first chapter, *Challenging the stabilitas loci*, examines the significance of hagiographic sources, in the form of *vitae* and canonisation proceedings, in revealing the nature of enclosure for religious women, and, by utilising a wide number of saintly examples, shows how often enclosure was in reality broken by women. The following two chapters concentrate on the construction of male textual authority and the importance they placed on the seclusion for religious women. Chapter 2, *The regularisation of chastity: between doctrine practice*, examines the theological arguments that were put forward in the development of monastic rules for women and how they reflected a trend that assumed that professed religious women ought to remain within the cloister. In doing so, the regularisation of the cloister emphasised the preservation of the chastity of nuns, through their affiliation to established orders, their supervision and material provision. Chapter 3, *The impact of enclosure on the development of the Rule of St. Clare* (1212-1253), concentrates on the consequences of the regularisation on the Franciscan second order. It examines the influence of Honorius III and Gregory IX, and Innocent IV on the regulation of conventual space in the *Rule of St. Clare*. The popes re-evaluated enclosure to make it a central tenet of her rule, to the detriment of the *cura mulierum* and her desire for absolute poverty.

The subsequent chapters analyse the extent to which enclosure was a mediated phenomena between the hagiographer, the saint and the saint's supporters.

Chapter 4, *Interpretations of monastic space: Clarissan contemplative spirituality and the conflicting pressures of enclosure and pilgrimage*, presents a caveat against the acceptance of the discourse of the cloister as hegemonic and wholly reflective of social reality. It repudiates recent studies, on Clarissan conventual space, which unquestioningly accepted representations of the Poor Clares as a cloistered order, and read the archaeological evidence of San Damiano as such.

Evidence from the *vitae* show that the competing pressures, a lack of material resources and the transformation of the convent into a pilgrimage site, prevented the implementation of a coherent plan. Chapter 5, *Duties to neighbours: miracle working as justification for breaking the cloister*, is a comparison between the canonisation proceedings and the *vita* of Clare of Montefalco. It reveals how the questions presented in the canonisation proceedings provide a framework of reference for witnesses testifying to the sanctity of Clare. While the questions reveal how the discourse of the cloister is constructed, the subjectivities of certain witness demonstrate disjuncture as they fail in their attempt to represent Clare as a cloistered contemplative abbess. Reading the *vita* against the canonisation proceedings reveals how her violations of the cloister were reframed as miracle-working. Chapter 6, *Mapping interiorities: Angela of Foligno's recollection of mystic union as mediated through Brother Arnaldo in her Memoriale (c. 1298)*, analyses the production of a mediated collaborative text on the "mental landscape" occupied by a woman influenced by Franciscan spiritual values. It reveals how far interiorised contemplation and articulation of the mystic experience for Angela went beyond the scripturally-based, schematised, progressive model provided by her male clerical scribe.



## Table of contents

	Acknowledgements	<b>i</b>
	List of illustrations	<b>ii</b>
	Introduction	<b>1</b>
Chapter 1.	<i>Challenging the stabilitas loci through hagiographic sources.</i>	<b>13</b>
Chapter 2.	<i>The regularisation of chastity and the construction of legislative ideals upon enclosure.</i>	<b>37</b>
Chapter 3.	<i>The impact of enclosure on the development of the Rule of St. Clare (1212-1253)</i>	<b>74</b>
Chapter 4.	<i>Interpretations of monastic space: Clarissan contemplative spirituality and the conflicting pressures of enclosure and pilgrimage</i>	<b>116</b>
Chapter 5.	<i>Duties to neighbours: miracle working as justification for breaking the cloister. Clare of Montefalco's cloistered spirituality as presented in Béranger's <i>Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce Ordinis Eremitarum S. Augusti</i> (c.1309-1316) and her canonisation proceedings, Sept. 1318 – July 1319.</i>	<b>154</b>
Chapter 6.	<i>Mapping interiorities: Angela of Foligno's recollection of mystic union as mediated by Brother Arnaldo in her Memoriale (c. 1298)</i>	<b>188</b>
	Conclusion	<b>241</b>
Appendix 1.	Database of Umbrian female saints in the thirteenth century	<b>243</b>
Appendix 2.	Key to database of Umbrian saints	<b>246</b>
	Bibliography	<b>250</b>

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## List of illustrations, maps and tables.

Map 1	Map of the Spoletan valley	7
Table 1	Processes and canonisations between 1198-1431	21
Table 2.	Religious establishments occupied by female Umbrian saints	29
Fig. 1	Plan of Fontevraud abbey	123
Fig. 2	Plan of San Damiano, Assisi	126
Fig. 3	San Damiano- longitudinal section of the original building	129
Fig. 4	San Damiano- longitudinal section of the present building	130
Fig. 5	Plan of Santa Chiara	143
Fig. 6	Plan of the commune walls	148
Fig. 7	Detail: Santa Chiara crucifix	151
Fig. 8	Detail: Fresco of Clare of Montefalco, Virgin and Christ child	177
Fig. 9 & 10	Fourteenth-century fresco, Santa Croce, Montefalco	178
Fig. 11	Table of Bonaventura, <i>Mind's Journey into the Soul</i>	217
Fig. 12	Figurative map of Angela's progress in the seven supplementary steps of the <i>Memoriale</i>	224

## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how far enclosure was pivotal in shaping the female Franciscan spirituality in thirteenth century Umbria as cloistered and contemplative. For centuries, a woman's spiritual role was understood in terms of her commitment to a vow of celibacy and seclusion to a remote religious house. Enclosure had always been a prerequisite for female monastic profession, and this expectation was confirmed and articulated in theological writing and monastic legislation. Conventual life was, in the most part, a privilege only for those who could afford it, and confined mainly to the aristocratic elite. However, the maintenance of adequate enclosure became an urgent issue in clerical minds, as a series of innovations within Christian ideals challenged the long-held vision of religious women as professed nuns.

The thirteenth century was a critical time for the development of the role of women in religious life. In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, religious leaders offered to increasing numbers of people, alternative and radical forms by which to express religious enthusiasm. The mendicant movement promoted the *vita apostolica*, through their preaching campaigns, that inspired a lay urban apostolate towards absolute poverty, evangelisation, itinerancy, and active charity. In other words, full religious participation with the urban community. Jacques de Vitry was the first to record the phenomenon in 1216. Writing to friends in Liège, he recounted his meeting with female followers of St Francis of Assisi in the Spoletan valley:

I found one consolation in those parts, nevertheless: many men and women, rich and worldly, after renouncing everything for Christ, fled the world: 'brothers minor and sisters minor' as they are called. They are held in great esteem by the Lord Pope and the cardinals... The women, in truth, live together in various residences as guests. They receive nothing that they do not earn by the work of their hands. Many of them are pained and troubled because they are honoured by the clergy more than they would want.<sup>1</sup>

At this stage the women inspired by St Francis' example, had not as yet transformed into the order of cloistered contemplative nuns, the Poor Clares.

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<sup>1</sup> R.B.C. Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry* (Leyden, 1961), I, 107-124: 75-76; trans. in R.J. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Writings and Early Sources* (New York, 1989) 245-246. Armstrong is the only editor to have collated and translated all the sources relating to the early life of Clare of Assisi in a single volume. For convenience, his translations have been referenced throughout this work. Unless otherwise cited all other translations are my own.

Concurrent with the rise of mendicant spirituality was the development of new monastic orders during the twelfth century. Orders, such as the Cistercians, attracted both men and women through their rehabilitation of long-held monastic rules. Moreover, women, attracted to the messages of spiritual renewal, also independently established their own informal communities. The beguine movement described informal female houses, where women took no permanent vows, had no formal organisational structure and often survived without regular endowments. It seems that de Vitry noted the female followers of St Francis because they appeared to be the Italian equivalent of the beguines whom he had supported in Liège.

The pressure of increasing numbers of women, inspired towards religious vocations in established and newly instituted religious orders, meant that their resources came under increasing strain. As early as 1198, the Premonstratensians excluded women from the order, and in 1228, the Cistercians also attempted to limit their responsibilities towards already incorporated convents, and refused to accept new communities. The solution provided by clerical authorities was to implement a policy of demarcation, where professed nuns were identified as the acceptable form of female religious life, and provision and supervision would be made for only them. The papacy sought to segregate nuns away from other types of religious expression. By holding up nuns as the orthodox ideal, both the papacy and the leaders of religious orders channelled their female followers towards introspective, contemplative seclusion. Strict active and passive enclosure of religious women (legal prohibitions involving not only the exit from, but also entrance of unauthorised persons into the monastic complex) was the primary mechanism by which this agenda was achieved. The formulation of a monastic rule and its application to the Poor Clares from 1219 to 1254, under a series of popes, was paradigmatic of clerical attempts to control the burden of women within religious orders. The culmination of papal enforcement of cloister policy was Boniface VIII's decretal, *Periculoso* (1298) that prescribed universal strict enclosure for all religious women, in all orders.

This thesis analyses the complex construction and presentation of the religious role of women as primarily cloistered. Ideals concerning the cloister were expressed in a wide variety of evidence and reflected a range of spiritual values. The evidence ranges from written legislation that circumscribed women's movement and behaviour; to the architecture of spatial division and

seclusion integrated into female monastic foundations; to artists depicting images of young female saints sealed within tiny houses; to pastoral letters and writings that gently reminded abbesses of their duty concerning the preservation of the chastity of their charges; to hagiographers who preserved the communal memory of the exceptional virtues of saintly candidates as inward-looking and heroically other-worldly; and, finally, to religious women's own writings and reflection that expressed their perception of the contemplative life. There has been no previously comprehensive treatment of enclosure which analyses all the various types of sources, legislation, archaeology and *vitae*. Other treatments have been piecemeal, whether they rely on one type of source or single viewpoint. By comparing the variety of evidence available, a more balanced picture of enclosure should emerge.

### **The secondary sources**

Current interpretations on the impact of enclosure on women's religious lives tend to either unquestioningly accept theological and legislative models of strict claustration as a prerequisite for religious women's lives, or fail to recognize how the material consequence and realities of the cloister shaped women's religious movements in the later Middle Ages. By systematically questioning the validity of the idealisation of the cloister, new insights can be made into the development of the role of religious women. It highlights how the transformation of spiritual life affected monastic houses as much as informal lay communities; it argues that canonization proceedings and *vitae* should be treated as distinct genres that often contained opposing conceptualizations of the value of enclosure; and that current studies on enclosure which concentrate on the impact of cloister regulation tend to over-estimate its success.

The most influential analysis on the development of women's religious lives in the later Middle Ages was Grundmann's *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*.<sup>2</sup> Grundmann saw the proliferation of religious life as springing from a single source, the pursuit of apostolic poverty and evangelical preaching. His universalising theory saw individual women's communities as part of a wider spiritual movement, which blurred the relationship between lay women and those who entered convents. By concentrating on the beguine movement as the source of religious transformation, he engendered increased interest into religious women's social role within their urban environment. Nevertheless, the pursuit of spiritual life through contemplation was also

taken up with enthusiasm, and this has perhaps been neglected. Importantly, monastic claustration increasingly predominated as the popular option for women, and women themselves began to dominate the monastic profession. Before 1200, monks outnumbered nuns. During the thirteenth century, equal proportions of women and men chose the cloister, but by 1500 nuns outnumbered their male counterparts in parts of Europe.<sup>3</sup> For such a large segment of religious women to become committed to monastic existence, it is surprising that the consequences of enclosure on women's spirituality has remained relatively unexplored. Studies of the proliferation of religious life benefit from an analysis on the adjustments made to more traditional contemplative roles, which were as popular as lay expressions of piety in this period.

Similarly, Vauchez's classic analysis of the role of hagiography in shaping the religious models<sup>4</sup> shared Grundmann's universalizing themes. He argued that *vitae* and canonisation proceedings deliberately reduced individual saints to the exempla of certain saintly types. The predominant type for religious women was defined as the cloistered contemplative virgin or widow. The role of the hagiographers of female saints was critical in the formulation and promotion of a strict adherence claustration as a moral value for religious women. Therefore, *vitae* are an essential source in discovering how the discourse of the cloister was consistently articulated and promoted. Vauchez highlighted a trend within conceptual hagiographic categories of the later Middle Ages directing women, from the lay apostolate, towards enclosure and solitary meditation. His magisterial study promoted canonical proceedings as important sources for interpreting contemporary understandings of sanctity. Vauchez outlined the interplay between competing categories of sainthood, and preferred to stress how individuals posited for sainthood were playing strongly predefined roles. The comparison between canonisation proceedings and the subsequent *vitae* builds upon his work on the proceedings, especially as he makes little distinction between hagiography and canonization proceedings. By examining saints within a local context, the discrepancies between a model of sanctity held by clerical elite, and the perceptions of a saintly candidate held by those who witnessed their lives, or contained in the writings of the women themselves, are revealed. By contrasting witness testimony and the candidate's own comments on the cloister, it can be demonstrated that women often did not accept the enclosure as their defining virtue, and that they either participated in, or tacitly approved, excursions outside the convents' walls.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, trans. S. Rowan (London, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> R. Brooke & C. Brooke, "St Clare," *Medieval women*, edited by D. Baker, Studies in Church History, subsidia 1, (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. by J. Birrell (London, 1997).

Works relating specifically to the impact of claustration upon women's religious experience have usually confined themselves to only broad treatments. They consider the subject across religious orders and countries, and rely on gendered interpretations, centering on clerical desires for the preservation of female chastity.<sup>5</sup> Primarily, this is because the certain historians have taken the legislative pronouncements of the clergy at face value.<sup>6</sup> They accepted the male clerics' fear of female sexuality as the only explanation for the development of cloistering legislation.<sup>7</sup> They saw the implementation of cloister legislation as uniform and evolutionary, culminating in *Periculoso*, the definitive response in the government of religious women. By concentrating only statutes as evidence, historians have previously over-estimated the success of enclosure.

Studies relating to Franciscan women reflect this idealizing of the cloister. Chiara Augusta Lainati, who studied the origins of the Poor Clares, refuted any question about whether enclosure “existed right from the beginning of the Order.”<sup>8</sup> She argued that enclosure was strict and immediately approved by Clare of Assisi, even before papal intervention. Lainati's study, however, was too heavily weighted towards Clare passively accepting the canonical version of *clausura*. Because of this, Lainati interpreted the papal imposition of enclosure as an extension of early Clarissan practice, and was unable to discern any differences in their stances. This thesis reassesses the origins of the Poor Clares' rule and its gestation as a negotiated process between Clare and her papal supervisors, counter balancing Lainati's study.

Moreover, the rigid vision inherent in studies based on the clerical perceptions of the cloister have also influenced interpretations of the architectural expression of monastic houses. Historians have increasingly recognised that the layout of monastic houses reflected the gender of

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<sup>5</sup> The best known of these is Tibbets Schulenburg's survey of enclosure from the fifth to the end of the eleventh century, “Strict active enclosure and its effects on the monastic female experience,” *Medieval Religious Women I: Distant Echoes*, edited by J. A. Nichols & L.T. Shank, (Kalmazoo, 1984): 51-86. See also P. Anson, “Papal enclosure for nuns,” *Cistercian Studies* 3 (1968): 109-23; 189-206; and J. Cain, “Cloister and the apostolate of religious women,” *Review for Religious* 27 (1968): 243-80; 652-71; 916-37.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly guilty of this is James R. Cain, “Cloister”.

<sup>7</sup> Horner created a “discourse of enclosure” based entirely on reading enclosure as related solely to protecting a nun's chastity. S. Horner, “Spiritual truth and sexual violence-the Old-English Juliana, Anglo-Saxon nuns and the discourse of female enclosure,” *Signs* 19 (1984): 658-675.

<sup>8</sup> C. Lainati, “The Enclosure of St Clare,” *Vox Benedictina* 7 (1990): 253-280.



those who occupied the space.<sup>9</sup> Plans outlining the boundaries and divisions of female houses supplement monastic legislation reinforcing the impression that enclosure was a deliberate intention and carefully monitored. But, by focusing primarily on the static idealized version of building layouts, architectural interpretations of the cloister also fail to address how the nuns and other personnel actually behaved within and without the space and transformed its construction over an extended period of time.

By analysing the extent to which a concerted policy of claustration was successfully implemented, it will be shown that enclosure as a form of demarcation failed precisely because of the fluidity of women's religiosity. In this period of transformation, large numbers of women lived on the cusp between conventual professed religious life and the urban apostolate. It would be false to categorise these women as simply either nuns or beguines. The *vitae* confirm that the women's religious movement remained numerous and diverse, even after *Periculoso*.

### Primary sources

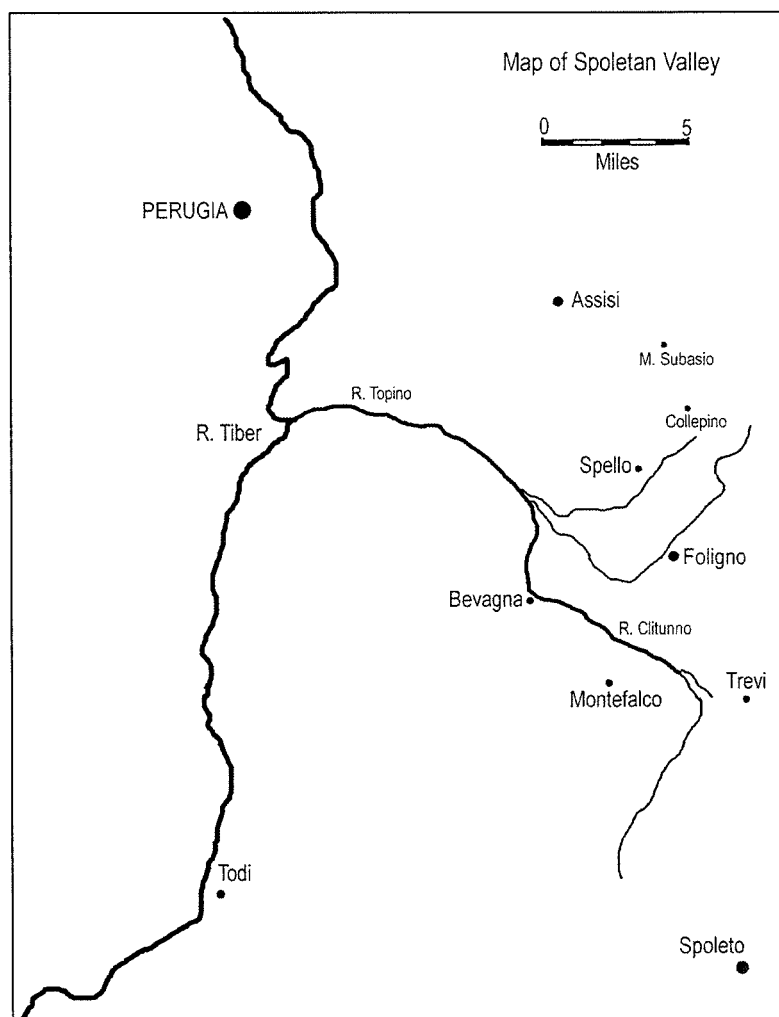
In order to develop fully the implications of the implementation of the cloister on religious women, while avoiding the inevitable generalisations inherent in broader studies, this thesis concentrates on the origin and development of Franciscan women within the Spoletan valley. More specifically, the development of representations of the cloister and contemplative spirituality in three female Franciscan saints; Clare of Assisi (†1253) Clare of Montefalco (†1308) and Angela of Foligno (†1309). First, each of the saints scrutinised represents the diversity of the Franciscan contemplative spirituality. Second, by focusing on a single order as a point of comparison for other religious orders, it will be revealed that idealisations of the cloister were as much influenced by the priorities of an order as by gendered assumptions that women should remain enclosed. Third, by prioritising women's own writings and testimonies on the nature of the cloister, it explores and reinstates their experience of enclosure over that of their hagiographers and clerical supporters.

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<sup>9</sup> The importance of a gendered interpretation of the architecture of monastic houses was most convincingly put by Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture* (London, 1994).

Clare of Assisi, as Francis' closest female companion and the founder of the second order, set down her interpretation of Franciscan spirituality in her own rule. Clare of Montefalco, second abbess of the convent of Santa Croce, highlights the fluidity of women's religious lives, as she moved from an informal hermitage to establish an Augustinian convent, while attracting the supervision and attention of Spiritual Franciscans. Angela of Foligno, a lay woman, became the spiritual mother of a wide network of Spiritual Franciscans, and related her understanding of the contemplative experience to her confessor in her *Memoriale*.

These extraordinary women all came from the Spoletan valley, a spiritually and politically precocious territory of individual city-communes. As the region had only recently come into the hands of the Papal State, under Innocent III in 1198, it was the ground upon which the papacy sought to impose its authority. The continuing tension between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, each of whom had claims to suzerainty over the Umbrian cities, enabled the leading families to offer or withhold loyalty, in return for the extension of their civic rights and interests. Each saint was celebrated by fiercely independent communes, who claimed them as their spiritual



patrons, and invoked their assistance when at war with rival communes. But any negotiations by a commune with the Papacy on the promotion of their saintly candidates and new forms of spiritual expression were affected by the popes' interest in containing and controlling the religious enthusiasm of their newly acquired and politically unstable territory. In the same way, the atmosphere of commune rivalry and individualism contributed to the break down of the integrity of the cloister, as communes celebrated their patron saints through the building of pilgrimage centres.

By isolating mendicant spirituality and its treatment of enclosure, it will be demonstrated that the difference in treatment between male and female followers of St Francis was not necessarily predicated solely on gendered assumptions. Namely, Franciscan women prioritised their attachment to their order's values over strictures relating to their gender or professional status. Thus, they sometimes chose the active apostolate of preaching, aiding the poor, and charity, over remaining in the cloister. Importantly, when women refused to adhere to the cloistered image created for them, the aspect of sanctity to which they aspired could be better characterised as Franciscan, rather than female. Adherence to particular religious institutions also meant that women actively shaped their spiritual development. A self-conscious renunciation of wealth was the key Franciscan value that explained why rich women chose not to enter traditional orders, such as the Benedictines. Despite the intentions of clerical supervisors to provide the Franciscan women with the security of property and a regular income, their refusal was consistent with their desire to pursue Franciscan values to the detriment of their claustral security. Furthermore, by comparing the development of the cloister amongst the Franciscans with that of the Cistercian, Fontevault and, to a lesser extent, Dominican women, variations amongst religious orders concerning the purpose and priority of enclosure become apparent. In essence, each order had its own interpretation of the value of enclosure, which was irrespective of gender.

Finally, focusing on hagiographic models throws into sharp relief the vexed question of what is understood as an accurate voice of women's experience. It cannot be denied that models of enclosure for women were in most cases generated by male writers and followers. Analysing the role of male writers and that of the women themselves in transforming cloister models, including the manifold ambiguities inherent in the process, recognises the extremely complexity of cloister values. From the types of evidence available, canonisation proceedings and women's own writings are particularly revealing as they provide a vital point of comparison between male and female viewpoints, and the means by which to distinguish them. Crucially, canonisation proceedings

recorded the testimonies of women, who witnessed the everyday action of a saintly candidate, and relate the comments that she made on the cloister. As the testimonies found in canonisation proceedings were reinterpreted within a strict theological and hagiographic framework in the subsequent *vitae*, the concerns and emphases of the male clerical writers can be discerned from the latter. This crucial difference between these two types of sources has been so far overlooked in nearly all the historiography on the subject, so the inter-relationship between canonisation proceedings and *vitae* will come under particular scrutiny.

Similarly, the writings of St Clare of Assisi and that of Angela of Foligno highlight the gap between female experience of the contemplative life and male perceptions and presentations of it. Angela of Foligno's *Memoriale* expressed a distinctive spirituality in her own "voice". Through examining the mystical writing of Angela, her mental conception of the cloister, as one which possessed its own landscape and time outside the physical boundaries of the convents' walls, and the extent to which she personified the introspection of later medieval female spirituality, can be explored.

The nature of the surviving evidence somewhat limited the number of saints chosen for the study. Candidates who were considered for canonisation have their proceedings recorded and stored in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano. The proceedings which have survived were indexed by the Congregation of Sacred Rites in index 1147. A preference was made for canonisation proceedings that contained contemporaneous witness testimony because later eighteenth and nineteenth century proceedings were limited in scope. For example, the canonisation proceedings of Agnes of Montepulciano, which were compiled in the seventeenth century, only proved the sanctity of a candidate by trying to demonstrate that an immemorial cult existed from the time of her death.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the record consisted mainly of the unofficial liturgy said on the candidate's feast day at various parishes. The proceedings can be useful in as far as they recalled episodes from a candidate's life which her community saw as important, but it was difficult to tell which episodes go back the farthest and which were more recent additions. In Angela's proceedings, witness testimonies related only to miracles performed at the site of her tomb or at the invocation of her name. Most of the testimonies were contemporaneous with the time of her canonisation proceeding, so were of little value in an investigation of her perception of the cloister. Only Clare

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<sup>10</sup> Città del Vaticano, Archivio Segreto Vaticano. *Arch. Congr. SS. Rituum, Proc. 1799. Processus apostolicus Romanus super virtutibus*. (Rome, 1708-1709).

of Assisi and Clare of Montefalco had both contemporaneous *vitae* and canonisation proceedings that survived.

\*

My research reveals that the creation and implementation of the cloistered ideal was a negotiated process. The first three chapters concentrate on how male clerical writers constructed an ideal of the cloister and imposed seclusion upon all religious women. Chapter 1, *Challenging the stabilitas loci through hagiographic sources*, presents hagiographic writing as the most effective source at revealing the reality of the enclosure, and reveal the extent to which male hagiographers constructed an image of religious women as cloistered and contemplative. Chapter 2, *The regularisation of chastity and the construction of legislative ideals upon enclosure*, examines the theological and canonical arguments that were put forward in monastic writings for women and how they reflected a trend that assumed that professed religious women ought to remain within the cloister. In doing so, the regularisation of the cloister emphasised the preservation of the chastity of nuns, through their affiliation to established orders, their supervision and material provision. Chapter 3, *The impact of enclosure on the development of the Rule of St Clare (1212-1253)*, concentrates on the consequences of the regularisation on the Franciscan second order. It examines the influence of Honorius III and Gregory IX, and Innocent IV on the regulation of conventual space in the *Rule of St Clare*. The popes re-evaluated enclosure to make it a central tenet of her rule, to the detriment of the care of women (*cura mulierum*) and her desire for absolute poverty.

The subsequent chapters analyse the extent to which enclosure was a mediated phenomena between, the hagiographer, the saint and the saint's supporters. Chapter 4, *Interpretations of monastic space: Clarissan contemplative spirituality and the conflicting pressures of enclosure and pilgrimage*, questions whether the cloister values presented in clerical writings and legislation were wholly reflective of social reality. It repudiates recent studies, on Clarissan conventual space, which unquestioningly accepted representations of the Poor Clares as a cloistered order, and read the archaeological evidence of San Damiano as such. This case study demonstrates the social and economic reasons that mitigated the demands of claustration and proved that stability of place was not possible even for Clare of Assisi's own monastery. By following the transformation of San Damiano and convent's move to within the city walls, evidence from the *vitae* show that the competing pressures, a lack of material resources and the transformation of the convent into a pilgrimage site which celebrated a member of the commune, prevented the implementation of a

coherent plan. By looking at the material evidence, it will be demonstrated that its new role as a pilgrimage site detrimentally affected the nuns' contemplative spirituality and their understanding of absolute poverty.

Chapter 5, *Duties to neighbours: miracle working as justification for breaking the cloister*, is a comparison between the canonisation proceedings and the *vita* of Clare of Montefalco. It reveals how the questions presented in the canonisation proceedings provide a framework of reference of witness testifying to the sanctity of Clare. While the questions reveal how the discourse of the cloister is constructed, the witness testimony reveals a more nuanced picture of enclosure compared to the *vita* that represented Clare as a cloistered contemplative abbess. Reading the *vita* against the canonisation proceedings, reveals how her violations of the cloister are reframed as miracle-working.

Chapter 6, *Mapping interiorities: Angela of Foligno's recollection of mystic union as mediated by Brother Arnaldo in her Memoriale (c. 1298)*. Angela's expression of contemplative spirituality is the culmination of this study of enclosure as it reveals how perceptions of the cloister shaped how women were expected to think. Despite her status as a Franciscan tertiary and as a laywoman, her confessor and scribe still sought to impose conceptual boundaries upon the way she expressed her inner state and progression towards God, along monastic contemplative lines. However, Angela's interiorised contemplation and articulation of the mystic experience went beyond the rigid, scripturally-based, schematised, progressive model provided by her male clerical scribe. Angela's expression of mystic union was the epitome of the flexible and fluid nature of women's spirituality. That she resisted and re-cast Arnaldo's clerical assumptions of mystic union, only confirms the vitality and inventiveness of women's spirituality.

Enclosure and the promotion of the cloister were fundamental mechanisms that influenced women's religious ambitions. Through it, clerical authorities attempted to shape women's spiritual vocations as cloistered and contemplative, implementing legislation and holding up saintly candidates as the moral guide to correct behaviour. And yet, the integrity of the cloister was consistently challenged, by the demands of the outside world and by the actions of religious women

themselves. Franciscan women negotiated with their clerical supervisors upon its extent and importance, transforming both the conceptualisation of enclosure, its value, and its application.

## Chapter 1. Challenging the *stabilitas loci* through hagiographic sources.

### Introduction

Central to understanding the effectiveness of cloister regulation, is an examination of the role of hagiographic sources. Hagiographic sources, in the form of *vitae* and canonisation proceedings are crucial in unlocking the true extent of enclosure. Previous treatments of the sources have perhaps unquestioningly accepted the cloistered ideal that hagiographers promoted, that women remained at a single location throughout the spiritual lives, maintaining *stabilitas loci*. However, the details within these types of sources reveal the alternative realities of claustration. The *vitae* record incidentally the practice of enclosure on a day-to-day basis. The miracles recorded often demonstrated public virtues, such as healing, assisting the poor, preaching, and peace-making.

Before outlining the value of hagiographic sources, it is necessary to discuss limitations in previous methodologies and within the sources themselves, as well as strategies to overcome them. First, the quantitative treatment of saints' lives have often been unbalanced; relying on too small a sample or picking out saints in a random fashion. Second, the sources themselves are also uneven, as they reflect the inconsistencies of papal policy in their choice of saints. Often, political reasons, rather than the desire to recognise sacred persons, motivated the popes' choices: there was deliberate policy to keep canonisations for a privileged elite; a bias towards mendicant saints; and later hagiographic sources reflected the concerns of the Catholic Reformation. Third, when examining the canonisation processes, it is essential to keep in mind that the design of the *articuli interrogatorii* encouraged the witnesses to make favourable reports on the holy candidates. However, it is possible to overcome the limitations of the canonisation proceedings by including those saints who were not officially canonised but still possessed a local cult.

To overcome the difficulties inherent in the sources, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will be employed. The wide range as of hagiographic material deployed in a database of Umbrian female saints allows for an more even analysis than previous smaller qualitative studies. Further, a categorisation method which allows a certain amount of fluidity in how the data is collected, should point up the diversity of religious women's lifestyles. The general trends relating to the movement of religious women are highlighted in the database and confirm



that the case studies which make up the remainder of the thesis reflect the experience of a wide range of religious women. However, a detailed database of female saints in Umbria is not an adequate substitute for a close reading of specific episodes in the saints' lives. Any analysis of enclosure, as understood through hagiographic sources, has to address how a candidate participates with her audience to define correct behaviour, and how such incidents of cloister regulation are mediated through the hagiographer.

### **General comments on hagiographic sources**

Before addressing concerns on the current state of hagiographic studies, some general comments on the problems inherent in this type of source, its nature and variety, and a brief survey of the revival of hagiographic studies, ought to be made.

The intention behind hagiographic sources was primarily pedagogical, which presents problems concerning their reliability. Collections of saint's lives often included apocryphal material or sources that would now be regarded as untrustworthy because they included episodes in *vitae* solely on the merit of being illustrative of particular moral values. Similarly, as their moral significance was paramount, the genre has often been regarded as stultifying conventional. Keen to show a saint's credentials, an author of a saint's life sometimes related material that recalled the successes of earlier holy men and women, or repeated the miraculous actions of biblical characters. *Vitae* were also considered to address only a limited audience of clerics, as collections were written in Latin for their edification. Neither can it be denied that political and social demands influenced the writing of *vitae* and the promulgation of a local cult. The purpose of *vitae* ranged from the promotion of local holy persons to greater recognition; as a response to royal decrees or communal demands, to present initial evidence for canonization proceeding; or to raise funds for a new basilica or build a tower for a local established monastery.

However, the thirteenth century is a particularly attractive period to study the hagiographic sources, as increasing papal involvement in sainthood ensured a move towards greater veracity in the reports produced. Previously, in the twelfth century veracity came a poor second to the need to promote a cult however spurious. Often *vitae* were forged to defend false relics or to promote a

church as a pilgrimage site.<sup>1</sup> Or a bishop might enhance his sacral authority by commissioning a life of his predecessor, to present himself as one of a saintly line.<sup>2</sup>

As *vitae* became increasingly numerous in this period, they provide a breadth of surviving material rarely available in history of medieval women. There are *vitae* of individual saints are found in contemporary collections of the religious orders. For example, the *Fragmenta minora. Catalogus sanctorum fratrum minorum* is a thirteenth-century Umbrian collection which names two hundred and sixty-one brethren.<sup>3</sup> More Franciscan saints and *beati's* lives are contained in Bartholomew of Pisa's, *Liber de Confirmatate vitae Beati Francisci et vitam domini Jesu*, which records over three hundred holy minorites.<sup>4</sup> Further *vitae* are interwoven into the chronicles which record the history of a particular order. For example, Agnes of Assisi's life was mentioned in Arnaud de Sarrant's, *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum (1209-1374)* (1360-74).<sup>5</sup> Particularly important for the more obscure tertiaries is Mariano of Florence's *Compendium chronicarum* (1521).<sup>6</sup> A similar collection of forty-six Dominican *beati* were collected by Laurence Pignon, *Catalogi et Chronica* (c.1400).<sup>7</sup>

Non mendicant saints were recorded in universal collections of saints' *vitae*. The most crucial collection, because of its thoroughness, was Pietro Natali's, bishop of Aquila, *Catalogus sanctorum et gestarum eorum ex diversis voluminibus collectis* (1369-72).<sup>8</sup> In it, Natali listed around three thousand three hundred saints. Later collections of saints are also valuable because they mention female saints which did not appear in the other sources which survived from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Particular to Umbria is Ludovico Jacobilli's *Vite dei Santi e*

<sup>1</sup> See P.J. Geary, *Furta sacra: thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages* (1978) for examples of such *vitae*

<sup>2</sup> M. Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideals of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, (1982): 29.

<sup>3</sup> ed. L. Lemmens, *Fragmenta minora. Catalogus sanctorum fratrum minorum*, Rome, 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Bartholomew of Pisa, *Liber de Confirmatate vitae Beati Francisci et vitam domini Jesu*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, vols. 3 & 4, Quaracchi, (1905-06).

<sup>5</sup> edited in *Analecta Franciscana*, III, Quaracchi, (1897): 1-575.

<sup>6</sup> Published in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, I (1908): 87-107; II: 92-107, 305-318, 457-72, 621-41; III: 294-309, 700-715; IV: 122-37, 318-19, 559-87.

<sup>7</sup> Edited by G.G. Meerseman, "Laurentii Pignon Catalogi et Chronica", *Monumenta Ordinis Praedicatorum Historica*, 18 (1936).

<sup>8</sup> Petrus de Natalibus, *Catalogus sanctorum et gestarum eorum ex diversis voluminibus collectus*, ed. Antonio Verlo, Strasbourg, 1513.

*beati dell'Umbria* (1647-1661).<sup>9</sup> Of the one hundred and thirty four vitae, only he provides much hagiographic detail about four of the holy women.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the veracity of hagiographic sources improved as editing and analysis of hagiographic sources became a recognized historical discipline from the mid sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, under the Bollandists. Supporting the centrality of the cult of saints to Catholic doctrine that was increasingly challenged by Protestant writers, the Bollandists sought to prove the authenticity of the sources pertaining to sainthood. Previously, only occasional collections of hagiographic sources attempted to address questions relating to reliability.<sup>11</sup> Jean Bolland (1596-1665), Godefrid Heskens (1601-1681) and Daniel Papebroch (1628-1714) sifted through collections of manuscript sources of *vitae*, their principle sources, to produce a critical history of a *vita*. In examining a cult, they unearthed the authorship, provenance and dating of *vitae*, while also recording information relating directly to the development of a cult: the circumstances surrounding a saintly candidate's death, the authenticity of miracles occurring during the lifetime and in proximity to the relics; and whether a cult had been in existence immediately after the death of a holy person. By 1643, they produced the first volume of *Acta Sanctorum*. A measure of the value of the project is that it remains the primary reference point for all subsequent hagiographic studies. Supplementing the multi-volumed *Acta Sanctorum*, *Analecta Bollandiana* collected additional information of saints, and published new insights into hagiography and its methodologies.

More recently, hagiographic studies have shifted out of the domain of specialists and antiquarians, as such sources have increasingly been recognised for their insights into the social and political contexts concerning the development of religious life. For example, Vauchez's consideration of hagiographic matter has revived the use of canonisation proceedings which had been previously been ignored. Drawing on as wide a sample of canonisation proceedings as possible, he attempted to map out what was understood as the criteria of sainthood. In doing so, he stressed that hagiographic sources, rather than invented works, were serious attempts to collect and arrange verifiable evidence.

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<sup>9</sup> Ludovico Jacobilli, *Vite dei Santi e beati dell'Umbria*, 3 vols., Foligno, 1647-1661

<sup>10</sup> These are Balbina Martini, Balbina the Younger, Benedetta of Assisi and Clare of Ianua. See database for details of their lives: 5,6,7,10

Proceedings were initiated by a procurator. Their first duty was to produce letters of postulation, which made a formal request for a saintly candidate to be canonised. Attached to these were clerical and secular depositions that witnessed to a candidate's sanctity. Often these were accompanied by biographies to verify the virtues and miracles working powers of the candidate. These initial *vitae* were especially telling because they present a popular view of the candidate, as yet unmitigated by the expectations of the Curia. Later biographies were produced in light of canonisation proceedings and the evidence presented there. Further, if the approach was successful then papal bulls sometimes survived to confirm the cult, and so indicate what the Curia found pleasing in the candidate. Most crucial of all was the local inquiry, where notarised statements record the saint's life as witnessed by their contemporaries.

Papal involvement in canonisation and beatification improved the quality of the subsequent hagiographic material in three ways: first, depositions were ordered to be carried out in a more detailed and increasingly formalised way, so that the witness could be more easily checked. Second, under the pressure from heretical movements and non-believers, the papacy switched the emphasis from the candidate's miraculous powers, which could not be easily distinguished from diabolical powers, to the importance of a saint's moral virtues. Third, the popes discouraged *procuratores* from making more fantastic claims, by introducing the more rigorous *forma interrogatorii*.

The first step towards more detailed reports Vauchez traced to Innocent III's attitude towards the canonisation proceedings of Gilbert of Sempringham (d. 1198). To avoid partial proceedings Innocent placed high ecclesiastics, the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of Ely and two abbots in charge, rather than the usual practice of the local bishop.<sup>12</sup> Moreover he wanted to receive the depositions of the witnesses in full, rather than a brief summary.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Cardinal Cesare Baronio compiled his *Martirologio Romano* in 1584, which questioned the veracity of his sources. See S. Gajano, *La santità*, (Rome, 1999): 119-1330.

<sup>12</sup> See A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. by J. Birrell (1997): 38

<sup>13</sup> "Non solum per testimonia sed per testes, per famam quoque vulgatam et scripturam auctenticam, de virtute morum et virtute signorum, operibus videlicet et miraculis, certitudinem inquiratis." as quoted in R. Foreville, "Un procès de canonisation à l'aube du XIIIe siècle (1201-1202): le Livre de Saint Gilbert de Sempringham" (thèse complémentaire, Paris, 1943: 28).

that Innocent was implementing a practice in France, which was already carried out in Italy at the end of the twelfth century.<sup>14</sup>

Innocent's concern for accurate depositions was carried over into later pontificates. For example, Honorius III insisted in 1225 that the depositions of witness should be recorded singly, and that the witnesses' words should be taken down literally, rather than summarised.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, concern for accurate depositions during Gregory IX's pontificate led him to include Honorius III's criticism of the muddled proceedings of Maurice Carnöet into his *Decretals*. Moreover, the dissemination of Honorius' instructions was assured as once published in the *Decretals*, they were later glossed by Gregory's contemporaries.<sup>16</sup>

The partiality of the *procuratores* was a risk during local inquiries as they were responsible for assembling witnesses and producing them before the inquisitors. In some cases they also formulated the questions upon which the investigation were based, *articuli interrogatorii*. To avoid the witnesses merely agreeing with the *articuli*, Gregory IX imposed a formulary of question, *forma interrogatorii*, which encouraged the accumulation of as much detail as possible. It was hoped that this method would avoid the pitfalls of invention or fraud because witnesses were cross-referenced and their testimonies checked against each other.<sup>17</sup> Gregory's preoccupation with accurate miracle recording is particularly pertinent considering the criticism the Church was subject to by heretics and non believers. A detailed deposition would reveal invented miracles, which

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<sup>14</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> "Idem episcopus et abbas quamdam nobis paginam transmiserunt...in qua multum quidem et magna miracula continentur...quae licet probata per testos juratos et nominatos in ipsa pagina minuantur, non tamen apparet per paginam sepe dictam quod ipsos testes examinaverunt singillatim et quod eos super hiis de quibus sunt testificati ac circumstantiis cum ea interrogaverunt diligentia quae solet et debet in testium receptione adhiberi." Honorius was criticising the muddled process of St. Maurice of Carnöet. Honorius III, *Venerabili fratre*, 1.IX.1225, *Decretals*, X.11.20.52, De test. et attest.; as cited by Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 53, ff. 76

<sup>16</sup> For glosses see E. Kemp, *Canonisation and Authority in the Western Church*. (1948): 107-111. For example, Hostiensis in his *Summa aurea*, ed. Nicholas Soranza, Venice, 1586; as cited in M. Goodich, *Vita perfecta: the ideals of Sainthood in the thirteenth century*, (Stuttgart, 1982) 27.

<sup>17</sup> "Testes legitimos quos super vita et miraculis rocolende memorie...debetis recipere, prius prestito iuramento, diligenter examinare curetis et de omnibus quae dixerint interrogetis easdem: quomodo sciunt? Quo tempore? Quo mense? Quo die? Quibus presentibus? Quo loco? Ad cuius invocationem et quibus verbis interpositis? Et de nominibus illorum circa quos miracula esse facta dicuntur; et si autem eos cognoscebant? Et quot diebus ante eos viderint infirmos? Et quanto tempore fuerint infirmi? Et quanto tempore visi sunt sani? Et de loco sunt oriundi? Et interrogentur de omnibus circumstantiis diligenter, et circa singula capitula fiant questiones predictae et fiat series testimonii; et verba testium prout seriose ac diffuse prolata fuerint, fideliter redigantur in scriptis." Gregory IX, *Ut caeci viam*, 13. X. 1232, *B.F.* I: 84-86; as cited in A. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 50.

could be subsequently removed from the later *vitae*, which were parsed down to a few important examples.

Not only was the *forma interrogatorii* used to check the veracity of candidate's miracle-working, but it was also applied to questions concerning a saint's early life and spiritual virtues. Indeed, as a result of increasing papal control, hagiographic sources began to stress miracles *in vita* over cataloguing those miracles which occurred *post mortem*. The purpose of the *vitae* was seen as pastoral; miracles performed while a candidate was still alive were seen as an extension of their moral virtues, and it was these that the papacy encouraged the laity to imitate, not merely to proclaim sanctity because they admired a saint's thaumaturgical powers. For example, Honorius III refused to canonise Robert of Molesme (d.1111) because the inquisitors had failed to mention any such miracles *in vita*.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the thirteenth century is a key period for the study of religious women because in that period one can observe an increase in the number of women canonised or beatified. The percentage of female saints which Weinstein and Bell catalogued almost doubled from 11.8 % (18 of 153) in the twelfth century to 22.6 % (36 of 159) in the thirteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

### Previous treatments of hagiographic sources

The treatment of evidence in previous quantitative studies of sanctity can be misleading. The actual number of female candidates who were officially recognised as either *sanctae* or *beatae* by the papacy was very limited. When Vauchez concentrated on candidates of canonisation proceedings, he confined himself to a very small sample. For example, in the period which Vauchez examined (1198-1431) 18% of the saints subject to a canonisation process were women, and 14% of saints canonised were women.<sup>20</sup> But when one looks at the actual number of women who were subject to a process, there were only thirteen candidates. Indeed, in the database created

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<sup>18</sup> Honorius III, *Cum olim nobis*, 8. I. 1222 (Pressutti, 3701) ed. P. Labbé, *Novae bibliothecae manuscriptorum librorum*, I, Paris, 1651: 650; see Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 47-48; see also M. Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> D. Weinstein & R. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, (Chicago, 1982) 220.

<sup>20</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 268, tab.2.

for all known thirteenth-century female Umbrian saints and *beatae*, only Clare of Assisi (one of twenty one) was canonised in the Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup>

The danger of placing overwhelming significance on quantitative evidence, is, as Kleinberg has argued that, “quantitative treatment gives a semblance of precision to data which is very often ambiguous.”<sup>22</sup> When he examined the approach of Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell's *Saints and Society* (1982), he applauded them for attempting to widen the field of material available when they sampled eight hundred and sixty four saints from 1000 to 1700. However, Kleinberg questioned the arbitrary way in which they picked saints worthy for collating. First, they chose those officially canonised and beatified, and then only half of the unofficial saints, selecting every other *beati* from an alphabetical list. Second, Weinstein and Bell confined themselves to the saints listed in Delooz's earlier study,<sup>23</sup> who in turn had relied solely on Jules Baudot's *Les vies des saints et des bienheureux selon l'ordre du calendrier* (1935-59). Baudot's study was biased towards Latin *vitae* and Italian saints. Moreover, they dismissed any accusations of a less than systematic approach, claiming that their sample had no pretence in being random in any statistical sense:

Since no one agrees even on the ‘population at risk’, such a sample would be impossible. Rather, we have included all the major cases and a large enough number of the others to be confident about our numerical findings when they corroborate literary sources.<sup>24</sup>

Not only is the sample uneven, but in the process of cataloguing a saint under statistical criteria, there is no distinction between important and less significant saints; all are treated as equal. Thus, the information gathered from the life of a saint as international and as popular as Clare of Assisi, was weighted the same as details from the more obscure Gennaia of Gubbio.

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<sup>21</sup> For the database I compiled see Appendix 1.

<sup>22</sup> A. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, (Chicago, 1992) 11.

<sup>23</sup> P. Delooz, *Sociologie et canonisations*, (Liège and The Hague, 1969).

<sup>24</sup> D. Weinstein and R. Bell, *Saints and society*, 279.

The problems in methodology are not entirely due to technique. Inconsistency in quantitative studies often reflected the nature of the sources. First, papal policy for awarding a candidate with an official cult was informed by other motivations than a candidate's worthiness. There was a deliberate attempt to confine canonisation to an elite. The number of processes and canonisations declined dramatically in the second half of the thirteenth century:

Period pronounced		Processes decreed	Canonisations
1198-1268	(71 years)	47	23
1269-1304	(35 years)	2	1

*Table 1. Processes and Canonisations between 1198-1431*<sup>25</sup>

Not only did the number of canonisation proceedings decrease, but the time between decreeing an investigation and pronouncing a cult increased. For example, Clare of Assisi's canonisation process took six days to complete (24-29 November 1253), while Margaret of Hungary's dragged on for three months.<sup>26</sup> Also, it took on average two years to complete a canonisation process (from postulancy to canonisation) in the first half of the thirteenth century. But, in the second half of the century, the time taken had stretched to ten years.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the likelihood of confirming a cult a pope initiated became slimmer, as the pontiff might die before the long investigation was completed. Moreover, a deliberate delay was built into the system. Although the pope might respond favourably to requests for canonisations by initiating an investigation, the procurators had to wait until the pope ordered the process to be sent to the See. Thus, the pope could postpone this order indefinitely if his interest waned.<sup>28</sup>

The result of such limitations was that saints who were officially canonised had to belong to an order recognized by the papacy. Indeed, the curial bias towards mendicant inquisitors was reflected in the number of mendicant saints. The evidence in Umbria reflects the trend across Europe that friars were particularly favoured as saintly candidates. In Umbria, 76.2% (16 of 21) of

<sup>25</sup> Drawn from Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 61, table 3.

<sup>26</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 61.



saintly women were mendicants, of which 87.5 % (14 of 16) were associated with Franciscans.<sup>29</sup> This is not surprising considering that Gregory IX, Innocent IV and Alexander IV (1198-1268) all showed a particular interest in the Franciscan order, and were involved in establishing the Poor Clares. By canonising the founder of their order, they demonstrated their active approval of the new order.<sup>30</sup> Alexander IV ensured that the mendicant bias continued when he lifted the prohibition on friars participating in canonisation proceedings.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, it is important to discriminate between saints recognised as such by their contemporaries and those canonised later. In particular, later collections of *vitae* and the later canonisations should be understood within the context they evolved. For example, Ludovico Jacobilli's *Vite dei santi e beati dell'Umbria* (1647-1661)<sup>32</sup> was written under the pressures of the Catholic Reformation. Catholicism was well served by militant models of sainthood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier and Teresa of Avila. However, the church stressed not only this increasingly radicalised form of Catholicism, but also her earlier tradition of sainthood. Thus, Jacobilli sought to promote local and older saints when he compiled his lives. His work reflected papal attitudes towards preserving Italian urban saints, as Vauchez pointed out:

In what only seems a paradox, the civic religion of the late Middle Ages, by establishing a close relationship between religious life, popular piety, and civic institutions, ensured the survival of devotions which were not imposed from above but emanated from the basic constituent elements of urban society. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the papacy's attempt to regularise the canonical procedure of these intercessors, most of whom had no official status, led to a large number of beatifications and canonisations *ex cultu immemorabili*, of which the majority of these local Italian saints were beneficiaries.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 61.

<sup>29</sup> This confirms the evidence in Vauchez' proceedings (1198-1431) where 50 % (5 of 10) of saints were mendicants. See Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 171.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory IX was the first cardinal protector of the order, Innocent IV initiated her canonisation process and Alexander IV confirmed her cult in 1255.

<sup>31</sup> "non obstante Sedis Apostolicae indulgentia qua dicitur ordino tuo prius esse concessum ut dicti ordinis fratres non possint inviti cognoscere de causis seu intromittere se de negotiis ab ipsa Sede committendis eisdem." Alexander IV, *Significarunt nobis*, 13. XII. 1255, in Raynaldi, *Ann. eccl.*, II: 528.

<sup>32</sup> L. Jacobilli, *Vite dei santi e beati dell'Umbria*. (Foligno, 1647-1661).

<sup>33</sup> A. Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1993) 167.

In other words, the motive for their beatification was less a recognition of sanctity demonstrated in the era which older saints had lived, but the need to strengthen lay religious sentiment in the face of the current threat of Protestantism. For example, it was only in 1609 that Paul V thought it necessary to confirm the local cult of Margaret of Città di Castello by beatifying her.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in Umbria 23.8% (5 of 21) saint's lives in the database were produced later. Although these ought to be treated with less weight than the contemporary sources, one should not dismiss out of hand their contribution to understanding female spirituality in the thirteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

Having pointed out the lack of consistency in canonisation sources, a few observations on the difficulties inherent in canonisation proceedings will be made concerning the questions addressed to witnesses of saintly candidates, the *articuli interrogatorii*. It is obvious that the format of *articuli interrogatorii*, channelled the responses of the witnesses. First, the promoter of a cult was usually the person responsible for writing the initial *vita* of their candidates, from which the *articuli interrogatorii* were formulated. One particularly informative collection of these questions are found in the canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco.<sup>36</sup> The procurator for Clare of Montefalco was Beranger of Saint Affrique, and his appointment was hardly an impartial decision because he had already been commissioned by the bishop of Spoleto to produce a life of Clare a few months after her death.<sup>37</sup> Episodes in this life became the source for the *articuli interrogatorii*. Second, in the bishop's retinue was Clare's own brother, Francesco, who had become a Franciscan. Although he was a key witness to Clare's early life, he was also appointed as one of the assessors at her canonisation proceedings.<sup>38</sup> Third, the main witnesses to Clare's life and miracles were her own followers, the nuns at the convent in Santa Croce. Thus, the choice and organisation of the testimonies were designed to be overwhelmingly supportive.

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<sup>34</sup> Congregatio per le Cause dei Santi, *Index ac status Causarum*, (1988): 277.

<sup>35</sup> Goodich is particularly dismissive of later collections such as Jacobilli as he suspected that Jacobilli used the *vitae* to promote new cults rather than existing ones. See M. Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> The *articuli*, along with the depositions of the witnesses, are found in Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Riti Proc.: 2929, and are edited by E. Menestò, *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, (Spoleto, 1991). The inquiry for which we have a written record of the witnesses' depositions took place from 6th September 1318 to July 1319.

<sup>37</sup> This *vita* was written in 1308 and is edited by M. Faloci Pulignani, "Vita di Sta Chiara da Montefalco scritta da Berengario di San Africano," *Archivio Storico per le Marche e per l'Umbria*, I (1884): 557-626; II (1885): 193-266.

<sup>38</sup> See Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, 45, 169

Nevertheless, it is not helpful to dismiss canonisation proceedings as completely unreliable. For example, the Bollandists, when they compiled *Acta Sanctorum*, actually hindered the use of proceedings as an informative source because they muddled the order of witnesses' depositions, only published them partially, or, in some cases, omitted them altogether. The Bollandists saw them as, "little more than a jumble of stereotyped declarations. As a result, they were content to reproduce extracts in fragmentary form, anxious not to exhaust the patience of their readers."<sup>39</sup>

However, the format of canonisation proceedings was not merely formula for superficial recommendations. First, in some proceedings *articuli interrogatorii* did not exist or were not used systematically. For example, the canonisation process of Clare of Assisi was completely without *articuli*.<sup>40</sup> These are particularly valuable as they allow the witnesses to speak spontaneously about the candidate, and thereby express what they thought was essential to sainthood, without the moulding influence of the *articuli*. Second, there are examples of witnesses expressing scepticism about miraculous events. For example, the confessor of Clare of Montefalco denounced the discovery of the passion instruments in her heart as fraudulent.<sup>41</sup> Third, as mentioned before, the *forma interrogatorii* of Gregory IX ensured that the witnesses answered accurately, even if their testimony went against the episodes of the *articuli*. For example, although Suor Marina was sure of Clare of Montefalco's propriety in receiving *conversi* and *oblati*, she admitted that she only knew this from hearsay and had not witnessed Clare's behaviour personally.<sup>42</sup> *Articuli* should be valued precisely because they reveal what was held as essential to sainthood by the clerical elite, and how witnesses' responses tried to engage their perception of a saint with the image presented in the questions. *Articuli* and the testimonies they produce were dialogues between two different conceptions of sainthood. The relationship between the two viewpoints makes canonisation proceedings especially revealing.

If reliance on only officially canonised saints leads to a distorted and inadequate sample, the *vitae* of saints not officially canonised are of far greater value. Here, one can see most clearly

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<sup>39</sup> A. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed the shorter depositions in Clare of Montefalco's proceedings also omit the *articuli*. See E. Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, passim.

<sup>41</sup> See Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, 877v-881.

<sup>42</sup> Soror Marina, "audivit a sororibus Thomassa et ab aliis dominibus, de quibus non recordatur, visu autem non interfuit alicui receptioni conversorum vel oblatorum." as ed. by E. Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 38, art. 70, 129.

the discrepancy between the popular cult as experienced locally, and how that candidate was viewed by the papacy. First, that popular cults of woman saints existed, even though they were not sanctioned by the Curia, is evidence of the vibrancy of women's religious experience in the thirteenth century. Technically, *sancti* were the only ones who could enjoy a public cult, according to canonical procedure.<sup>43</sup>

The political and social context in which a *vita* was written impinged upon the subsequent success of the cult. Thus, a commune, caught up in the enthusiasm of its inhabitants to celebrate a candidate's sanctity, would indeed organise offices for saints not officially recognised as such. For example, in Montefalco, a personal office and mass was celebrated soon after the death of Clare of Montefalco.<sup>44</sup> This precipitative celebration of her sainthood was not exceptional. Dominicans were offered candles by the commune of Orvieto in 1307, “in quo celebratur officium pro sorore Vanna” (d. 1306).<sup>45</sup> And Dom. Johannes Meier admitted that [Gio]vanna of Orvieto and Margarita of Città di Castello, although they were not canonised, had their memories honoured in their native cities, “festive et solemniter suo modo”.<sup>46</sup> Meier was writing in 1466, and shows the continuation of non-official public cults.

### Overcoming the limitations in methodology and hagiographic sources.

My approach has been to set general trends found in the database of women's lives against close readings of specific episodes in these lives. However, to use any database effectively it is essential to address Kleinberg's criticisms. First, I have selected lives from as wide a range of saints' lives as possible. I searched for names in Umbrian women saints in *Bibliographica Hagiographica Latina*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Butler's *Lives of the Saints* and other minor collections. However, the most critical collection of Italian saints' *vitae* is *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, which

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<sup>43</sup> “Non negamus quoniam cuilibet liceat alicui defuncto quem credebatur bonum virum porrigere preces ut pro eo intercedat ad Deum, quia Deus fidem eorum attendit; non tamen pro eis licet facere officium sollemne nec preces sollemnes.” Innocent IV, *In quinque libros decretalium...commentaria*, Venice, (1588): 188; as cited by Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 95, ff. 34.

<sup>44</sup> See A. Semenza, “Vita S. Clarae de Cruce ex codice monte falconensi saeculi XIV desumpta”, *Analecta Augustiana*, 18 (1941): 1-8.

<sup>45</sup> as quoted by Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 98, ff. 44.

<sup>46</sup> “with celebrations and ceremonies as they see fit”. Johannes Meier, *Liber de viris illustribus Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. in Paulus von Löe, *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Domenikanerordens in Deutschland*, 12 (1918): 71, as cited in A. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 157.

contained minor *beati* and localised cults which did not extend further than one of two regions.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, to avoid either too small a sample and to correct the statistical randomness of Weinstein and Bell's study, I have also included all saints and *beatae*, whether they were officially canonised or not.

Second, to avoid the over-simplification inherent in fields created for a database, I have attempted to include flexible categories. For example, to aid a study of the effectiveness of the policy of enclosure, I have included a new field, which describes the candidate's movement between religious foundations. In this, I have presumed that women's religious lifestyles could be fluid and that they might move between monasteries,<sup>48</sup> or from a hermitage to a monastery,<sup>49</sup> or even from a life of lay pilgrimage to settling down in a convent.<sup>50</sup> The database also confirms that the three case studies undertaken reflected the underlying trends in the region. It is crucial that the evidence from the *vitae* was contextualised within a specific political and social environment, otherwise, only general trends can be explored, such as those in Goodich's study, *Vita perfecta* (1982) which was limited to a comparison between trends in Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean countries.

### **Reading against the *vitae*: challenging the myth of *stabilitas loci*.**

To gain a full picture of female spirituality, the relationship between the hagiographer and the potential audience of belief shall be examined. The primary motive for producing a *vita* was to prove the sanctity of a possible canonisation candidate. The *cognoscenti*, that is, the hagiographers, were members of a privileged few who knew the candidate's life fitted into the hagiographic tradition, which in turn they had to teach to the rest of the community. But, as Heffernan argued, it is essential not to see the hagiographer as merely recording the opinions of the community:

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<sup>47</sup> To rely on Butler, as Sorokin and George and George did, meant that profiles of only universal saints with international profiles would be analysed. See Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Altruistic Love*, (Boston, 1950); K. George & C. George, "Roman Catholic Sainthood and social status, a statistical and analytical study," *Journal of Religion*, 35 (1955): 85-98.

<sup>48</sup> See Agnes of Assisi's entry in the database, Sheet 1, p.2: 1

<sup>49</sup> See Philippa Mareri's entry in the database, Sheet 1, p. 2: 19

<sup>50</sup> See Sperandea's entry in the database, Sheet 1, p. 2: 21

One must resist the impulse to conclude that because such intimacy between the audience and the author existed that the sacred biographer was a cipher simply reflecting received opinion and that such compositions were mere cultural montages. The function of the text was not only to document the wondrous appearance of the divine in a man or a woman but also to interpret for the community what was only partially understood, mysteriously hidden in the well-known public realm, buried in the very ideal of sanctity itself.<sup>51</sup>

It was dependent on the hagiographer, not the saint, to persuade their community of the holiness in a person's reputation. They had to place the saint's ambiguous behaviour into a credible framework of belief. However, the framework which they created was also informed by their own narrow agendas. Further, the quantitative studies which draw their information from the *vitae* often unquestionably accept clerical perceptions of sanctity. The homogeneous appearance of saints' lives demonstrates how hagiographers presented women as passive cloistered virgins. Both Vauchez and Petroff have commented on the similarities in the *vitae* of female saints. For Vauchez:

The ideal type does not allow for certain characteristics specific to each of these women, who did not lack personality. But the common features outnumber the differences, especially with regard to their spirituality, which was focused on flight from the world and the refusal of marriage, extreme asceticism and devotion to the sufferings of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Petroff commented that, "the biographer's intention was not to reveal how unusual or unconventional a woman was, but to demonstrate how conventionally good she was."<sup>53</sup> Such an impression is supported by evidence in liturgical practice. According to the litany, women were confined to one type of saintly profession.<sup>54</sup> Men were categorised into five different roles: patriarchs and prophets; apostles, evangelists and disciples; martyrs; pontiffs, confessors and doctors; and monks and hermits. Women were judged by one criteria; their celibacy. They were either widows or virgins.<sup>55</sup> Their roles as religious reformers, teachers, martyrs or even as monastics were downplayed.

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<sup>51</sup> T. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 1988): 21

<sup>52</sup> A. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 211

<sup>53</sup> E. Petroff, *Consolation of the Blessed* (New York, 1978): 11

<sup>54</sup> S.A. van Dijk, "The litany of the saints on Holy Saturday", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 1, (1950): 51-62.

<sup>55</sup> J. Wood, "Perceptions of holiness in Italian painting: Clare of Assisi," *Art History*, 14 (1993): 310, ff. 29.

Moreover, Vauchez recognised a trend in thirteenth-century hagiography which increasingly stressed contemplative spirituality over active public virtues of charity in the women's *vitae*. This Vauchez tied into the pastoral mission of the mendicants. He argued that the first generation of female mystics appeared c. 1260-1310, who were closely associated with the friars, such as Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297) and Angela of Foligno (d. 1309). Their appearance was a result of the pedagogical motives of the mendicants, who sought to promote an increasingly contemplative form of lay spirituality:

The almost exclusive emphasis on female sanctity-when men had previously been more numerous- was a sign of these new orientations. Through the example of female saints, the regulars sought to impose their own conception of sanctity, based on contemplation and the mystical life. Among the lay saints of the thirteenth century, such concerns had been accompanied by a deep feeling for suffering humanity and a pronounced interest in temporal activities; the spirit of prayer went hand in hand with good works and the desire to pacify and moralise the society in which they lived. The values now proposed for the imitation of the faithful were purely spiritual. What mattered most was the search for union with God through solitary meditation on the mysteries of salvation.<sup>56</sup>

The behavioural consequences of such an ideal was the need to stress the *stabilitas loci* of the women. The hagiographer of Philippa Mareri († 1236) thought that it was better to live a holy life amongst the rest of the community, than to become a savage hermit. Thus, although Philippa had established a community of female hermits in the mountains east of Rieti, having met Francis of Assisi, she returned to the town and established a regular community, which practised the rule of Clare of Assisi.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, expectations of claustration led the inquisitors during the canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco to ask whether Clare remained in the cloister right up to her death.<sup>58</sup> Bartoli, in his brief survey of religious women in Italy, also identified this trend away from the earlier roaming of lay women in the twelfth century towards the *stabilitas loci* of religious women in the thirteenth century.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 212.

<sup>57</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 180

<sup>58</sup> “Item quod isti ordinationi ipsa Clara propter humilitatem nolebat a principio consentire, set volebat esse servicialis aliarum dominarum; sed tamen postea propter obedientiam consensit, et stetit postea usque ad obitum suum reclusa cum aliis dominabus.” Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, art. XLIV, 7.

<sup>59</sup> M. Bartoli, “Francescanesimo e mondo femminile nel secolo XIII”, *Francesco e la cultura della nuova Europa*, eds. I. Baldelli & A.M. Romanini, (Rome, 1986) 173.

However, reading against the narratives presented, it is possible to reveal the tensions which underlie women's participation in the public sphere and through that gain a more accurate picture of the diversity of religious women's lifestyles. By reading the *vitae* carefully, we can reveal extent to which the *stabilitas loci* was mythical. My approach sets general trends found in the database of eighteen Umbrian saints I compiled against close readings of specific episodes in these lives. For example, to aid a study of the effectiveness of the policy of enclosure, I have included a new field, which describes the candidate's movement between religious foundations.

Table 2. Religious establishments occupied by female Umbrian saints in the thirteenth century (%)

MON	MONS (2)	MONS(3)	DIFF. INS.
33.3	28.6	14.3	19

[key: MON-remained in one institution during their lifetime, MONS-moved between monasteries, the number of houses they lived in is indicated in the brackets, DIFF. INS.-moved between different types of religious establishment]

From the small sample of female saints, it is clear that actual number of women who practised permanent *stabilitas loci* was only a third. Even then, this category includes not only conventional convents, but also those women who stayed in their own homes, such as Angela of Foligno, and those who resided in a beguinage, such as Giovanna of Orvieto. The third category reveals that for a fifth of the sample, women's religious lifestyles could be fluid, and they could move from a hermitage to a monastery as Phillipa Mareri did, or give up the life of lay pilgrim to settle in a convent, as Sperandea did.<sup>60</sup>

Such fluidity is often disguised in the *vitae*. A closer analysis of the *vitae* of Margaret of Città di Castello reveals why religious women might move from one lifestyle to another and how hagiographers hid this. At an early age, Margaret entered a *hospitio* but was forced to leave as the

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<sup>60</sup> St Sperandea of Gubbio († c.1276) visited holy sites across Umbria and the Marche preaching the penitential life. She retired to a convent in the territory of Cingoli. See *B.S.*, XI, col 1345-46.



women who lived with her were unable to tolerate her excessive goodness.<sup>61</sup> Having been rejected by this religious house, she returned to her adoptive parents and took up the habit of the *mantellate*, the Dominican lay movement. From 1301-1320, she lived in the world and practised active charity.

The hagiographer of her minor legend was very keen to establish her Dominican credentials. We are informed that she wore their habit, always attended their church and received confession from their priests.<sup>62</sup> When she miraculously levitated, her companion reported the news to the Dominicans.<sup>63</sup> In their eagerness to claim her for themselves, the Dominicans played down her earlier attempt at a religious vocation. In Casagrande's study of Città di Castello, in the late thirteenth century, she demonstrated that the institutionalised female religious houses were mostly either Benedictine or Clarissan.<sup>64</sup> The writer of the minor legend does not mention which order owned the *hospitio* she lived in, but preferred to instead emphasise its association with Margaret.<sup>65</sup>

However, the author of her major legend sought to rebuke the Dominicans for attempting to monopolise Margaret. For example, Sacchetti, a secular clerk in his preface to the life of Margarita of Città di Castello wrote (c. 1348) complaining about mendicant domination in the promoting saintly candidates.<sup>66</sup> Sacchetti saw his legend as the true reflection of a local saint's cult, which drew the admiration of all members of the community, which should nor have been high-jacked by one religious order. In the same way, the Dominican bishop Lorenzo Giacomini rewrote the life of Verdiana da Castelfiorentino, which had already been compiled by a Benedictine.<sup>67</sup> If

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<sup>61</sup> "Que moniales mores sanctitatem eiusdem beate Margarite non ferentes, cum iniuriis et opprobriis eandem expulerunt, eidem publice detrahentes." A. Poncelet, "Vita beatae Margaritae Virginis de Civitate Castelli," *A.B.* 19 (1900), 3, 24.

<sup>62</sup> "Semper habitum ordinis Predicatorum portabat. Et in ecclesia Predicatorum semper prima erat. Et ibidem orans, omni die, quando poterat confessorum copiam habere, confitebatur" *Vita beatae Margaritae Virginis*, 6: 25-26.

<sup>63</sup> *Vita beatae Margaritae Virginis*, 6: 25.

<sup>64</sup> She catalogues four Benedictine abbeys, four Clarissan convents (although one is not officially attached to the order) one congregation of Santuccia, and one Augustinian house. G. Casagrande, "Forme di vita religiosa femminile solitaria in Italia centrale," *Eremitismo nel francescanesimo medievale*, (Perugia, 1991) 148.

<sup>65</sup> "Nam propter sanctitatis famam cuiusdam monasterioli, moniales Sancte Margarite sic appellati, eam in sociam receperunt." *Vita beatae Margaritae*, 3: 24.

<sup>66</sup> "Fratres quandoque et maxime mendicantes consueverunt a quodam proprietatis affectu in suorum sanctorum laudibus superari, recedere ab omni tramite rationis, uti sub sancti vel sancte velamine in eorum sordibus et maculis coperti humanis sucrescentibus oblationibus et subsidiis foveantur." M.H. Laurent, "La plus ancienne légende de la B. Marguerite de Città di Castello", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 10 (1940): 119.

<sup>67</sup> E. Menestò, "La legenda di Margherita da Città di Castello," *Movimento religioso femminile in Umbria secoli XIII-XIV*, (Florence, 1984) 228.

one relied only on the minor legend, Margaret's early career outside the Dominican order would have been obscured.

When discussing the question of affiliation more generally, there does seem to be a trend particular to female houses that encouraged a diversity of religious lifestyles. Lay penitents could ascribe to other kinds of supervision than that of a third order. Religious houses might remain subject to the parish, accepting the direction of the parish priest. Otherwise, they could be subject to the canons and cathedral to which the parish belonged as seemed to be the case with the Clare of Montefalco's retreat on Monte Cucco.<sup>68</sup> Despite the popularity of Clarissan houses (two thirds of our sample belonged to the Poor Clares), the older monastic orders still existed. For example, Cistercian houses in Umbria did not subside completely as a result of competition from the mendicants. In Perugia from 1218-1253, three female Cistercian communities were established, of which the final one, Sta Giuliana housed 121 nuns.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the Benedictines underwent a revival with the establishment of new congregation of the *Servarum b. Mariae virginis* in 1258, under the statutes of Sperandeo of Gubbio, whose number of affiliated convents increased under the influence of S. Santuccia. Again, it is worth considering that even the conventional Clarissan houses began as loose groups of lay penitents who only later were affiliated to the Poor Clares. In the case of Santa Maria di Vallegloria in Spello, the community there began as oblates to the Calmodolese abbey of San Silvestro di Collepio.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> S. Nessi, "Dal reclusorio di Damiano al monastero di s. Croce e Caterina," Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, 556-559.

<sup>69</sup> A. Pantoni, "Monasteri sotto la regola benedettina a Perugia e dintorni," *Benedictina*, 8 (1954), 242-243.

<sup>70</sup> M. Sensi, "Anchoresses and penitents in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Umbria," *Women and religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. D. Bornstein & R. Rusconi, (Chicago, 1986) 61.

**A useful comparison: the situation in Tuscany**

One can also observe a similar diversity in women's institutional experience of religious life in Tuscany. The efflorescence of female religiosity manifested itself in diverse ways, not all along the model of the perpetual cloister. This is clear in the lives of Justina of Civitella, Giovanna of Signa, Fina of San Gemignano, and Verdiana of Castelfiorentino. Again, the demands of the fourth Lateran council and the second council of Lyons, that women should be affiliated to an order were not heeded by the women themselves. Of the four saints I shall examine, only one, Justina of Civitella (d.1319), might have belonged to an order.<sup>71</sup>

Although Justina, Giovanna, Fina and Verdiana were classified as “recluses”, it would be more accurate to claim that these women practised seclusion. Using this term accommodates the diversity in their lives, and emphasises how the practice of enclosure could be surprisingly fluid. The strictest was Verdiana who from her profession remained an anchoress in the town of Castelfiorentino for thirty four years. Next is probably Giovanna of Signa (1245-1307), who led an eremitical life in her cell by the river Arno. Fina of San Gemignano because of her poverty and her young age (she dies aged 15) was a recluse in her mother's house, but would venture into the public gaze on her way to Mass everyday. Finally, the frequency of changes in Justina's vocation, makes her the least able to practice unbroken seclusion.

Active and passive enclosure as defined in *Periculoso* was not strictly adhered to, primarily because the surrounding community's interest could interfere with such a commitment. For example, it was the citizens of Castelfiorentino who requested that Verdiana become an anchoress. They were so impressed with the reports of Verdiana's sanctity, while she was on pilgrimage to St. James, at Compostella, that they wished her to remain permanently in the city. Out of love for God, rather than a desire to please the citizens, she asked them to build her an anchoress' cell, away

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<sup>71</sup> Benvenuti Papi argued that Fina of San Gemignano, Giovanna of Signa and Verdiana of Castelfiorentino were definitely not affiliated to a particular order, though the mendicants did attempt to claim their sanctity for their orders, after their deaths. A. Benvenuti Papi, “Mendicant friars and female *pinzochere* in Tuscany: from social marginality to models of sanctity,” *Women and religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. D. Bornstein & R. Rusconi, (Chicago, 1986) 85.

from public contact and worldly matters.<sup>72</sup> However, the essence of Verdiana's request was ignored. As the commune possessed a holy woman, they ignored her pleas for seclusion and brought the infirm to her in the hope that she might cure them. For example, a young boy was afflicted with a badly broken arm, and at the recommendations of the citizens, his parents took him to Verdiana. After knocking, as was the custom, at her window they were became increasingly more anxious as they heard no response from Verdiana. Now, at this point, having lingered there a long time, the mother pushed her son through the window so that he touched the saint. Instantly, he is cured. But to effect this cure, the mother had actually infringed on the passive enclosure of the saint. Presumably, Verdiana did not respond in accordance with her aspiration to seclusion, but the mother saw the situation quite differently. She wanted a miracle to be performed on her son, and despite some initial hesitation, ruptured the anchoress' seclusion. Interestingly, Verdiana performs this act passively and makes no comment upon it. This might acknowledge a sense of being compromised.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, the passive enclosure of Giovanna of Signa was ruptured by her followers. Giovanna was singularly remembered for her miraculous cures of the infirm, and after her death a cult developed around her as a saint that protected the locals against the plague. In the *vita* the hagiographer records examples of the efficacy of her healing while she was alive. Again, one can see that her seclusion was broken on a regular basis. But unlike Verdiana, she had no qualms about steady contact with the public. She did not hesitate to speak to her visitors or even pick up an ill person. For example, she saw an upset nursemaid whose charge had just died. She called the nurse and asked what was wrong. Then, Giovanna took the baby into her arms, raised her eyes to heaven while lamenting, so that the baby was revived.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "Illa soli Christo cupiens, non hominibus placere, unum eos rogavit, ut publicis expensis sibi eremiticam domunculam fabricarentur, in qua posset solitaria vivere, ab omni hominibus sejuncta consortio ac rebus mundanis." *Vita S. Verdianae Virginis, A.S.*, February, vol. 1, par.5, 260.

<sup>73</sup> "Continuo ad Virginem properant: pulsant cellae de more fenestram: sed cum nulla audirent, dolore gravissimo afflictis ac taedio victi, dubii haerebant, abirentne opis exortes, an adhuc opperirentur. Demum mater filiolum eius per fenestram porrigit: quem ut tetigit Sancta, is subito planctu in risum mutato, ac gestu aliisque indiciis laetitiam testificari coepit, et, sanus sum, inquit." *Vita S. Verdianae Virginis*, par.17: 262. Verdiana's reluctance to live in contact with the world is demonstrated by her rarity of when she spoke, par.9: 261.

<sup>74</sup> "et transitum faciens iuxta romitorium beate Iohanne, vocata est a beata Iohanna et interrogata quidnam hoc esset, respondit cum multis lacrimis: 'Quia iste filius mortuus est et mortuum reporto proprie matri'. Quem virgo Dei beata Iohanna sunsit in braciis suis et subspiciens in celum ingemuit spiritu et post permodicum restituit nutrici a morte resuscitatum" *Vita de B. Iohanna Virgine, A. S.* November, vol.4, par.2, 284. Other examples her breaking passive seclusion are when she cures a young boy's bird, par.4; cures a woman from the plague, par.5; and cures boys with injured feet, two instances pars.8 & 9

Fina of San Gemignano, though a recluse, actively broke her enclosure everyday. This was not motivated out of imprudence but was a reflection of the alternative lifestyle of the lay religious. She set herself the task of living as though dead from the world, while being in daily contact with it.

While a young maiden she withdrew herself from all contact that could endanger her soul in which her like often indulged; such as to gambol and frolic, and other frivolities and pleasantries. Rather, instead, she set her heart and mind upon keeping her soul unsullied, bearing purity in her breast even as fruit of her spirit. In this way, the holy maiden continued all the days of her life to dwell in seclusion in her house, except when she would go forth to attend the holy offices of the Church. She would avoid all frivolous comings and goings as harmful to her peace of mind.<sup>75</sup>

In her journeys to and from the church, the hagiographer stressed her awareness of the threat to her chastity, so that she avoided the looks of men, “if she walked abroad, she first made entreaty with her eyes, that they should always look upon her feet; lest by their vain outward glances they should tempt her guileless spirit.”

What is striking about the life of Justina of Civitella is how, though a recluse, she moves from one religious house to another. She stays in her first monastery, St Mark, for four years, but after harassment from the servants, she enters the monastery of the Sacred Cross, also at Civitella. Soon after, in search of a more punishing regime, she shares an eremitical cell, in the wood near the city. After the death of her cell mate, she then moves to another community, next to the church of St. Antony. Again, they are troubled by servants and “evil people”, and move to an enclosed cell built by Bencasa Medicus, which he had intended as a religious shrine.<sup>76</sup> The Bollandists conjectured that Justina of Civitella was a member of the Benedictines but this has not been proved conclusively. From the *vita* it is impossible to tell whether she remained attached to one community, but the fluidity of her movement from convent, to hermitage, to community (and possibly to beguinage), suggests the possibility that she interchanged conventual religious cloister

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<sup>75</sup> Giovanni di Coppo,. *The Legend of Holy Fina. Virgin of Santo Gemignano*, trans. M. Mansfield, (New York, 1908) 8. Mansfield rather archaic forms of expression have been updated.

<sup>76</sup> See *Vita de B. Justina Reclusa, Acta Sanctorum*, March, vol.2, pars. 1, 2, 3, 239-240

with semi-religious lifestyles.<sup>77</sup> Further, the turbulence of this religious women's experience denies the clerical ideal of perpetual enclosure. In practice, many unforeseen factors worked against the possibility of Justina remaining steadfastly at one place.

*Clausura*, when to refer to perpetually cloistered nuns, does not take into account the variety of ways women expressed the idea of escaping from the world. These examples have stressed the degrees of enclosure possible, and how much outside factors, such as local patronage, affected the way women's religiosity was expressed.

## Conclusion

Saints' lives are one of the most detailed sources which we have describing women's religious lives. Only in them do we find incidental details that reveal the diversity of their spiritual lifestyle. However, because they are written for a distinct purpose, i.e. to prove the sanctity of the candidate, *vitae* must be treated with caution: a quantitative approach ignores the complexity of the sources; canonisation proceedings tend to channel the responses of the witnesses, there are only a limited number officially canonised saints, and hagiographic sources tend towards a homogenous reading of women saints' lives, intent on promoting the candidates as passive cloistered virgins, inclined towards mystical contemplation. By combining a comprehensive quantitative approach, with the subtle analyses only gained through a close contextualised reading of the sources, the difficulties inherent in hagiographic sources can be surmounted.

It is crucial to separate the image presented by the clerical hagiographer from how a holy woman's life was actually lived. Reading against the hagiographic *topoi* presented, I shall reveal the diversity of religious lifestyles obscured in the sources. First, when the lives are followed chronologically, one finds that the *stabilitas loci* which the writers stressed was not quite straightforward. Instead, one can witness progressive movement from house to house or, in some cases, between religious orders; institutional variety amongst religious women; and examples of public interaction during their supposed cloistered existence. Second, the focus of women's lives fell not only on the candidate herself, but also the religious women which surrounded her. As

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<sup>77</sup> Gill also stresses the difficulty of distinguishing religious from semi-religious houses because of their rapid transformations in size, location and affiliation. K. Gill, "*Scandala*: controversies concerning *clausura* and

witnesses to their holy counterpart, the saint's female supporters illuminate the urban networks and how women were recruited into a religious life, as well as how the candidate's life was promoted after her death. An in-depth study of the lives of three female Franciscan saints highlight their struggle to express their spiritual visions under the strictures and expectations of enclosure.

Before presenting the case studies, the legislative factors which influenced how and why hagiographers framed religious women's experience as cloistered and contemplative will be examined.

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women's religious communities in late medieval Italy," *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Prosecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, eds. S.L. Waugh & P.D. Diehl, (Cambridge, 1996) 186-187.

## Chapter 2: The regularisation of chastity and the construction of legislative ideals upon enclosure.

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how far monastic writings and canonical legislation were adapted for their specific application to religious women. The writers of monastic instruction for female communities were aware of a particular need to address the preservation of religious women's chastity to an extent not recognised amongst their male counterparts. At the same time, monastic rules were flexible in as far as the writers responded to the particular needs of the community to which their rules were addressed. Both concerns reflected two long-held ideological stances on female chastity, one that emphasised the physical integrity of virgins, and the other the moral value of chastity, whether physical or not.<sup>1</sup> Theologians, such as Jerome and Ambrose, accorded virgins with an exalted status that reflected the values of the ascetic movement. They assumed that physical virginity was the prerequisite to spiritual perfection,<sup>2</sup> and the highest form of purity amongst women.<sup>3</sup> However, in their enthusiasm to promote virginity as the primary virtue of women, these writers were harsh in the condemnation of marriage.<sup>4</sup> Refuting the primacy of physical virginity, Augustine argued that chastity was a spiritual and moral rather than a physical state.<sup>5</sup> The latter, more inclusive interpretation of chastity addressed the lack of spiritual models for women who were previously married and wished to participate in religious life.<sup>6</sup> This chapter,

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<sup>1</sup> See Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the golden bowl: gender and spiritual formation in the twelfth century," *Traditio*, 45 (1989): 126.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome situated Mary's virginity as central to women's salvation: "after a virgin conceived in her womb and bore a son for us, of whom it is said, 'the government shall be upon his shoulders' (Is. 9:6), mighty God, Father of ages to come, the curse was dissolved. Death came through Eve, life through Mary. And for that reason, too, the gift of virginity pours out more richly upon women, because it began with a woman." Jerome, *Letter to Eustochium* 21; see also Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* (c. 370), 41, 1; trans. in E. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, (Wilmington, 1983) 132-33; 121-2. Only through practising virginity as Mary had done could women separate themselves from their carnal natures. Ambrose, *Institutiones virginittatis*, 5, 35; 6, 35; as cited in H. Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church*, (London, 1964) 77.

<sup>3</sup> Citing the parable of the sower, Jerome equated virginity as the most fruitful form of chastity. "The thirty fold refers to marriage...the sixty fold to widows, the one hundred fold expresses the crown of virginity" Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* (393), I, 3; trans. in Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 126-127.

<sup>4</sup> For Jerome marriage was only useful in as far as it produce more virgins: "Remember that what is born of wedlock is virgin flesh and that by its fruit it renders what in its parent root it has lost. I praise wedlock, I praise marriage; but it is because they produce me virgins" Jerome, *Letter to Eustochium*, 20, ed. and trans. by F.A. Wright, *Selected Letters*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1980) 93-95.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, referring to the Sack of Rome, commented that virginity as a "virtue of the mind" which was "not lost when the body is violated". *City of God*, trans. by D Knowles (Harmondsworth, 1972) 27.

<sup>6</sup> His moral understanding of virginity valued married couples who lived together chastely: For since chastity is a virtue that has unchastity as its contrary vice, and since all the virtues, even those who act through the body, reside in the soul, how can the body be deemed to be chaste in any real sense when the soul itself fornicates against the true God?...Thus, there cannot be said to be true chastity, whether in marriage, in



rather than describing the peaks and troughs of these two visions of chastity within theological debate, examines which ideological position was favoured in the development of monastic rules for women. I shall briefly describe how the Patristic ideals informed the creation of two early monastic rules. Caesarius' *Rule for Nuns* (512-514) emphasised the consecrated physical virginity as a virtue particular to women, and was the first rule to rigidly enforce enclosure as the means to its preservation. Aldhelm's *De virginitate* acknowledged a more diverse community that included widows and those who had fled marriage, and so interpreted chastity less strictly, while recognising the worldly experience of previous married women as psychologically advantageous, and that they were better equipped to command their communities.

However, by the twelfth century, monastic regulation of virginity and chastity increasingly prioritised the definition of a professed religious woman as consecrated virgins. This had a direct impact on the development of nascent mendicant female communities. Robert of Arbrissel's transformation of his community at Fontevraud with the addition of extra cloister regulations for choir nuns reflected a wider trend that sought the formal profession of religious women. Fontevraud was one of many female communities grew from lay expression of fidelity to the *vita apostolica* countered by the expectation for the preservation of their chastity. Innocent III saw evolving foundations such as Fontevraud as the coming together of two antithetical movements; the lay apostolate with contemplative seclusion. He saw regularisation as the solution to misguided interpretations of the *vita apostolica* for women. By outlining the reasoning and mechanisms of regularisation, it will be shown that the preservation of chastity remained a central tenet throughout the period. To ensure adequate maintenance of the cloister Innocent followed an *ad hoc* policy which is best summarised as the affiliation, supervision and material provision of religious women. The development of Cistercian and Dominican convents illustrated this type of approach. However, the occasionally contradictory positions of the leaders of religious orders and that of the popes demonstrates an evolving policy towards stable claustration. During the thirteenth century, Innocent's successors gradually addressed the proximity anxiety that hindered the long-term affiliation to orders who recognised themselves as essentially male, and were reluctant to accept women. The financial and administrative burden of maintaining a stable cloister contrasted with the unstable mendicant lifestyle of the friars themselves and hindered the latter's ability to provide consistent supervision. Furthermore, the granting of papal protection and privileges to communities that appealed directly to the popes interfered with the religious order's ability, at general chapters, to make definitive statements on the *cura mulierum*. From this context,

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widowhood or in virginity, except that which is disposed to be the true faith." Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, I, 4; trans. in Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, 131.

*Periculoso*, Boniface VIII's definitive legislative statement on the necessity of claustration for nuns, can be seen as the summation of the problems surrounding the preservation of the chastity of women, and the most comprehensive attempt to remove the financial, ideological and administrative obstacles hindering the proper care of nuns.

## I

Caesarius' *Rule for Nuns* (512-534) was the first rule specifically designed for women.<sup>7</sup> As the first rule for nuns, Caesarius' rule was particularly concerned with cloister regulation, which reflected the attitude of Patristic writers and his own pastoral sermons. In it, we can see the first practical articulation of ideals of chastity, as specifically addressed to women. Both his contemporaries and later scholars have emphasised that the innovation in the *Rule for Nuns* was its attachment to enclosure as a way of protecting the consecrated virginity of its community. A primary concern of the rule was the supervision and protection of young girls who had entered the convent of St John, at age six or seven.<sup>8</sup>

McCarthy argued that from his sermons and other writings, Caesarius' rule was an expression of the need to protect the consecrated virginity of the nuns governed by it. The ultimate aim for the nuns within the community was to take their place amongst the ranks of heavenly virgins:

that you may come...in eternal beatitude to the fellowship of the angels and of all of the saints, and that I may happily come to see you receive the crowns of glory together with holy Mary and all the other virgins...<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This presumes that Augustine's *Rule for Nuns* came after Caesarius' rule and was a later feminine form of his *Praeceptum* for monks. For details on the composition of Caesarius' rule see W. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: the making of a Christian community in late antique Gaul*, (Cambridge, 1994) 118-121. The critical edition of Caesarius' *Regula virginum* was edited by Adalbert de Vögue & Joël Corréau, *Césaire d'Arles, Oeuvre monastiques*, vol. 1, Oeuvres pour les moniales. Sources Chrétiennes, 345 (Paris, 1988). See also M. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, (Washington, 1960) 108-116. For the dating of Augustine's *Rule for Nuns* to around the late sixth century see G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, (Oxford, 1987) 131, 139.

<sup>8</sup> He recognised that their parents had left their daughters under the protection and supervision of the bishop and his sister the abbess, Caesaria, *in loco parentis*: "Great numbers of virgins arrived there in throngs. By renouncing their property and parents they spurned the frail and deceptive blossoms of mortal existence and sought the lap of Caesarius, their father, and Caesaria, their mother." *Vita Sanctorum Hilarii et Honorati*, ed. S. Cavallin. (Lund, 1952) 1. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*, 63, 21; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 52.

Caesarius' sermons confirmed that he did differentiate on terms of gender between nuns and monks. While his sermons to monks stress spiritual valour in monastic progress, his letter *Vereor* for nuns stressed vigilance in the preservation of their consecrated virginity:

She who desires to preserve religion in an immaculate heart and a pure body, ought never, or certainly only for great and unavoidable necessity, go out in public; familiar friendship with men, as much as possible should be rare.

For a soul chaste and consecrated to God should not have constant association with externs, even with her relatives, either coming to her or she going to them; lest she hear what is not proper, or say what is not fitting, or see what is injurious to her chastity. For if vessels which are offered to the Church to be placed upon the consecrated altar are called holy by all, and it is wrong that they be taken back afterwards from the Church to a lay abode or adapted to human usage-if vessels which can have neither thought nor feeling have such great dignity, how much dignity do you think the soul has before God in whose likeness it was created?<sup>10</sup>

As with Jerome, he envisioned the consecrated virgins at the monastery of St John as the apex of chaste models.<sup>11</sup> The professed status of those young women who had chosen a religious life made them subject to much stricter treatment than their married or widowed counterparts. A comparison between Augustine and Caesarius' rules show up glaring differences, as the latter's adaptation of the former's rule placed a stronger emphasis on the preservation of the cloister for nuns, and was riddled with additional clauses concerning its practical application.

Augustine's *Rule for Nuns* subsumed the preservation of chastity into his communal vision of monastic life as dependent on mutual supervision. Members community relied on maintaining vigilance over each other's conduct and expecting sisterly correction. He warned the nuns themselves to be vigilant about their own attraction as well as attractiveness to the men they came in contact with:

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<sup>10</sup> *Vereor*, Letter to nuns. Eds. Vögue & Correau, *Césaire d'Arles, Oeuvre monastiques*, vol. 2, *Oeuvres pour les moniales*, 304-306 ; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 53-54.

<sup>11</sup> "Now there are three profession in the holy Catholic Church: there are virgins, widows, and also the married. Virgins produce the hundred fold, widows the sixty fold and the married the thirty fold..." Caesarius, *Sermones*, ed. Morin, I, CLV: 599.

When you see a man, do not fix your eyes on him or any man. You are not forbidden to see men when you are out of the house. It is wrong, however to desire men, or wish for them to desire you. Lust for men is mutually stimulated not only by tender touches but by sight as well. Make no claim to a pure mind when your eyes are impure; an impure eye is the herald of an impure heart. Unchaste hearts reveal themselves by exchanging glances even without any words; people yield to lust as they delight in their passion for each other. Chastity takes to its heels, even though their bodies remain unsullied by unchaste actions.<sup>12</sup>

The nuns were not to assume that their exchanges went unnoticed and stressed that although other members of the community may fail pick up on inappropriate behaviour, God, who was omniscient, would.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as a precaution, Augustine enjoined each member of the community to watch each other in the presence of men, and punish the offender in the presence of the community<sup>14</sup>:

If you notice in any of your number this roving eye referred to above, immediately admonish the individual and correct the matter as soon as possible, in order to curb its progress. If, after this warning you observe her doing the same thing again or at any other time, whoever happens to discover this must report the offender, as if she were now a wounded person in need of healing. But first, one or two others should be told so that the witnesses of two or three may lend greater weight, and the delinquent thus be convicted and punished with an appropriate severity. Do not consider yourselves unkind when you point out such faults. Quite the contrary, you are not without fault yourselves when you permit your sisters to perish because of your silence. Were you to point out their misdeeds, correction would at least be possible. If your sister had a bodily wound which she wished to conceal for fear of surgery, would not your silence be cruel and your disclosure merciful? Your obligation to reveal the matter is, therefore all the greater in order to stem the more harmful infection in the heart.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, Augustine demonstrated a contamination anxiety concerning the presence of errant nuns, so that if a nun persistently held to her innocence in her relationships to men, she was to be

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Rule for Nuns*: 4; trans. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Rule for Nuns*: 5; trans. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> "Mutually safeguard your purity, when you are together in church and wherever men are present. God, who dwells in you, will protect you in this way too by your mutual vigilance." Augustine, *Rule for Nuns*: 6; trans. by Lawless *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *Rule for Nuns*: 7; trans. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 113-114.

expelled rather than infect the rest of her community with her laxity towards the preservation of the claustral integrity.<sup>16</sup>

However, Augustine's *Rule for Nuns* was only a feminine version of his rule for monks without other significant variations. Implicit in the feminine version was his assumption that the protection of the cloister was of equal concern for both men and women, and predicated on the effective maintenance of the common life. Caesarius was less concerned with this concept and only inserted Augustine's introduction on the importance of the common life abruptly in 20th and 21st chapters of his own rule. In Caesarius' adaptation of Augustine's *Rule for Nuns*, he preferred to contextualise Augustine's passages on mutual supervision within a raft of strictures on cloister regulation.

Caesarius made explicit a gendered distinction in his treatment of nuns as compared with monks, stressing enclosure as the main characteristic of religious women's lives:

And because many things in monasteries of women seem to differ from the customs of monks, we have chosen a few things from among many, according to which the elder religious can live under rule with the younger, and strive to carry out spiritually what they see to be especially adapted for their sex. These things first of all are suited to your holy souls. If anyone, having left her parents, wishes to renounce the world and enter the holy fold, in order to evade, with God's help, the jaws of spiritual wolves, let her never leave the monastery until her death, not even into the church, where the door can be seen.<sup>17</sup>

In comparison with Augustine's rule, Caesarius included a further 14 additional prohibitions relating to the preservation of the integrity of the cloister. In total references to the cloister were mentioned in eighteen of the chapters [2, 23, 25, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 59, 73], as opposed to eleven in Augustine's *Rule for Nuns*. Of particular interest are the cloister regulations reiterated in the latter part of the rule, as Caesarius, at this point, summarised the

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<sup>16</sup> "If she refuses to submit to punishment even if she is determined not to leave, expel her from your society. Even this is not an act of cruelty but of mercy: to prevent the contagion of her life from infecting more people." Augustine, *Rule for Nuns*: 9; trans. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. virg.*: 2; trans. by McCarthy *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 171.

essence of his monastic vision developed over twenty years, and insisted that this was his final version in his recapitulation:

With the help of God we made a rule for you at the beginning of the establishment of the monastery, but in several places we have later added material to it or cut from it. For considering and trying out what you have been able to fulfil, we now define what is suitable by reason, possibly and sanctity. For as far as we have been able to grasp by a diligent experimentation, with God's inspiration this Rule has been tempered so that you should be able to keep all of it with the help of God. And on that account, we call you to join as witness that nothing here is further changed or cut out.<sup>18</sup>

Caesarius' adaptation of the building to cloistered monastic use was hinted at when he referred to passages and entrances into the monastery that had subsequently been sealed:

And because, on account of the protection of the monastery, I have closed and condemned and number of doors, whether in the old baptistery or in the dormitory, or in the workshop where cloth is made, or in the tower beside the space alongside the city walls, let no one presume to open them under whatever pretext of utility, but let the holy congregation resist and because they know it does not accord with their reputation or tranquillity, let them not permit it to be done.<sup>19</sup>

In his treatment of contact between the nuns and those outside the community, Augustine had anticipated a certain level of daily contact between the majority of the nuns in the community and their male aides. Caesarius saw this as a less frequent event and stated unequivocally that the preservation of perpetual enclosure was a non-negotiable criteria:

This is something which we specially wish to be preserved without any exception: that until her death none of you leaves the monastery or receives permission or presumes for herself to go into the basilica itself, where you have your door.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*: 48; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 187.

<sup>19</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*: 73; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*: 50; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 188.

He was also careful to specify that unnecessary casual contact with outsiders was prohibited.<sup>21</sup> He regarded the only contact with outsiders which was necessary was for spiritual purposes, such as, communion or confession, or for the continued maintenance of the monastery's fabric. Even after permitting certain personnel within the convent, Caesarius specified the age and suitability of those clerics who entered (perhaps concerned as they would be the outsiders with the most regular contact with the nuns) and how these men were to be monitored:

Above all, for the safeguarding of your reputation, let no man come into the private part of the monastery or into the oratory, with the exception of bishops, the provisor and a priest, deacon subdeacon and one or two readers, commended by their age and their life, who must celebrate masses from time to time. And when the buildings must be remodelled, or the doors or windows must be constructed, or any repairs of this sort are needed, such artisans and workers as are necessary to do the work may come in with the provisor, but not without the knowledge and the permission of the mother. And the provisor may never enter the inner part of the monastery except for those reasons which we have explained above, and never without the abbeess or at least some other very respectable witness, so that the holy women have their private place as is fitting and expedient.<sup>22</sup>

In the long term, the significance of Caesarius' rule was that it recognised that the treatment of the cloister for women was different than for men. Rather than the straightforward application of the feminine form of Rule of Augustine, Caesarius included strict prescriptions of entry, exit, and supervision of the monastery. The protection and preservation of the chastity of religious women became of paramount importance.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "No-one shall have her own cell. No-one shall be secretly familiar with or associate with religious or laypeople, whether men or women; nor is it permitted to speak with them alone, even for a moment. Let them not accept men's clothing to be washed, dyed, stored or sewn; and as we have established in the rule, let them not dare to send anything secretly from the monastery to the outside world or accept anything from the outside thereinto." Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*: 51; trans. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 188. See also *Reg. Virg.*: 25, 36, 46, 54, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Caesarius, *Reg. Virg.*: 36; trans. by McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St Caesarius of Arles*, 182-3. The only exceptions to this was the invitation of women, either of great religious repute into the monastery for banquets and only then was this to be done rarely, or the meeting of nuns with their mothers or sisters under strict supervision. *Reg. Virg.*: 39, 40, 53.

<sup>23</sup> The adoption of the rule by other monasteries was limited and localised. It was reported to have been used in only four other convents: Radegund's monastery of the Holy Cross in 567; St Mary of Autun where Bishop Syagrius of Autun knew of Holy Cross at Poitiers; Donatus of Besançon who borrowed from the rule for his foundation of his mother's nunnery, Jussanum in Besançon; and Regensburg in the tenth century. Only at the first convent was it explicitly stated that rule was favoured for its attention to claustral integrity. Gregory of Tours mentioned the rule was praised by bishops for its emphasis on strict regulation, and its adaptation specifically for the use of women. In a letter to Radegund from the Merovingian bishops, they stated: "we must specifically decree that if a woman comes...and is considered worthy to be chosen as an inmate of your nunnery in Poitiers, according to the Rule of Caesarius...she shall never have the right to leave it, it being

Conversely, Aldhelm's *De virginitate* addressed the demands of a different audience; women who had chosen religious life in widowhood, or after a separation from their husbands. In his interpretation of chastity, he promoted the Augustinian stance that chastity was concerned more spiritual than material status. Aldhelm redefined Jerome's hierarchical tripartite division of chastity as virgins, widows and mothers, preferring to use the terms virginity, chastity and conjugality. This allowed for a more optimistic assessment of the role of chastity as a merited lifestyle that was not necessarily inferior to virginity. He also accepted the increasing numbers of influential women who sought seclusion, who were previously married. In this, Aldhelm was sensitive to the backgrounds of the nuns of Barking, his audience for the work. At Barking, the nuns' social position made supervision a lesser concern.

Aldhelm's primary innovation in *De virginitate* was the higher status he ascribed to chastity for married women who were later widowed or separated. He transformed the earlier three-fold division between of virgin, widows and the married into an analysis of the forms of chastity to which women could aspire. Importantly, in contrast to Jerome, he avoided the latter's analogy to the parable of the sower, which valued virginity above the other two states:

...virginity is (that which), unharmed by any carnal defilement, perseveres purely out of the spontaneous desire for celibacy, and chastity on the other hand (is that) which, having been assigned to marital contracts, has scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom; or conjugality (is that) which, for propagating the progeny of posterity and for the sake of procreating children, is bound by the legal ties of marriage.<sup>24</sup>

His more inclusive analysis, addressed to the nuns of Barking, reflected their diverse life experiences. For example, one of the nuns, Cuthburg, had been married to Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, but separated from him. She was mentioned in the salutation that Aldhelm addressed

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clear that she has enter of her own free will, as ordered by the rule..." Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, IX, 39 Most probably the rule was short-lived because Carolingian Renaissance imposed the Rule of Benedict as the preferred form of monastic regulation (even the monastery of St John seems to have switched to the Rule of Benedict in seventh century under the influence of St Columba).

<sup>24</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, trans. by Lapidge in M. Lapidge & Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, (London, 1979) 56



to the nuns at the beginning of the work. Mindful of her, Aldhelm was careful to ascribe virginity with too lofty a status or wholly denigrate the value of marriage:

For the radiant beauty of pure silver is not shamefully debased, even though the refined metal of shining gold is preferred...The sublimity of praiseworthy virginity, like a lofty light house place on the uprearing promontory of a cliff, does not shine so resplendently that the strict moderation of chastity, which is the second grade, is scorned as completely inferior and grows vile, or so that the legitimate fertility of marriage, undertaken for the issue of children, becomes perceptibly foul.<sup>25</sup>

More contentiously, Aldhelm implied that the commitment of those who had experienced marriage was stronger than that of virgins who had not. He was keen to stress that virgins were more susceptible to the serious sin of pride, while those who had been married were less complacent about their relationship to God:

And yet-unfortunately-it usually occurs the other way around with the hierarchical positions reversed, so that the station of the inferior life...takes the place of the superior grade as it languishes tepidly...[virgins] inflated with the arrogance of pride, exult in the integrity of the flesh alone; while others, sailing near the perilous shipwreck of this world...hasten towards the harbour of the monastic life, and with Christ as their pilot arrive safely, even though the timbers of the ship are somewhat shaken. The former lot, seeking the condition of Holy life with the life-rafts of their soul all sound, and the ship of their uncontaminated body unbreached, without any risk of rocks, are so much the less eager to devote themselves to moans of lamentations or to seek to wash their faces with floods of tears, inasmuch as they trust themselves to be deformed by no blemishes and stains, and fouled by no blackness of secular slag.<sup>26</sup>

The practical consequence of such envisioning of the role of virgins and the previously married within monastic communities was to place a greater responsibility on the latter to protect the former's chastity. Considered more broadly, monastic writers were aware of how the life experience religious women affected the level of necessary supervision within the convent. Widows had experience of marriage and the outside world, so were valuable within the monastic community because they were able to recognise and deter unwanted male attention. Also, as the

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<sup>25</sup> Aldhelm, *De virg.*, IX: 65-66; trans. Lapidge, *Aldhelm*, 64.

respected protectors of virgins, widows were able to convince young women to remain as virgins and to encourage recently widowed women to continence. Virgins, however, lacking this experience, had to be sheltered from possible seduction so that enclosure was the expected option for them. In producing advice to female houses, Aldhelm and Caesarius accommodated varying levels of chastity, but Robert of Arbrissel's adaptation of the Rule of Benedict for his community at Fontevraud demonstrated how changing social constructions of widowhood and virginity affected their respective roles within the monastic community.

## II

Robert's talent as a preacher attracted a large number of female followers. As imitation of this public itinerant evangelism was deemed inappropriate he sought alternative means of religious expression for women. Indeed, his initial acceptance of women into his spiritual movement made him vulnerable to criticism, as his vision of women and men living and pursuing the *vita apostolica* together, *syneisactism*, could have potentially resulted in scandal.<sup>27</sup> Robert's adaptation of the Rule of Benedict for the choir nuns of Fontevraud, reflected later twelfth and thirteenth century trends that questioned the roles of women within the convent. In developing the community at Fontevraud, the three surviving rules demonstrated a transformation from radical *syneisactism*, to a cloistered community of choir nuns ruled and protected by a lay *conversa* abbess and served by a subordinate community of monks and lay brothers.

The community was founded in 1100-01 by lay the preacher Robert of Arbrissel, who initially considered it possible for nuns and monks to live and work equally together. The evidence of the nature of the early community was found in the fragments of the original rule written 1116-17, and the *vitae* of Andreas of Fontevraud and Baldric of Dol.<sup>28</sup> There was an expectation in the

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<sup>26</sup> Aldhelm, *De virg.*, X: 67; trans. Lapidge, *Aldhelm*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Marbod of Rennes wrote in a letter to Robert, concerning the comments made by clerics against such association, "that these women are disciples and followers of your peregrinations. They say you have a number of women distributed in guest houses and inns, whom you have deputed to serve the poor and pilgrims. Divine and human laws are both clearly against this association... Without doubt, you cannot long be chaste if you dwell among women." *Marbodi Redonensis Episcopi Epistolae*, P.L., 171, 1481-1482. Trans. C. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London, 1989) 222.

<sup>28</sup> The original version of the rule was labelled by Migne as Rule II of the *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, in P.L. (162): 1083-1084, 1058-1078, 1047-1049. See Simmons, "The abbey church at Fontevraud

early life of the community that women were expected to enter and leave the convent on a regular basis. For example, the rule assumed that cloistered nuns could go outside on business, enjoining them only to maintain silence.<sup>29</sup> It also assumed that the prioress could travel outside as she was to be received and obeyed in all communities of the order. Such involvement in the public sphere was probably only possible because of the lay status of Robert's female followers. Indeed, Robert insisted that the efficient running of the community was dependant on it being headed by an abbess; a lay woman. The original rule cited Petronilla de Chemillé as the leader of the community:

Petronilla, chosen by Master Robert and constituted abbess by the common will and by the devoted request of the nuns as well as of the brothers religious, is to have and maintain the power of ruling the church of Fontevraud and all the places belonging to that church, and they are to obey her. They are to revere her as their spiritual mother, and all the affairs of the church, spiritual as well as secular are to remain in her hands, or to be give into whomever she assigns, just as she decides.<sup>30</sup>

Robert had feared that the monastery would falter in the inexperienced hands of a nun brought up and educated within its confines.<sup>31</sup> When questioned by one of his followers he responded that Martha was more suited to minister worldly matters, and Mary should confine herself to the heavenly. He argued how could a cloistered virgin efficiently deal with matters pertaining to the outside, when she knew only how to sing the psalms.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Robert did not see Petronilla's earlier marriage as an impediment, rather it gave her the experience of authority, accorded to an abbess.<sup>33</sup> In contrasting the experience and the authority of previously married women with the naivety of nuns brought up within the choir, Robert reinforced the paradigm hinted at in Aldhelm's division of the roles of virgins and widows, and applied these assumptions to the later seclusion of choir nuns, in his later adaptations of his rule.

The second version of the rule, some thirty years later, indicated that the relationship between the monks and the nuns of Fontevraud had been transformed, most probably in response to

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in the later twelfth century: anxiety, authority and architecture in female spiritual life," *Gesta*, 31 (1992): 99-107.

<sup>29</sup> "Ut claustrales sanctimonialiales omni tempore silentium teneat, exceptis illis quae in exteriora procurant." Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule II: 1083 & Schine Gold, "Male/Female cooperation: the example of Fontevraud" in Nichols & Shank, *Distant Echoes*, vol. 1 (1984): 151-168.

<sup>30</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule II: 1083.

<sup>31</sup> Andreas, *Vita altera B. Roberti de Arbrissello*, 9, P.L., (162) 1062.

<sup>32</sup> Andreas, *Vita altera B. Roberti de Arbrissello*, 5, 1060.

difficulties in the implementation of Robert's earlier rule. The second rule was a reworking of the original version and produced sometime before 1149.<sup>34</sup> By this point, there was a more conventional division of labour, while women prayed, the men acted as their spiritual supervisors or engaged in manual work, because Robert, "commended the more tender and weaker sex to psalm singing and contemplation, while he applied the stronger sex to the labours of an active life."<sup>35</sup> The gender division of roles was strongly expressed with the inclusion of twelve new cloister regulations. Significantly, only one restrictive cloister regulation appeared in the *Praecepta Recta Vivendi*, the strictures addressed to the men.<sup>36</sup> In any case, Robert had envisioned their roles as so different that he had based the rule for men on the Rule of Augustine rather than the Rule of Benedict that he had used for their female counterparts.

The expectation that the choir nuns should be circumspect in their contacts with outsiders was emphasised in the revised rule. Where the statutes mentioned cloistered nuns leaving the monastery, exhortations were added reminding them to maintain the honesty and the seriousness of the cloister inasmuch as was possible.<sup>37</sup> The statutes concerning correct behaviour outside the monastery also formally recognised the abbess' underlying authority; no nun could go outside without the explicit permission of the abbess. Moreover, a nun had to be accompanied by two men, one religious and one secular and there was to be no speaking on route, except by the abbess or prioress.<sup>38</sup>

Within the cloister, the choir nuns were strictly regulated by their older lay sisters. When the priest came to celebrate Mass, the door of the choir remained closed to the nuns, unless for communion, and even then they would be watched over by the abbess, prioress or cellarer.<sup>39</sup> The choir nuns were to be guarded: the novices by their mistress or an elderly lay sister (perhaps relying on her watchful experience); anyone who entered the nun's complex was accompanied by the abbess; one lay sister guarded their dormitory during the day and two or even four sisters guarded it at night; and the nuns were to enter and leave the church *en masse*, leaving no one behind.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Andreas, *Vita altera B. Roberti de Arbrissello*, 7, 1061.

<sup>34</sup> Known as *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule I in *P.L.*, (162) 1079-1082.

<sup>35</sup> Baldric, *Vita prima B. Roberti de Arbrissello*, 17, *P.L.*, (162) 1052.

<sup>36</sup> *Praecepta Recta Vivendi*, 14, *P.L.*, (162) 1081-1084.

<sup>37</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule I, 3, *P.L.*, (162) 1079.

<sup>38</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule I, 17, 18, 19:1079-1080

<sup>39</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule I, 24: 1080

<sup>40</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Regulae sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi*, Rule I, 23, 28, 32, 4: 1079-1082

Crucially, the underlying assumption of the unsuitability of choir nuns for an active public role seemed to be borne out in other documentary evidence on the practical application of the rule. Penny Gold has argued that from charter evidence of donations given to the monastery, Fontevraud was regarded as primarily a female foundation, as donations were given primarily to the nuns. However, it also reflected the impression that monks were there to serve the needs of the female community in secular matters, as the drafting and the implementation of the donations were mostly done by the men. The witness lists of charters indicate that out of three hundred and five witnesses, sixty three were monks, thirty three abbesses or prioress, and only three other nuns. This indicated that the seclusion promoted in the statutes did protect the consecrated virginity and restricted role of the choir nuns. Furthermore, although a lay abbess was also chaste, her experience in worldly matters made her, and the other lay sisters, better equipped to protect the cloistered virgins from inappropriate male attention.

### III

The inclusion of cloister regulation at Fontevraud, though reminiscent of the policies of Caesarius are indicative also of a change in the religious climates towards stricter claustration. Aldhelm's rule hinted that nuns from aristocratic backgrounds had enjoyed a limited level of economic and administrative liberty. Now many female communities were directed towards harsher prescription concerning enclosure. The increasing number of women wishing to take up some form of religious vocation had to be addressed. This period marked a change in women's spiritual aspirations. Looking to support themselves, women actively sought the leadership of holy men who promoted the *vita apostolica*. Attempting to lend coherence to the increasing number of informal communities, Innocent III set out a policy of demarcation. Religious women, for the preservation of their chastity, were to be recognised primarily as professed nuns. The attachment of informal communities to the Cistercian and Dominican orders illustrate his approach of affiliation, regulation and material provision. Innocent's policy drew on the practices of religious orders as an attempt to accommodate women's aspirations, although it resulted in a loss of autonomy for those very communities. Nevertheless, the imposition of a religious order upon such houses was not without difficulty. The demands of maintaining the *cura mulierum* was such that religious orders attempted to removed themselves from such onerous duties. Following the development of Dominican convents, after the death of the order's founder, highlights the constitutional reform necessary for women to be accepted. Conflicts between Gregory IX and Innocent IV and a series of Master Generals of the Dominicans concerning the nature and extent of the *cura* helped shape Boniface VIII's conviction that universal enclosure was a necessary

prerequisite for the effective supervision of religious women. From this context, *Periculoso* can be seen as the summation of the problems surrounding the preservation of the chastity of women, and the most comprehensive legislative attempt to remove the financial, ideological and administrative obstacles hindering the proper care of nuns.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was a clear initiative by a series of popes emphasising the centrality of their acceptance of a regular monastic lifestyle, where obedience, the avoidance of secular matters, corporate poverty, and the preservation of chastity were central tenets. Bolton's consideration of Innocent III's regulation of diverse and increasingly radical expressions of Christocentric piety (*via ascetica*), has summarised the pertinent issues.<sup>41</sup>

In the case of female religious communities, the legislation of Innocent and the ecumenical council addressed the complex and problematic status of the transitional status of many religious houses. In the first place, the official status of many women's communities was unclear, so that affiliations to particular religious orders were not obvious. Bolton cited the religious milieu in Lotharingia at the beginning of the thirteenth century as an example of the variety and complexity of religious expression. This region contained a multiplicity of spiritual figures: the beguine Marie d'Oignies; the recluse, Ivetta of Huy; the Dominican tertiary Margaret of Ypres; and the Cistercian nun Lutgard of Aywières. Christine of St Trond, moreover, was an example of a religious figure who was claimed by not only the Benedictines, but also the Cistercians and Premonstratensians.<sup>42</sup> The situation in Lotharingia confirms that the spiritual diversity of women's lives in Tuscany and Umbria was not exceptional to Italy.

Innocent addressed this fluid condition and sought to bring some order to it, preferring all who professed religious life to live according prescribed monastic strictures. He promoted the role of the pope as the *abbas universalis*, and brought monastic houses under canonical protection. His actions assumed stability as distinctive of the monastic profession. Innocent's interpretation of the Rule of Benedict stressed the importance of solitude and retreat from the world as essential

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<sup>41</sup> Bolton, "Via ascetica: a papal quandary", *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W.J. Shiels, (Oxford, 1984) 161-184; "Vita matrum: a further aspect of the Frauenfrage", *Medieval Women*, edited by D. Baker, Studies in Church History, subsidia 1 (Oxford, 1978), 250-274; "Daughters of Rome: All One in Christ Jesus!" *Women in the Church*, ed. by W.J. Shiels & D. Wood, Studies in Church History 27, (1990) 110-115.

elements, so monks were discouraged from excessive excursions outside the monastery.<sup>43</sup> He implemented monastic values through three mechanisms; supervision, and adequate material provision, and affiliation.

Innocent was keen to have centralised curial control over the development of new religious communities. The papacy's role was embodied in the Roman chancery formula, *Religiosam vitam*. Not only did it confirm new houses, it allowed for granting of special privileges, an aid to papally initiated reform.<sup>44</sup> In particular, he sought a more interventionist treatment of houses that claimed local episcopal supervision and were attached *nullo medio* to the Holy See herself. The papacy enhanced its jurisdiction by later insisting that new houses took on an established rule as a condition of their confirmation, before they could refer to themselves as an *ordo* or *religio*. This was presumably as an attempt to introduce conformity.<sup>45</sup> However, it is worth remembering that an attachment to a particular rule was less concerned with its appropriateness for female religiosity, as they were often adapted to suit a convent's needs, but as a confirmation of their professed status.

Concurrent with Innocent's attempts to regularise houses under papal jurisdiction, the decree, *Ne nimia religionum diversitas* (1215), at the Fourth Lateran Council, was the culmination of episcopal policy of regularisation across all religious communities. It sought a level of uniformity across religious communities insisting, "whoever wants to become a religious should enter one of the already approved orders." As all religious houses had to accept an established rule and join an approved order, the decree limited the choices of women taking up an urban apostolate and channelled religious expression into clearly defined structures and institutions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bolton "Vita matrum," 260.

<sup>43</sup> Innocent III, *Register* I, 161: 229-30. Letter 30 April 1198, "Viris religiosus, et his praecipue qui beati Benedicti regulam sunt professi, non credimus expedire, ut, otio claustrali postposito, contra instituta sui ordinis discurrant per curias seculares aut secularibus negotiis involvantur"; as cited in Bolton "Via ascetica," 176.

<sup>44</sup> "Religiosam vitam eligentibus, apostolicum convenit adesse praesidium," See M. Tangl, *Die päpstlichen Kanzleiordnungen von 1200-1500* (Innsbruck, 1894): 229-32; as cited in Bolton "Via ascetica," 162-163.

<sup>45</sup> J. Dubois, "Les ordres religieux au xii<sup>e</sup> siècle selon la Curie romaine" *R.B.*, 78 (1968): 285-27, Maccarrone, "Primato Romano e Monasteri dal Principio del Secolo XII ad Innocenzo III", *Istituzioni Monastiche e Istituzioni Canonicali Occidente (1123-1215)*, (Milan, 1980): 49-132; esp. 74-75, 50-77; as cited in Bolton "Via ascetica," 162-163.

<sup>46</sup> Sensi "Anchoresses and penitents in Umbria", 56.

As Robert of Arbrissel's treatment of his female followers indicated, the leaders of religious orders formulated their own response to the burgeoning demands of the *cura*, and women's enthusiasm for the *vita apostolica*. From both legislative and non-legislative Cistercian sources (the rulings in Cistercian General Chapters and the writing of Idung of Prüfening), one can observe a long preoccupation with the ideal of enclosure: whether it was used to provide financial security, to protect the chastity of religious women, or to embody a spirituality that was based on fleeing from worldly matters. The description of the Cistercian convent of Coyroux, in the *vita* of Stephen of Obazine, highlights the origins of where Gregory IX and Boniface VIII developed their harsh strictures on claustration. Moreover, other Cistercian writings provided the spiritual justification for female enclosure, namely, to protect women from contact with the outside world, because it threatened the sacred vessel of female chastity. Affiliated sixty five years before the first Poor Clare foundation, one can observe an equally vigorous vision of enclosure.<sup>47</sup>

The Cistercians made enclosure the prerequisite for female entry into the order. In the general chapter of 1213, all female houses already under the care of the Cistercians, and female convents who wished to join them, had to adhere to strict enclosure.<sup>48</sup> In practical terms the order imposed physical obstacles that prevented access to the nuns. In Coyroux, the nave was partitioned from the private chancel by a wicket, reinforced with iron bars. The women were further obscured by a curtain on the nuns' side, which was drawn back only for confession and communion.<sup>49</sup> Stephen of Obazine appointed experienced personnel, who scrupulously regulated contact with visitors who brought the necessary daily provisions. In Stephen's double monastery he appointed a porter for each house, and even went to great lengths to ensure that they never set eyes on each other:

It is also necessary to explain how their physical needs are met without their coming out of, and anyone entering the convent. The way out of the enclosure is through two doors facing each other, at either end of a small corridor. The prioress keeps the key to the inner door while that of the outer door is in the keeping of an elderly, experienced brother, who has been appointed by the bursar of the convent: this friar, bursar or porter, being lay, is charged with all

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<sup>47</sup> See Barrière's excellent study of Coyroux, "The Cistercian convent of Coyroux in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries", *Gesta*, 31 (1992), 76-82.

<sup>48</sup> "Item constituitur auctoritate Capituli generalis ut moniales quae iam etiam incorporatae sunt Ordini, non habeant liberum egressum, nisi de licentia abbatis sub cuius cura consistunt, quia omnino non expedit animabus earum. Si quae vero fuerint incorporandae de cetero, non aliter admittantur ad Ordinis unitatem, nisi penitus includendae." ed. J.M.. Canivez, *Statuta Capitolorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1768*, I, (Louvain, 1933) 405, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Barrière, "The Cistercian convent of Coyroux", 77.



the dealings with the outer world; he must provide what the community needs without asking anything from the secular monks, except for what these concede to give or send over. He gathers the various supplies between two doors: bread, wine, herbs, wood, vegetables, all that is useful to the healthy and to the sick, he locks the outer door, which he then strikes with a stick...The portress, thus notified, opens her own door and removes what has been placed in the corridor.”<sup>50</sup>

The Cistercians contextualised their strict position on enclosure within monastic values by insisting that religious should flee from worldly matters. With this in mind, Stephen deliberately situated his nunnery in an inhospitable location. It was in a valley cut off from human habitation, except for the brother monastery; the valley was very narrow and distant from any roads; and there was no drinking water available. All these features added up to what Barrière termed as an, “anti-site”.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the general chapter of 1216 further reinforced such separation amongst other female houses. Each one was required to be six leagues away from its brother house and ten leagues away from other Cistercian nunneries.<sup>52</sup> Such a lifestyle led Jacques de Vitry to regard Cistercian nuns as women sealed away from all outside contact.<sup>53</sup>

Non-legislative Cistercian writings reinforced gendered distinctions on the matter of enclosure. Idung of Prüfening's *Argumentum super quatuor quaestionibus* developed the justification for the increasingly harsh attitude to the claustration of female religious. He posed the question whether monks and nuns, both subject to the *Rule of Benedict*, should experience the same level of enclosure. Collecting together patristic and biblical sources on the issue, he argued that women's nature required that they have a stricter form of enclosure imposed upon them.

In the first place, women were dedicated as brides to Christ, and in order to fulfill such a role effectively they must not be distracted by outside concerns. Their priority was always to their

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<sup>50</sup> M. Aubrun, ed. & trans., *Vie de saint Etienne d' Obazine*, (1970): 1100; as quoted by Barrière, “The Cistercian convent of Coyroux,” 79

<sup>51</sup> Barrière, “The Cistercian convent of Coyroux,” 76

<sup>52</sup> “Abbatiae monialium de cetero non construantur infra VI leucas a nostris abbatiis, et infra se habeant distantiam X leucarum, et recipiant se alter utras sicut monachi facere consueverunt.” *Statuta Capitolorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis*, 485, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis*; as cited by P.D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, (London, 1991) 151.

Lord:

The spouse of Christ should also have such an uninterrupted stability in her cell or in her monastery that she does not go out to visit a prince's wife, even if she lives near the monastery.<sup>54</sup>

Such distance was motivated, in the second place, by a deep concern with chastity of religious women. Nuns were enclosed as their virginity was seen as a sacred sealed vessel, which needed protection:

The more fragile the vessel, the more diligent care it needs lest the vessel be broken...[or] carried off through theft or pillage, a protection which golden vessels require more than glass. A consecrated woman requires both kinds of protection for she can, metaphorically, be called a glass vessel because of her fragile sex and a golden vessel because of the office of virgin.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the chastity of women was defined in terms of a precious commodity, at risk of being broken. Those dedicated to Christ were held as more valuable because of their sacred intention towards life-long chastity. Idung's image was taken literally by Cistercians in their desire to ensure that religious women were physically enclosed to prevent the risk of the loss of their virginity.

Third, the guardianship for a women's chastity belonged to the father-abbot. By this, Idung justified the limits to nuns' autonomy:

It is not expedient for that sex [female] to enjoy the freedom of having its own governance-because of its natural fickleness and also because of outside temptations which womanly weakness is not strong enough to resist.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Idung of Prüfening, *Argumentum super quatuor quaestionibus*, VII; trans. J. Leahey, *Cistercians and Cluniacs: the case for Cîteaux*, (Kalamazoo, 1977): 172.

<sup>55</sup> Idung of Prüfening, *Argumentum* 6, as quoted by B. Newman, "Flaws in the golden bowl: gender and spiritual formation in the twelfth century", *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, (London, 1996): 28.

<sup>56</sup> Idung of Prüfening, *Argumentum super quatuor quaestionibus*, VII; trans. J. Leahey, *Cistercians and Cluniacs*, 176.

As well as the appropriate level of supervision and affiliation of monastic communities, Innocent tried to address the difficulties surrounding their material provision. On one hand, stressing the distinctiveness of monastic expression of spiritual life, Innocent highlighted the necessity of personal poverty and chastity. Innocent, influenced by a visit to Subiaco in 1202, where he witnessed laxities such as embezzlement, involvement in secular feuds, and the possession of personal goods. As a result of his visit his decretal, *Cum ad monasterium* February 1203, emphasised chastity and poverty as central components of monastic life: “since the abdication of all personal property, as with the practice of chastity, is so essential in the monastic rule, even the Pope himself has not the right to abrogate it.”<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Innocent saw the poverty of convents as the reason behind lapses in their code of behaviour. Therefore, by bringing, for example, autonomous Benedictine houses in Rome under papal jurisdiction he could prevent abbesses from stripping assets from the community as a result of familial pressure.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Dominic’s treatment of religious women at San Sisto, Rome and St Agnes, Bologna, can be seen as the continuation of Innocent’s three-pronged policy of supervision, affiliation and provision, as well as in line with Cistercian legislation to ensure the enclosure of women who professed themselves to the order. Consequently for women, monastic expression of chastity required enclosure to be a prerequisite in the foundation of their religious houses. Dominic’s foundation at San Sisto, Rome showed a hardline approach to enclosure. Dominic’s policy was a realisation of Innocent III’s earlier attempt to reform the religious women in Rome. Seeking uniformity in religious practice, Innocent desired a *universale cenobium*, where all Roman religious women, regardless of their lifestyles and orders were to be enclosed. Benedetto da Montefiascone looking back a century later (c.1318) claimed that, “the women of the city and the nuns of Rome, instead of wandering about were to be brought under a strict enclosure- *arcta clausura*- and the diligent custody of the servants of the Lord”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed A. Friedberg, 2 vols, (Leipzig, 1879), II, Decretal of Gregory IX, (X.3.35.6) cols 599-600. De statu monachorum et canonicorum regularium; *Chronicon Sublacense*: 36 “Nec extimet annas abbas quod super habenda proprietate posit cum aliquo monacho dispensare, quoniam abdicatio proprietatis sicut et custodia castitatis adeo est annexa regulae monachali ut contra eam ne summus pontifex possit licenciam indulgere.”

<sup>58</sup> Letter to the abbesses of convents in Rome, 7 Dec 1204; *P.L.* 215, col. 415; as cited in Bolton, “Daughters of Rome,” 107-8.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted Bolton “Daughters of Rome,” 108.

Crucially, enclosure was an innovation that broke the customs of Roman *pinzochere*. For example, the first group to be enclosed, the sisters of Santa Maria in Tempula, were known to take a daily *passeggiata* when they assisted the poor and infirm. Their affiliation to the Dominicans denied them this privilege, and transformed the nature of their religious vocation. In accepting enclosure and professing their loyalty to Dominic, the women, as in Prouille, gave up their autonomy. In February 1221, Abbess Eugenia formally abdicated her power to Dominic. If the women were undecided about enclosure, Dominic offered them little choice when he made them profess an oath to it, confiscated their keys and refused to allow them to speak to their relatives. The assumption of enclosure reflected Dominic's expectations of religious observance amongst women, where the observance of territorial boundaries were paramount. In a letter to the nuns of Madrid in 1219, he connected the construction of a physical cloister and the imposition of both active and passive enclosure as essential to the maintenance of a rudimentary rule:

Until now, you have had no place in which you could practise your religious life, but now you can no longer offer that excuse. By the grace of God, you have buildings that are quite suitable enough for religious observance to be maintained. From now on, I want you to keep the silence in the prescribed places, namely the refectory, the dormitory and the oratory, and to observe your rule fully in everything else too. Let none of the sisters go outside the gate, and let nobody come in, except for the bishop or any other ecclesiastical superior, who comes to preach to you or on visitation.<sup>60</sup>

Dominic was aware of the level of supervision required for nascent communities because of his experience in the foundation of Prouille, Madrid and Bologna. It was essential that he had the consent of the rest of the friars in providing a role for women with the order. In establishing the convent of St Agnes in Bologna in 1218, Dominic had ordered the friars to establish a cloister for his female followers, even if it meant delaying the construction of the friary:

So one day St Dominic gather his brethren and asked them what they thought about building a house of nuns which would be called, and which would be part of the order...[the substance of their reply is not recorded though he asked them to pray about it]...The next day, after he had prayed, he sat down with the brethren in chapter and said. "It is absolutely

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<sup>60</sup> Dominic, Letter of Dominic to the prioress of Madrid, 1219, in *A.F.P.* 56 (1986): 5-13; trans. Koudleka, *Dominic* (London, 1997): 162-163.

necessary brethren, that a house of nuns should be built, even if it means interrupting the work on our own house.<sup>61</sup>

Dominic did indicate early on his acceptance of women within the order. Interestingly, the friars' response to his request went unrecorded. It is possible that at first they showed reluctance to his suggestion of the formation of the second order, as Dominic asked them to sleep on their response, as he added the caveat, "I do not want a reply today, I want to consult the Lord. I will give you an answer tomorrow".<sup>62</sup> In any case, Dominic took the initiative out of their hands. In the same year, he had placed the nuns of Prouille under a modified rule of Augustine similar to that of the friars, hinting at his intentions to include women in the order.

Nevertheless, he inspired in his immediate followers a continued interest in St Agnes. Having appointed four brothers in charge of the project [Master Paul of Hungary, Guala of Brescia, Ventura of Verona and Rudolph of Faenza], three of the friars remained committed to its completion and were present at the installation and profession of Diana d'Andalo and the other sisters in 1223. In that year, the Master General, Jordan of Saxony, was also careful to appoint Guala and Rudolph to present a petition to the pope to transfer four nuns from San Sisto to train the new community in Bologna. The example of St Agnes demonstrated that at the very least the friars visited daily to say Mass for the community, although previously lay brethren also provided for the community materially:

[Jordan] also gave the sisters some brethren to say Mass in their house every day, as in a house of the Order. At first he had appointed some lay brothers to live in the house and look after their temporal affairs but as time went by, the sisters thought it would be better if neither lay brothers nor clerics were obliged to live in the house, so the blessed father gave the ruling already mentioned, that they should say Mass for them everyday, but not be bound to live in the nun's house.<sup>63</sup>

The extended period over which San Sisto was built (1208-1221) ensured that the popes who succeeded Innocent were aware of the issues the project engendered. After Innocent died in

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<sup>61</sup> *Chronicle of St Agnes, Bologna, 1254*, ed. M.G. Cambria, *Il Monastero Domenicano di S. Agnese in Bologna*, (1973): 226-231; trans. Kouldelka, *Dominic*, 169.

<sup>62</sup> *Chronicle of St Agnes, Bologna, 1254*; trans. Kouldelka, *Dominic*, 169.

<sup>63</sup> *Chronicle of St Agnes, Bologna, 1254*; trans. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans: selected writings* (London, 1982): 399.

1216, the complex was completed by Honorius III and Dominic. Honorius III had ordered nuns who had previously experienced enclosure were present at San Sisto at the beginning, so that the some nuns from Prouille were transferred there in 1219.<sup>64</sup> However, in the case of the supervision of St Agnes, it was Hugolino (later Gregory IX) who, in turn, convinced Honorius III to transfer four nuns from San Sisto to St Agnes. Honorius had at first refused Jordan's request for the four nuns, probably because of the threat to the stability of the fledgling San Sisto that could not afford to lose critical members at such an early stage. But Hugolino who had visited Diana while she was in her father's house was aware of the genuineness of her vocation. Hugolino arrived at San Sisto with the provincial master of Tuscany, brother Claro and requesting the presence of both the prior of San Sisto and the brother community articulated the pope's concerns.

...the Pope said that he found it painful to drag any of them away from the monastery, but all the same it would be unfitting and improper to refuse to grant a petition made by such men as these, so he intended to send four of the sisters to the monastery of St Agnes...So four sisters, who had made profession in the hands of St Dominic and received the habit from him, came to the monastery of St Agnes and remained in the community there until they died.<sup>65</sup>

The initial success of Innocent's policy was evident not only within the Dominican order. Later, as Gregory IX, he reformed the remaining convents in Rome in 1232, and in the bull, *Gloriam virginalem*, (1233) enclosed all consecrated virgins in Germany.<sup>66</sup>

However, when assessing the long-term implementation of papal policy on the *cura mulierum*, such guidelines channelling religious women towards conventual life was in practice only partially successful. The fraught relationships of the nuns with the master generals of the Dominicans, and theirs with the popes, were paradigmatic of the problems not adequately addressed in the *cura*. In the first place, the Holy See never really addressed the proximity anxiety articulated by Dominican general chapters that hindered the affiliation of female communities. Secondly, the burden of supervision brought about by the expected geographical stability of the nuns with the itinerancy of the friars led to neglect for the new communities and continued protests to the Curia by the leaders of the female communities. Finally, the confused responsibilities of the

<sup>64</sup> Cited by Bolton "Daughters of Rome," 112.

<sup>65</sup> *Chronicle of St Agnes, Bologna*, 1254; trans. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, 398.

<sup>66</sup> The papal legate to Umbria, Hugolino, later Gregory IX was so convinced by the successful transferral of the women to San Sisto and applied this policy across Umbria. Hugolino a supporter the Roman venture, as

pope with the master generals set up an antagonistic dialogue between the two offices that prevent a consistent approach being taken with the *cura*.

The Dominican order articulated increasing anxiety towards the close association of friars to religious women. After Dominic's death in 1221, the increasing burden of the number of monasteries asking for the supervision of the Dominicans brought the issue of the *cura* into sharp focus. The first official statement that demonstrated the order's reluctance to supervise women was at the chapter of 1228. A decree stated that:

Under pain of excommunication we prohibit any of our friars from labouring for or procuring that the care or the supervision of nuns or any other women be committed to the friars, and if anyone will presume to act contrary, he will be subject to serious blame.<sup>67</sup>

The statute itself followed the trend amongst other orders to extricate themselves from their obligations to women. Papal precedent had earlier acknowledged the extent of the burden of women, so that Innocent himself had acted similarly on behalf of the Premonstratensians in 1198.<sup>68</sup> As with the Dominicans, the Cistercians were unable to effectively supervise the multiplicity of religious houses that had sought an association with the order, after the opening of the order to women in 1221. Seven years later, the Cistercians also prohibited the incorporation of women's houses or even imitated their institutes.<sup>69</sup>

The degree to which the Dominicans' mandate was interpreted was crucial. Some saw it as a complete prohibition from contact with all women, while the Master General, Jordan of Saxony, was more flexible in his interpretation. For example, Stephen of Lombardy, who had in his jurisdiction the monastery of St Agnes, interpreted the statute in 1229 as a means to disengage with the convent. Protesting at this, Diana wrote to the master general to seek clarification on the issue. Jordan's letter to Stephen rescinding the former's decision highlights how he interpreted the statute.

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Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia was responsible for the enclosure of the Poor Clares at San Damiano, 1218-1219. The subsequent chapter outlines the influence of Innocent's policy amongst Franciscan circles.

<sup>67</sup> *Const. antiquae*, dist. 2, ch. 27: 64; as quoted by Brett, *Humbert of Romans: his life and views of thirteenth century society* (Toronto, 1994) 59. See Brett's chapter on the Dominican second order for a more detailed analysis of the implications of the *cura mulierum*.

<sup>68</sup> Innocent III, *Opera omnia*, P.L., 214: 174; as cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 59.

He insisted that the chapter did not intend to apply the directive monasteries already affiliated to Dominicans: San Sisto, Prouille, Madrid and St Agnes, Bologna. Such a move was unconstitutional as it went directly against papal insistence on the attachment of the four monasteries to the order. The chapter could not overturn an order from the pope.

I know very well the acts and decrees of all the chapters and also the particular reason which inspired them, and I can state that although one of them carries the prohibition it is not a question of our order's nuns at all. But even if this had been the intention [of the general chapter], would we have had the right to do it? By no means, for we would be acting against the intention of the Supreme Pontiff who as commissioned us to watch over them [the nuns] as over the friars...Be then totally reassured in this matter... Reassure the sisters of St Agnes and tell them that they have nothing to fear and that they may continue to live in peace...This matter must be regarded as certainly and clearly defined...It is useless to bring up this matter again.<sup>70</sup>

Despite his unequivocal statement the treatment of the four sister houses was still under debate in the general chapter of 1234. The statute referring to the disengagement of women's houses has not survive but its removal was recorded by Jordan in a letter to Agnes.<sup>71</sup>

It was possible that without the explicit direction and inspiration of their founder, Dominic, the friars objected to their close association with religious women because of a fear for their own chastity. Indeed, the friars could find justification for their attitude towards women in Dominic's own comments. He was reported to have said on his deathbed that he himself was wary of frequent contact with women. Again the concern about relations with women were constructed around their threat to the vow of chastity:

"Look at me" he said "God's mercy has preserved me to this day in bodily virginity, but I confess that I have not escaped from being more excited by the conversation of young women than by being talked to by old women."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis Cisterciensis*, vol. 2, 16, 68

<sup>70</sup> As quoted in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 59-61.

<sup>71</sup> "Consequently, since I was not there personally, the diffinitors, knowing little of the condition at St Agnes, made a decision which was not helpful to you. When I learnt about it, seeing it was a mistake, I nullified it in its entirety." Jordan, *Epistulae* no. 49: 55-58; as quoted in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 62.



The haphazard nature of certain affiliations reflected the itinerant nature of the friars' lifestyle, and confirmed that the preservation of chastity was still regarded as a primary feature of female Dominican houses. Successful preaching campaigns led to the establishing of convents as an *ad hoc* solution to the increasing number of women who, although enthusiastic to follow the Dominicans, were unsuited to monastic profession. When Jordan clarified the reasoning behind the prohibition of additional Dominican convents, he stated:

If we have made a statute on this question, it is not concerned with our nuns, but is a result of certain foreigners, for, in various provinces, in order to better assure the conversion of women, our brethren have been accustomed to admit them too easily to the vow of chastity and to the religious habit.<sup>72</sup>

Jordan was actually referring to practices in Germany where friars received former prostitutes in an attempt to stop them returning to their earlier sins. Jordan's assumption was that chastity of professional nuns was downgraded by such additions to the flock.

In a letter of Raymund of Peñafort to prioress of St Agnes (c. 1231 and 1236) he hinted at the commitments that limited his ability to care for the nuns, as well as how he envisioned the role of the sisters as essentially contemplative:

Living, as I do, in the whirlwind of the court, I am hardly ever able to reach, or to be quite honest, even to see from afar, the tranquillity of contemplation...So it is a great joy and an enormous comfort to me to feel how I am helped by your prayers. I often think of this service which you and your sisters do for me, sitting as you do, at the Lord's feet with Mary, enjoying the delights of your spouse, our Lord Jesus Christ, contemplating the face of him...So when all is going well for you with your spouse in the secrecy of your chamber, do not forget to pray for me and beg alms for me in my poverty and need.<sup>73</sup>

Ordinary friars, who had to juggle the demands of the daily supervision of nuns with their commitments to preaching and study, were often unable to attend to their female dependents. Thus, objections to the *cura* continued up until 1235, when the general chapter prohibited Dominicans

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<sup>72</sup> Jordan, *Libellus*, 92; trans. Koudleka, *Dominic*, 160

<sup>73</sup> Jordan, *Epistulae*, no. 48: 54-55; as quoted in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 61.

<sup>74</sup> Raymund of Peñafort, Letter to Prioress of St Agnes, (c. 1231-36) ed. F. Balme, C. Paban and J. Collomb, *M.O.P.H.* IV, 2, Rome (1901): 48-49; trans. Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, 409.

from carrying out work in all monasteries except San Sisto and St Agnes, thereby ignoring the affiliation of Prouille and Madrid. The nuns' subsequent neglect forced them to write to Gregory IX who in turn ordered the Dominicans to reincorporate the latter two convents.<sup>75</sup>

The obduracy of a succession of Dominican master generals, who were hostile to the *cura*, highlighted the weakness in the papal method of affiliation and exemption in the treatment of the four main houses of Dominican nuns. Their hostility resulted in Gregory IX recognising their reluctance in his bull, *Inspirationis divinae*, Oct 1239. Gregory's bull declared that the friars were no longer obliged to accept women into their order who did not possess a papal exemption ordering this specific concession. For the *cura* to be valid, a papal letter had to cite *Inspirationis*. In essence, female houses had to reapply to the pope and the chapter for affiliation.<sup>76</sup> The Master General, John Teutonicus, interpreted the bull as an opportunity to wrest the friars away from the *cura* and in 1240 and 1242 forbade the friars to administer all the sacraments except penance to female communities<sup>77</sup> and requested that the new pope, Innocent IV, renew *Inspirationis* to reinforce his decision.<sup>78</sup>

However, the nuns at San Sisto protested at their disaffiliation, so that Innocent overturned Teutonicus' removal of the chaplain at the convent and ordered him to reinstate a Dominican in the position as Jordan and Raymund had done.<sup>79</sup> This action set a precedent for the re-affiliation of women to the order. Instead of re-affiliating the original four houses, Innocent set out his objections to *Inspirationis* and ordered the Dominicans to accept the *cura* of all nuns at the discretion of the Holy See.<sup>80</sup> As a result, another thirty new houses joined the order by the end of 1246. The affiliation of the new convent of Montargis in 1245 demonstrated how two authorities, the Master General and the Curia could be played against each other by female communities in an attempt to gain entry into the order.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Teutonicus remained steadfast in his refusal to accept women so that frustrated at his lack of cooperation in 1252 Innocent relieved the Dominicans of all their nunneries except Prouille and San Sisto. The nuns were allowed to retain the Dominican rule, but the supervision of the nuns went under the care of the local bishop who

<sup>75</sup> Prouille: *B.O.P.*, 1: 86; Madrid, 1: 87; cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 62.

<sup>76</sup> Gregory IX, *Inspirationis divinae*, Oct. 1239, *Acta capitulorum*, 1: 17; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 62.

<sup>77</sup> *Acta capitulorum*, 1: 24; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> *B.O.P.* 1: 120; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 63.

<sup>79</sup> *B.O.P.* 1: 131; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 63.

<sup>80</sup> Innocent IV, *Licet olim*, *B.O.P.* 1: 160; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> *B.O.P.* 1: 148; Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 64.

appointed their chaplains and confessors. As a consequence of these tortuous negotiations, the status and supervision of previously Dominican nunneries remained imprecise.

Moreover, the episode also reflected the limits of the conciliar decree, *Ne nimia religionum*. By signing communities under episcopal jurisdiction to either the Rule of Benedict or the Rule of Augustine at a monastery's erection, as the decree insisted, these rules could counter the original or nascent intentions of the community. If a community had sought affiliation to the Dominicans, then the imposition of the Rule of Benedict was unwelcome. To put it succinctly, in this period, monastic rules were often used as a form of emergency legislation, used to assign professional status to new communities, and had no bearing on the house's vision of spiritual life. The repetition of *Ne nimia* at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 continued this trend and limited the efficacy of episcopal intervention in disputes on affiliation. In any case, the lack of consistency in the treatment of religious women by the popes, master generals and bishops undermined the creation of stable contemplative environments

Only under the master general Humbert of Romans was a consistent formula generated which addressed the above issues. Humbert, while articulating proximity anxiety, still managed to effect a suitable compromise between maintaining the integrity of the order and allowing for the care of nuns. He put forward a clear justification why the *cura* for women was essential:

First, on account of their defect of industry; for no woman is by nature so sensible as is man, and therefore women need sensible men who can prudently conduct their affairs. Second, because of their ineptitude for business; for there are no religious women in the cloister as fitted for running to and fro for their business transactions as are men who might do this for them. Third on account of danger; for it is not without peril that women because of their business are frequently occupied in speaking with secular men or in lingering with them.<sup>82</sup>

His justification of enclosure and supervision probably developed during his role of drawing up the constitutions of Montargis c. 1249 and his application of the constitutions to all Dominican houses in 1259. He regarded previous attempts by master generals as extreme; total prohibition of contact was irresponsible and illegal and *ad hoc* affiliation was ill considered.

Crucially, Humbert added constitutional mechanisms that allowed for the considered acceptance of further monasteries, and also assuaged papal anxieties about the casting off the friars' duties towards established monasteries. He proposed in 1255 at the Milan chapter that female communities were not to be accepted into the order unless three sets of diffinitors had inspected and reported favourably on a monastery at each annual general chapter. (Ironically, in the period up to when this ordinance was passed 1256-59, the convents already affiliated to the order sought to bypass the new mechanism and asked the pope for acceptance into the order.<sup>83</sup>) He also reformed the regulation of Dominican nuns and he asked in 1257 Alexander IV's permission to create a new set of constitutions for the nuns. In 1259, at the general chapter, he issued the new code and ordered them all to follow it. In it, Humbert made an explicit statement on the necessity of conformity among Dominican nunneries: "that you might live under one rule and by one profession and that there should be uniformity in you regular observances"<sup>84</sup>

The constitutions brought together all the convents affiliated under the Dominicans and lent cohesiveness to the second order. They were based on his earlier Montargis constitution and sought to clarify the relationship between the first and second order. The first order maintained centralised control on the nunneries: the master, provincial or vicar were to choose or confirm candidates for the post of prioress.<sup>85</sup> The master general or provincial prior chose who was to hear the sisters' confession.<sup>86</sup> No one was to construct a house for the Second Order until the community had the approval of the general chapter.<sup>87</sup> This constitution ensured that no further nunneries were able to bypass the wishes of the general chapter by appealing directly to the pope. Finally, Humbert insisted each foundation was to be on a firm financial footing: "We command with the same severity that no one should receive a house under the care of the order unless there are provisions sufficient enough in temporal goods for the sisters' necessities"<sup>88</sup> That the papacy approved of this compromise position is evident when Clement IV promulgated the bull, *Affectu*

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<sup>82</sup> Humbert of Romans, *De modo prompte cudendi sermones*. Pt 1, no 53: 483. This extract was from a sermon addressed to friars who worked for religious women and explained why they had to accept the cura; as quoted by Brett *Humbert of Romans*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> For example, St Agnes was reincorporated by the bull of Alexander IV, 18 April 1257; as cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 73.

<sup>84</sup> Humbert of Romans, *Opera*, 2:515; as cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 73.

<sup>85</sup> Humbert of Romans, "Liber constitutionum sororum ordinis Praedicatorum" 23, *Analecta sacri ordinis Praedicatorum*, 3, (1897): 346; as cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 73.

<sup>86</sup> Humbert of Romans, "Liber constitutionum sororum ordinis Praedicatorum" 23, *A.S.O.P.* 3 (1897): 342.

<sup>87</sup> Humbert of Romans, "Liber constitutionum sororum ordinis Praedicatorum" 23, *A.S.O.P.* 3 (1897): 348.

*sincero sic* (6 February 1267) which confirmed the specific role of Dominican friars who acted as chaplains for nuns to administer sacraments, visit, correct and reform, install or remove the prioress where necessary, though it was usually the community's prerogative, and subject to confirmation by provincial prior or master general. Clement also conceded that chaplains were not obligated to reside at the nunnery except at Prouille, San Sisto and Madrid as accorded with their customs.<sup>89</sup>

#### IV

This survey of the development of monastic legislation as it related to the claustration of religious women, has highlighted the difficulties in maintaining a stable cloistered environment. *Periculoso*, put forward by Boniface VIII in 1298, can be viewed as the final definitive attempt to deal with the issue; presenting a justification for the cloister, and implementing a series of practical considerations borne out of failures from past legislative practice. The primary assumption behind the implementation and promulgation of *Periculoso* was that nuns' central virtue should be defined as chastity and the decretal was intended to ensure it was universally, consistently and strictly regulated. It insisted that the consecrated chastity of professed nuns made them distinct from lay religious. Most significantly, the supervision of all nunneries was to be universal. *Periculoso* applied to all communities whether under episcopal, papal control, or under the supervision of a religious order. Finally, it prioritised the importance of provision and supervision over the necessity of affiliation.

Boniface VIII sought to update and replace earlier papal legislation by Gregory IX producing his *Liber Sextus* (where *Periculoso* is found as title 16 in the third volume of the *Liber Sextus*), as indicated in his bull of promulgation, *Sacrosanctae Romanae*.<sup>90</sup> Boniface's collection of decretals was the sixth volume in an updating of Gratian's *Decretals*, *Concordia discordantium canonum*. Gregory IX had commissioned Raymund of Peñafort (d. 1275) to prepare a new collection of decretals, *Decretales Gregorii IX* or the *Liber extra*. With a letter of transmission to law faculties of Paris and Bologna they were ordered to teach this collection in their classes. *Liber sextus*, which contained *Periculoso*, was a continuation of these official collections. As a consequence, Boniface contributed to primarily a teaching aid rather than a statute, a collection of legislative enactments. Nevertheless, Gratian's work and in turn Boniface's *Liber Sextus* were transmitted not only through teaching but more importantly legal practice. The *Liber Sextus* was an

<sup>88</sup> Humbert of Romans, "Liber constitutionum sororum ordinis Praedicatorum" 23, , *A.S.O.P.* 3 (1897): 348.

<sup>89</sup> *B.O.P.* 1 :481; as cited in Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, bull of promulgation, *Sacrosancta Romanae*, ed. E. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2, (Leipzig, 1959): 933-36.

attempt to collate and compile all papal decretals that had not appeared in five previous volumes of Gratian's *Decretals*, including those missing in Gregory IX's previous compilation. *Liber Sextus* was sent to Bologna as the final word on papal decretals and intended for immediate practice:

...arranged with much care, which under our bull we transmit to you, be taken up with manifest affection, and be used henceforth in the courts and schools, and that after the publication of the aforesaid volume, no decretals or constitutions promulgated by our Roman predecessors outside of those especially inserted in and reserved to the aforesaid volume be received or held as decretals.<sup>91</sup>

As part of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, the *Liber Sextus* was recognised as part of the universal law of the church. Gratian outlined the legal presumptions behind uncertain or problematic laws. So the decretals were published by the pope to deal with difficult laws and spelled out the rationale behind them. Many, then, resemble modern day court decisions, or appeal court rulings. Copies were usually despatched to the parties involved. In the case of *Periculoso*, these seemed to refer to no particular parties but the work was instead despatched to the Bolognian canonists, so perhaps could be seen as the pope's clarification to the legal assumptions behind enclosure, for the edification of canon law teachers and practising canonists. Crucially, *Periculoso* was also confirmed in the bull, *Apostolicae sedis* (1309), which reinforced the popes' intention that enclosure be applied to all conventual houses. In this way, the decretal entered official circulation so that supervising bishops and abbots could not avoid implementing its orders by claiming ignorance of its existence.

It is worth stating the first paragraph of *Periculoso* in full, as outlines the reasoning behind the imposition of strict active and passive enclosure as the protection of the chastity of nuns:

Wishing to provide for the dangerous and abominable situation of certain nuns, who, casting off the reins of respectability and impudently abandoning nunnish modesty (*modestia*) and the natural bashfulness (*verecundia*) of their sex, sometimes rove outside their monasteries to the homes of secular persons and frequently admit suspect persons into these same monasteries, to the injury (*offensam*) of that to which by free choice they vowed their chastity (*integritatem*), to the disgrace and dishonour of the religious life and the temptation of many, we do firmly decree this present constitution which shall forever remain in force, that nuns collectively and individually, both at present and in future, of whatsoever community or

order, in whatever part of the world they may be, ought henceforth to remain perpetually cloistered in their monasteries, so that none of them, tacitly or expressly professed, shall or may for whatever reason or cause (unless by chance any be found to be manifestly suffering from a disease of such type and kind that it is not possible to remain with the others without grave danger or scandal), have permission hereafter to leave their monasteries; and that no person, in any way disreputable, or even respectable, shall be allowed to enter or leave the same (unless a reasonable and obvious cause exists, for which the appropriate authority may grant a special license) so that [the nuns-(*sanctimoniales*)] be able to serve God more freely, wholly separated from the public and worldly gaze, and occasions for lasciviousness having been removed, may most diligently safeguard their hearts and bodies in complete chastity.<sup>92</sup>

Makowski's survey of the commentaries and glosses that accompanied *Periculoso* confirm contemporary understandings of chastity as the central value in the decree, and reinforce how theological ideals of chastity for women were expressed in legislative pronouncements, and supported with additional biblical and canon law exegesis. Commentators consistently saw the preservation of chastity as the most important aspect of women's religious life. This rigid and restrictive conceptualisation of the women's spiritual life ensured that no other value was equally praised. Guiso de Baysio's gloss differentiated between *modestia* and *verecundia*; the latter meaning an active avoidance of all impurity and an awareness of contamination. Joannes Andreae included continence in his understanding of chastity, and emphasised it as the defining virtue of nuns.

The second commentary on *Periculoso* was written by Guiso de Baysio, a Bolognese canonist and the archdeacon of Bologna. His *Apparatus* written three years after the promulgation of *Periculoso* expounded upon the chaste virtues at risk when nuns roamed. *Modestia* was understood as a women's fragility and shyness as well as her chastity. Citing Rebecca in the Old Testament he saw *modestia* as a quality demonstrated by her when she first caught sight of Isaac, and hid her face in a veil.<sup>93</sup> He also highlighted *verecundia*, bashful modesty, as a term worth analysing. Guiso associated the term with a fear of contamination, citing Leviticus when the sons

<sup>91</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, bull of promulgation, *Sacrosancta Romanae*, edited by Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2, 933-36; trans. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, 1997): 133.

<sup>92</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso", ed. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2: 1053-54; collated with Vatican Borghese 7 *Liber Sextus* fol. 58v-57v; trans. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 135-136.

<sup>93</sup> Guiso de Baysio, *Apparatus* (1302), to VI 3.16.1 v. *modestia* "id est mansuetudine verecundia modestia partes sunt fragilitas, pudor castitas. *Verecundia* id est pudore modestia de hac verecundia sexus feminini

of Israel were warned to shun all uncleanness (*immundicia*).<sup>94</sup> However, by using both male and female biblical examples of chaste qualities, he seemed to assume that chastity should be valued equally by male and female religious. Indeed, he also cited male examples from the *Rule of Benedict* and *Decretum* as his sources for his gloss on *extra sua monasteria*, on why nuns should stay within the cloister.<sup>95</sup>

Guiso's assumption of the equal value of chastity for monks and nuns was challenged by Joannes Andreae, Professor of Canon Law at Bologna. He completed his *Apparatus* in 1305, which was recognised as the standard gloss of the text, *glossa ordinaria*. His work was influential because the *glossa ordinaria* was appended to most early manuscripts of the *Liber Sextus*. The first part of his summary of the constitution related to the purpose and definition of the enclosure of nuns. He glossed *laxatis habenis* as the analogy of women who have "thrown off the reins of nunnish modesty are likely, as a horse, to run wherever they will."<sup>96</sup> Andreae also used only gender specific examples, which defined enclosure as a concern particular to women. For *verecundia*, he repeated the example of the veiling of Rebecca, but also cited Augustine on the necessity of women to wear such garments. As men were made in the image of God, there is no need for them to cover their heads, as stated by St Paul, but women had to as, "they possess neither the glory or the image of God."<sup>97</sup> Similarly, glossing the injury (*offensam*), that secular visitors might cause a nun's chastity, he cited Cyprian on the corporeal corruption of women. As caresses and kisses are only appropriate in marriage, then nuns, as they are married to Christ, should refrain from such activity with another as they would defile their bodies and betray their spiritual husband, and incite Christ's just anger.<sup>98</sup>

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loquitur: Gen. 24: 61/5, cited in, *Decretum* c. 30 q. 5. 8." See Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 55.

<sup>94</sup> Guiso de Baysio, *Apparatus* (1302), to VI 3.16.1 v. *verecundia* "scriptum est vercundes vel veretites facite filios Israel ab omni immundicia ...[Leviticus 15:31]...et dic verecundos vel verentes, scilicet ut verecundia vel timore essent ab omni immundicia"; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> Guiso de Baysio, *Apparatus*, to VI 3.16.1 v. *extra sua monasteria*, where he cited the Rule of Benedict saying that monks should live within the monastery's precincts "et hoc pessime, nam monachis secundum regulam sancti benedicti intra claustrum morari precipitur: *Decretum* c. 16 q. 1 c.11; cited *Decretum* on comment that a monk can live outside a monastery as far as a fish can live out of water "monachus claustro suo sit [sic] contentus, quia sicut piscus sine aqua caret vita, ita monachus sine monasterio" *Decretum* c. 16 q. 1 c.8; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 56.

<sup>96</sup> *Glossa ordinaria*. to VI 3.16.1 v. *laxatis habenis* "similitudinarie ad equum, qui laxatis habenis currit quo vult."; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 58-59.

<sup>97</sup> *G.O.* to VI 3.16.1, v. *verecundia* "mulier idea velat quia non est gloria aut imago Dei": *Decretum*, c. 20 q. 3. c. 4; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> *G.O.* to VI 3.16.1 v. *offensam* citing *Decretum* c.27 q.1 c.4 "...Si superveniens maritus sponsam suam iacentem cum altero videat, none indignatur et fremit et per zeli dolorem, portam gladium in manu sua? Et Christus Dominus et iudex noster, cum virginem suam sibi dicatam et sanctitati suae destinatam iacere cum altero cernit, quam indignatur et irascitur?"; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 59-60. Andreae reintroduced Guiso's comment that leaving the monastery was prohibited also to monks by ancient authority in his later gloss. However, in the context of his earlier *Glossa Ordinaria*, which emphasised the



When Andreae developed his ideas on the *Liber Sextus*, between 1336-1342 he composed another commentary, *Novella in Sextum*. Andreae clarified the prohibition of the entry of secular visitors, lest they injure a nuns' free vow to chastity, *integritas*. He saw the use of the word *integritas* as meaning continence, so the prohibition was relevant to widows as well as virgins, in accordance to St Paul's exhortation to widows.<sup>99</sup> He emphasised the consecrated nature of a nun's profession of chastity in his interpretation of the term *sanctimoniales* that was used to refer to the nuns when applying for special license for entry and exit from the convent. He inferred that the holiness of their hearts and bodies, which they had to "most diligently safeguard" was synonymous with their chastity.<sup>100</sup> It would seem then that the preservation of chastity as stated in *Periculoso* was strongly presumed as a female concern. Brundage concluded that *Periculoso*:

...unstated assumptions that sexual abstinence and virginity are central values, that they are essential to a life of religious dedication, that their cultivation outweighs all other considerations, and that they must be safeguarded at all costs, run through the literature on *Periculoso*. There is scarcely a hint in Boniface's decretal or in the commentator's remarks on it that religious women might encounter any other mortal dangers...beyond the preservation of their hymeneal integrity.<sup>101</sup>

As well as giving the reasoning behind enclosure, *Periculoso* included practical considerations on how it should be enacted. Here, Boniface, in seeking its universal application upon all religious women, appeared to prioritise the adequate provision and supervision of female houses over their affiliation. For example, clauses 1 to 4 detailed the provision necessary to assure strict enclosure. Drawing from contemporary legislation, primarily that relating to the enclosure of Cistercian nuns and the Poor Clares, Boniface outlined the practical measures need to implement enclosure. Clause 1 stated that all convents without adequate resources were to restrict the acceptance of further postulants.<sup>102</sup> It repeated Innocent and Dominic's insistence on the measured

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special virtues of nuns, it would only be regarded as an encouragement to perfection, rather than a statement of equality between monks and nuns. *Novella in VI* 3.16.1 v. *extra sua*: "hec prohibetur etiam maribus"; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 73.

<sup>99</sup> *Novella in VI* 3.16.1 v. *integritatem* "id est virginitatem vel continentiam" and cites *Decretum C.* 27 q.1 c.1-2; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 73.

<sup>100</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. *Periculoso* "corda sua et corpora in omni sanctimonia diligentius custodire"; *Novella in VI* 3.16.1 v. *sanctimonia*, "id est sanctitate vel castitate et ab hac sanctimoniales dicuntur"; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 73.

<sup>101</sup> J. Brundage & E. Makowski, "Enclosure of nuns: the decretal *Periculoso* and its commentators," *Journal of Medieval History*, 20 (1994) 152

<sup>102</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso", ed. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris Canonici*, 2: 1053-54; collated with Vatican Borghese 7 *Liber Sextus* fol. 58v-57v; trans. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 136.

foundation of religious houses necessary to prevent lapses in behaviour occurring because of inadequate resources. Abbesses were to avoid any unnecessary excursions from the convent, and if their presence was necessary outside it they ought to return to the cloister as soon as was conveniently possible.<sup>103</sup> Boniface insisted rather that provision should be made, so that public transactions were assigned to a male proxy. For example, temporal lords, bishops and other prelates were to allow abbesses and prioresses to swear fealty or conduct other legal transactions through a procurator wherever possible.

...lest any nun have any occasion to wander abroad, indeed we ask, beg and beseech secular princes and temporal lords...to allow the same abbesses and prioresses or nuns who carry out the administration of business for monasteries...to litigate in their tribunals and courts through procurators...lest for lack of procurators the nuns themselves are required to wander abroad.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to this, the supervision of enclosure was given over to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. If necessary, they were to enforce enclosure and provide the funds to support the practice. In these ways, the nuns had to give up their political and economic autonomy:

We strictly command patriarchs, primates, archbishops, and all bishops that they take very diligent care that the nuns of any monasteries subject to them by law...in which enclosure is not observed shall be enclosed as soon as they can properly provide for this; they shall meet the expenses incurred therein from the alms of the faithful that they shall procure for the purpose.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso", "quam primum commode poterit...quod in fraudem residentiae sive morae claustralis nihil fiat omnino." c.2: 1054.

<sup>104</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso": "ne moniales causam seu occasionem habeant evagandi, principes saeculares ac alios dominos temporales rogamus, requirimus et obsecramus...quod abbatissas ipsa et priorissas ac moniales quascunque, monasteriorum suorum curam, administrationem negotiarum gerentes...per procuratores in suis tribunalibus seu curiis litigare permittant, ne pro constituendis procuratoribus, qui atornati in aliquibus partibus nuncupantur, seu aliis huiusmodi easdem oporteat evagari" cl.3, col.1054, trans. Brundage & Makowski, "Enclosure of nuns," 154-55.

<sup>105</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso": "patriarchis, primatibus, archiepiscopis et episcopis...mandamus, quatenus eorum quilibet in civitate ac dioecesi propria in monasteriis monialium sibi ordinario iure subiectis sua...in monasteriis huiusmodi sibi subiectis de clausura convenienti, ubi non est, ipsorum monasteriorum expensis et fidelium eleemosynis, quas ad hoc procurent, diligentius facienda, et de ipsis monialibus includendis quam primum commode poterunt providere procurent." cl.4, co.1054; trans. Brundage & Makowski, "Enclosure of nuns," 155.

The second significant intention behind *Periculoso* was that it had universal application. Previous attempts of claustration were *ad hoc*, and provincial synods were responsible for placing only partial prohibitions on the egress of religious women.<sup>106</sup> No matter what rule they lived under or which monastery they inhabited, *Periculoso* demanded that all nuns must be perpetually enclosed:

we do firmly decree by this present constitution, which shall forever remain in force, that nuns collectively and individually, both at present and in the future, of whatsoever community or order, in whatever part of the world they may be, ought henceforth to remain perpetually cloistered in their monasteries.<sup>107</sup>

Bishops and other prelates were to ensure that *Periculoso* was enforced, even at convents answerable to the Holy See, and those who disregarded the decretal would incur both secular and ecclesiastical penalties. The relationships that had been carefully negotiated between individual houses and their provincial supervisors, were torn up and replaced with *Periculoso*. In highlighting the violation of the cloister, a nun's lack of propriety was understood as not recognising the distinctiveness of her position as a professed religious. Boniface sought to enhance the status of nuns in the same way that Gregory VII in reforming the clergy, through strict sacerdotal celibacy, had set the priesthood apart from the laity. That Boniface regarded all religious women as nuns can be seen in his other legislation. For example, the *Liber Sextus* contained a constitution Boniface decreed in the first year of his pontificate that directly influenced clause 2 of *Periculoso*. *Mulieres quas vagari* ordered that women should not be forced to appear personally in court, rather a notary should be sent to record her testimony. Boniface reasoned that, "surely religious women who ought to remain cloistered are not to be called or compelled to leave their monastery or cloister to appear personally before a judge for any reason, even if they are willing to do so."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> For example, the synod of Paris (1248) allowed nuns to leave the convent only for very important reasons, requested that suspect and unused doors were blocked up, and exhorted the bishops to avoid any scandals that might arise from nuns leaving the cloister at night. See E. Jombart & M. Viller, "Clôture", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique doctrine et histoire*, 2, (1953) col.993.

<sup>107</sup> Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, 3.16 De statu regularium c. un. "Periculoso", "praesenti constitutione perpetuo irrefragabiliter valitura sancimus. universas et singulas moniales, praesentes atque futuras, cuiuscunque religionis sint vel ordinis, in quibus libet mundi partibus existentes, sub perpetua in suis monasteriis debere de cetero permanere clausura ita."; trans. Brundage & Makowski, "Enclosure of nuns," 156.

<sup>108</sup> *Corpus iuris civilis*, ed Krueger, Mommsen et al; trans. Scott, vol. 17 (1973): 96; quoted Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 22.

## Conclusion

*Periculoso* reflected in many ways the clerical assumptions that were recorded in a variety of monastic writings on the nature of women's religious life. Clerical authorities prioritised the preservation of chastity as the primary virtue of women. They assumed women required constant supervision by their male counterparts. In the case of nuns, the vision of their lives remained surprisingly consistent throughout; nuns were to be cloistered and contemplative and exercise little public power. As the social background of women who aspired to religious life transformed from a small aristocratic elite to wide range of social backgrounds, clerical expectations still insisted on enclosure.

Despite Boniface's attempt to shore up cloister legislation with *Periculoso* with a definitive solution to the care of nuns, his exemption of mendicant communities from the adequate provision engendered long-term problems of a policy of provision, supervision and affiliation. Clause 1 stated:

...we most strictly decree that no sisters from this time forward be received in monasteries other than [those of] mendicant orders unless those same monasteries are able to support them with goods or revenues and without penury; contrary actions shall be considered void.

It is precisely the popes' failure to address religious women's identification with mendicant spirituality, especially relating to their enthusiasm for absolute poverty, and the implications this had on provision and supervision of the *cura* that resulted in the failure of *Periculoso* and other previous legislation. A detailed analysis of the actual practical effect of clerical legislation on the Franciscans, in the formation of a rule for Clare of Assisi's community, highlights how far they misread women's identification with mendicancy.

### Chapter 3: The impact of enclosure on the development of *The Rule of St Clare* (1212-1253)

#### Introduction

Historians who have concentrated on canonical sources have often assumed that what was written by the clerics, was followed in practice. This chapter draws out, within a specified context, the canonical motives for enclosure, and also examines the extent to which the process of enclosure proved successful in practice. Broad discussions on impact of cloister legislation fail to reveal the nuances and complex patterns upon contemplative practice. In the case of female Franciscan spirituality a detailed study of its formation under Clare of Assisi at the convent of San Damiano, reveals the flaw in papal attempts to address the problem of religious women. The imposition of universal enclosure and conventional monastic rules ignored women's determination to participate in *vita apostolica*, and motivated them to cling tenaciously onto Franciscan affiliation as their expression of their new born spirituality.

Of particular importance is Clare's relationship with Cardinal Hugolino, the papal legate for Tuscany and Umbria, who went on to become Pope Gregory IX, thus this chapter concentrates mostly on the period just after her entry into San Damiano (1212) to the death of Gregory (1241).<sup>1</sup> The primary theme is upon the religious backgrounds of these protagonists that shaped two almost contradictory stances on enclosure. For Gregory, his restrictive attitude towards enclosure was based upon his experience of Cistercian female monasticism, and his desire to follow the canonical conventions of the Roman Church. But Clare, with her beguine training and Franciscan affiliations held a more adventurous attitude towards the possibilities of life within the cloister. Their inter-relationship between the orthodox authority figure and a radical innovator will be delineated. For Hugolino, the primary use of enclosure was to justify the transferral of the *cura mulierum* away from the Franciscans, towards more stable traditional monastic orders. In his search for stability he also saw apostolic poverty as inappropriate. But to Clare, her affiliation to Francis and her vow of apostolic poverty were the core values of her religious life. The issue of enclosure then escalated from a simple question of security, to something that threatened to undermine what Clare held most dear.

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<sup>1</sup>I make use of Innocent IV's rule for the Clares, but prefer to treat it, in this context, as an extension of Gregory's policy.

The key texts are the different versions of the rule of St Clare. In a period of just thirty years there appeared three rules for San Damiano, Clare's convent, and its satellites. Their value lies in the order they were produced. First, we have presented to us the papal ideal of enclosure as reflected in the rules of Hugolino (1219) and of Innocent III (1247). Only after they were implemented, did Clare produce her own rule, which was a valuable source for the practical implications of the two former rules. One can assume that the adjustments Clare made in 1253 reflected problems she discovered in implementing papal ideals in practice, and more controversially her resistance to the religious values promoted in the earlier rules. Moreover, the end result embodied Clare's own ideals.

However a more balanced picture of the impact of enclosure on the Poor Clares can only be gained from other sources, especially hagiography. The most important being the *Acts of the Process of the Canonisation of St Clare of Assisi* (1253). In it, the testimonies of the nuns show how they and Clare actually lived in the cloister. Many of the incidents were also repeated in Celano's, *Legenda sanctae Clarae Virginis* (1255). These two sources reveal, almost incidentally, the practical realities of practising enclosure, and most importantly, the way it is broken.

## I

Hugolino's primary contribution to the development of the Clares was to transfer the care of the women from the Franciscans to traditional monastic orders. He used enclosure as the means to achieve this end, and so the cardinal was crucial in moulding the Clares along cloistered ideals. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to identifying the conditions that pressured him to take such a harsh stance on enclosure with the Clares. First, he wished to resolve the instability of Clarissan houses. Francis and his followers had accepted the *cura mulierum*, but also felt obliged to remain aloof from the women in fear of establishing scandalous or unnecessary relations. As a consequence of Francis' own confused attitude towards them, they failed in practice to provide adequate support. Second, Hugolino was driven to disassociate the Poor Clares from movements he saw as too radical. He was obliged to ensure that the Clares were attached to an established order, in accordance to the precepts of Lateran IV's, *Ne nimia religionem* (1215). Thus, for him, the newly approved friars were not suitable. In the same way, the Clares were recognised as similar to

the increasingly problematic beguine movement, an association Hugolino wished to avoid.<sup>2</sup>

Hugolino's initial act, in keeping with papal policy, was to bring the new community under the protection of the Holy See. Hugolino disassociated the Clares from the Franciscans by imposing on the women Benedictine and Cistercian ideals. The traditional monastic structure of the Cistercians provided the solution of how to support the women, while maintaining a sense of distance. Hugolino's prescriptions on enclosure not only made the Clares dependent on their male assistants, but also dictated who they were to be. Under the guise of securing the Clares' survival and protection, he imposed the government of papally approved visitors upon the Clares.

The understandable motive behind Hugolino's enclosure of the nuns was to resolve the instability of their struggling convents. When Honorius III initially informed Hugolino about the Clares he saw that their insecurity stemmed from outside patrons, both bishops and lay patrons, who attempted to claim, for themselves, the property which the Clares used, and take control or even disband the houses against the women's will<sup>3</sup>:

Since for this purpose, foundations are being offered to you by many people in the name of the church of Rome, some of the people wish to reserve for themselves the improvement, establishment and abandonment of these foundations, and are not afraid thereby, of impeding the salutary resolutions of these women.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence, the pope ordered Hugolino to protect the women by placing them under papal jurisdiction:

Wishing, therefore, to impart our Apostolic favour upon the pious desires of these women in such a way that they may attain the result of their petition, and that both the bishops and others in whose parishes these women set up their homes, may not have just reason for complaint, we

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<sup>2</sup>Jacques de Vitry's description of them resonates with beguine characteristics. See R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, 1, (Leiden, 1961) 75-76

<sup>3</sup>See M.D Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, (London, 1961) 98

<sup>4</sup>"Cum ad hoc tibi fundi a pluribus ecclesiae Romanae nomine offerantur; quidam volentes sibi reservari correctionem, institutionem, et destitutionem in illis, non verentur salubre illarum propositum impedire." Letter of Honorius III to Hugolino, 1218, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, I: 1, 1; trans. R.J. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Writings and Early Sources*, (New York, 1988): 86.

command you through the authority of this letter to receive, legally as property, the foundations of this kind in the name of the church of Rome, and to ordain that the churches built in these places be solely under the jurisdiction of the Papal See.<sup>5</sup>

That such a situation should have occurred was symptomatic of the irregular protection provided for the Clares by the Franciscans. Because Francis and his followers were dedicated to evangelisation and gospel poverty, they were unwilling to establish fixed abodes near the Clares.<sup>6</sup> But more importantly, Francis' own erratic behaviour and developing attitude to the Poor Clares actively discouraged consistent support. This situation, as the previous chapter has indicated, was neither unusual or unexpected. At the time Honorius' letter was written, Francis was preoccupied with the desire to evangelise outside of Italy. In the same year, 1218, he had determined to go on a preaching mission to France. Only a meeting with Hugolino in Florence dissuaded him from this project. And by 1219, he had left for the Middle East, leaving no friar in charge of the Poor Clares during his absence. Because he had, up to that point, taken personal supervision of the community at San Damiano, the women had no guidance during his absence. It was up to Hugolino to find alternative supervision. Even while in Assisi, one can detect a certain distance he maintained with the women. A record of this can be found in Celano's *Second Life of St Francis*, (1246).<sup>7</sup> This work was compiled at the request of Crescentius in 1244, who appealed to the friars to recall the practice of Francis, so that his followers could follow his teachings as faithfully as possible, despite his death. What is particularly striking, in the chapters concerned with the nuns, was how impersonal his relationship was with the majority of them. Francis claimed that he knew only two of the Poor Clares by sight.<sup>8</sup> And when questioned about this aloofness, he saw that his duty was to protect the Poor Ladies as he had called them, to a life of poverty. But he also saw that visiting them was a potential threat so that the best solution was to visit them infrequently and reluctantly:

“Do not believe, dearest brothers, that I do not love them [the Poor Clares] perfectly. For if it were a fault to cherish them in Christ; would it not have been a greater fault to have united them to Christ? Indeed, not to have called them would not have been a wrong;

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<sup>5</sup> “Volentes igitur piis dictarum mulierum desideriis sic favorem Apostolicum impertiri, ut et ipsae assequantur suae petitionis effectum; et diocesani locorum et alii, in quorum parocchiis loca ipsa consistunt, iuxtam non habeant materiam murmurandi; praesentium tibi auctoritate mandamus, quatenus huiusmodi fundos in ius, et proprietatem Ecclesiae Romanae nomine ipsius recipias, et ecclesias construendas in ipsis soli Apostolicae Sedi subesse decernas; ita quod nullus diocesanus, vel alia ecclesiastica, secularisne persona in eis possit sibi ius aliquod vendicare.” Letter of Honorius III to Hugolino, 1218, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, I: 1, 1-2; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 86.

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi* 87.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Second Life of St Francis*, trans. M. Habig et al, *Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London, 1979) 359-554.



not to have cared for them once they have been would have been the greatest unkindness. But I give you an example, that as I have done to you, so you should also do. I do not want anyone to offer himself of his own accord to visit them, but I command that the unwilling and most reluctant brothers be appointed to take care of them, provided they be spiritual men, proved by a worthy and long religious life.”<sup>9</sup>

But precisely what threat did Francis think the women presented? The rule of 1223 outlined his fear of scandalous relationships between the friars and the Clares: “I strictly command all the brothers not to have suspicious associations or conversations with women.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he wished that all unnecessary relationships were avoided. For example, he reprimanded a brother, who had visited a convent on an errand of sympathy, by making him walk several miles naked in deep snow.<sup>11</sup> All relations with women were to be pared down to offering only confession and spiritual advice.<sup>12</sup>

In his harsh treatment of the Poor Clares, Francis recognised a genuine dilemma in his relations with Clare and her followers. He insisted on the Franciscans' obligation towards supporting them. However, in practical terms it was hindered by his strong warning of caution, so as to avoid scandalous or unnecessary visits. The consequence of this juxtaposition can be seen in Francis' own followers. He might have aspired for the spiritual development of his most reluctant friars, improved by a task they did not enjoy, but most failed to follow his example. Reluctant friars could easily excuse themselves from such duties as they feared the temptation the women entailed, and claimed themselves to be incapable of withstanding it, unlike the perfect Francis. Conversely, those willing to visit the women remembered Francis' prohibitions against casual

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<sup>8</sup> “Fateor veritatem, carissime, nullam me, si aspicerem, recogniturum in facie nisi duas illius,” inquit, “et illius mihi vultus cognitus est alterius nescio” Celano, *Second Life of St Francis*, LXXVIII, 112, in *Analecta Franciscana*, X: 197.

<sup>9</sup> “Non credatis, carissimi, quod eas perfecte non diligam. Si enim crimen esset eas in Christo fovere, none maius fuisset eas Christo iuxisse? Et quidem non eas vocasse nulla fuisset iniuria, non curare vocatas summa est inclementia. Sed exemplum da vobis, ut quemadmodum ego facio ita et vos faciatis. Nolo quod aliquis ad visitandum eas spontaneum se offerat, sed invitas et plurimum renitentes iubeo ipsarum servitiis deputari, spirituales dumtaxat viros, digna et longaeva conversatione probatos.” Celano, *Second Life of St Francis*, CLV, 205, in *A.F. X*: 248; trans. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 526.

<sup>10</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Later Rule*, cap. 11; trans. R.J. Armstrong & I. Brady, *Francis and Clare: the Complete Works*, (New York, 1982): 144.

<sup>11</sup> Celano, *Second Life of St Francis*, CLVI; trans. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 527

<sup>12</sup> Francis said: “Quae sunt fratri minori cum muliere tractanda negotia, nisi cum sanctam paenitentiam vel melioris vitae consilium religiosae petitione deposcit?” Celano, *Second Life of St Francis*, LXXVIII, 114, in *A.F.*, X: 198 “What business should a Friar Minor have to transact with a woman, except when she asks for holy penance or for advice concerning a better life.” trans. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 457.

relations. Thus, it was unsurprising that no other friar assumed the position of protector of San Damiano without Francis' express command. Francis' own ambiguity towards the care of the women of San Damiano resulted in inadequate support for them, however well intentioned. As a result, Hugolino did not regard them as proven supervisors, and sought alternative means for the Poor Ladies.

A second pressure that encouraged Hugolino to transfer the care of the women to a more conventional order was canonical legislation. As papal legate for Tuscany and Umbria, Hugolino felt a special obligation to ensure that legislation arising from the Fourth Lateran Council was adhered to. In the case of the embryonic order of the Poor Clares, it was essential for them to be affiliated to an established order. From Hugolino's subsequent action, it is obvious that he did not find the Franciscans experienced enough to attend to the Poor Clares. At that time, the position of the Franciscans was still slightly precarious, as their rule had only been orally approved.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, with the intention of ensuring the survival of the Poor Clares, Hugolino encouraged them to affiliate to a more firmly established order.

Close association with the conventional monastic orders also removed the danger of association with another religious group, which was increasingly under pressure from the church hierarchy, that is, the beguines. How closely the Clares were related to the beguines is dependent on one's interpretation of a critical source by Jacques de Vitry. In a letter, dated 1216, de Vitry described the Franciscans and Clares thus:

I was consoled by seeing a great number of men and women who renounced all their possessions and left the world for love of Christ: "brothers minor and sisters minor" as they are called. They are held in great esteem by the Lord Pope and the cardinals. They do not occupy themselves with temporal affairs, but work each day with great desire and enthusiastic zeal to capture those souls that were perishing from the vanities of the world and to bring them along with them...By day they enter the cities and villages to earn their living, with some of them pursuing their own activities. By night, they return to their hermitages or to solitary places to give themselves over to contemplation. The women, in truth, live together in various residences as guests. They receive nothing that they do not earn by the work of their hands.

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<sup>13</sup> See L. Oliger, "De origine regularum ordine S. Clarae", *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 5 (1912): 199-102.

Many of them are pained and troubled because they are honoured by the clergy more than they would want.<sup>14</sup>

Jacques de Vitry's passage is the only surviving contemporary description of the Clares which was written before the imposition of papal rules. Therefore, it is the only example of the early aspirations of Clare's order. Much controversy surrounds this passage, mostly concerned with whether the Clares were, at the beginning, beguines. On one side, historians such as Patricia Ranft and Rosalind Brooke have assumed, from this passage, that the Clares lived a life of active charity, because they were described as going into the town during the day. Ranft is particularly vehement that past translations have obscured the Clares from urban participation: "Some prominent Franciscan historians have erroneously translated it and thus created much confusion. John Moorman, whose *A History of the Franciscan Order* is a standard work in Franciscan studies, translates the key phrase, 'fratres minores et sorores minores' in Jacques de Vitry's letter simply as 'friars minor.' His overall translation is misleading."<sup>15</sup>

On the other side, Manselli and Lemmens have claimed that such a reading is not clear from the text, as de Vitry's real intention was to distinguish the friars from the sisters by contrasting the mobility of the former with the stability of place of the Clares. Thus, continuing his description, de Vitry stated that the men, unlike the women, only met together once a year. Meanwhile, it is the men who were dispersed to practise urban charity.<sup>16</sup> Further, they cite other sources that

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<sup>14</sup> "Unam tamen in partibus illis inveni solatium, multi enim utriusque sexus divites et seculares omnibus pro Christo relictis seculum fugiebant, qui Fratres Minores et Sorores Minores vocabantur. A domno papa et cardinalibus in magna reverentia habentur, hii autem circa temporalia nullatenus occupantur, sed ferrenti desiderio et vehementi studio singulis diebus laborant ut animas que pereunt a seculi vanitatibus retrahant et eas secum ducant...De die intrant civitates et villas, ut aliquos lucrifaciant operam dantes actione; nocte vero revertuntur ad heremum vel loca solitaria vacantes contemplationi. Mulieres vero iuxta civitates in diversis hospitibus simul commorantur; nichil accipiunt, sed de labore manuum suarum vivunt, valde autem dolent et turbantur, quia a clericis et laicis plus quam vellent honorantur." Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry* (1961), I, 107-124: 75-76; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 245-246.

<sup>15</sup> Ranft, "An overturned victory: Clare of Assisi and the thirteenth century", *Journal of Medieval History*, 17, 1991: 124-125. J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, (Oxford, 1968) 30. See also R. & C.N.L. Brooke, "His [Jacques de Vitry's] evidence is entirely consistent with the indications that Francis originally intended women to play as central a part in his activities as men, and that their role was at first not so different as it later became." In "St Clare", 282. This opinion originated in the writings of the French historian, Sabatier, who was the first to argue that the Clares were not intended as a contemplative order. Sabatier, *Speculum Perfectionis* (London, 1898), 296.

<sup>16</sup> "Homines autem illius religionis semel in anno cum multiplici lucro ad locum determinatum conveniunt, ut simul in domino gaudeant et epulenter...post hoc vero per totum annum disperguntur per Lumbardiam, Thusciam et Apuliam et Siciliam." J. de Vitry, R.B.C. Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, I, 107-124: 75-76; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 245-246. See R. Manselli, *St Francis of Assisi*, trans P. Duggan (Chicago, 1988): 171. This argument is dependent on translating the phrase 'Mulieres vero', as, 'the women,

demonstrate that Clare had always intended to live under the monastic structure of enclosure. To support this, they rely on the testament of Thomas of Celano's biography, *Legenda sanctae Clarae virginis*, where San Damiano was immediately labelled as an *aretum reclusorium* - a place of seclusion. Celano's description of her entrance into the convent develops this theme of enclosure:

In this narrow prison, for the love of her heavenly spouse, the virgin Clare enclosed herself. There, hiding herself from the tempest of the world, throughout her life she imprisoned her body...In this narrow enclosure for forty two years, she broke the alabaster of her body.<sup>17</sup>

Though it is necessary to outline the current debate surrounding Clare's original intentions, I suspect such pedantry is a historiographic red herring. That such diverse interpretations can be drawn from the source most probably indicates that the women's lifestyle was not as yet fully defined. First, Jacques de Vitry's view of the Clares was a reflection of his own concerns. At the time he took solace from the sanctity of the *sorores minores*, he had returned from the Holy See in an attempt to gain recognition for Flemish beguines. He cast an optimistic eye over the Clares searching for Italian equivalents of the beguines, rather than scrutinising them objectively.<sup>18</sup> However, that he chose the term, *hospitium* rather than *monasterium*, to describe their houses indicates that the Poor Clares were obviously a development distinct from previous monastic orders. Other sources corroborate such a stance. A contemporary papal document, the privilege of poverty of Innocent III, referred to the Clares as *vos* and *ecclesia vestra* in recognition of their as yet undefined status, by avoiding the term for traditional monastic communities.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, what is indisputable is how strongly Hugolino wanted the Clares to possess a professed monastic status, and the persistent manner in which he pursued this agenda. His hostility

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however', thus stressing the distinction between the friars and the sisters by reading 'vero' with adversative force. Unfortunately, this is no more reliable than Armstrong's more neutral rendering of the word as, 'in truth'.

<sup>17</sup> "In huius locelli ergastulo, pro caelestis amore sponsi, virgo se Clara conclusit. In hoc se a mundi tempestate celans, corpus, quoad viveret, carceravit. In hoc arcto reclusorio per XLII annos disciplinae flagellis fregit sui corporis alabastrum." Celano, *Legenda sanctae Clarae virginis*: 10; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 198-199; See Lemmens, "Die Anfänge des Clarissenordens", *Römische Quartalschrift*, (1902): 98. See also Lainati, "The enclosure of St Clare," 273. However, this evidence is from later sources, where the aspirations of the pope might have obscured the reality of life at the monastery before his intervention. Celano's source is possibly anachronistic: as enclosure was the norm by the 1260s, so he presumed it was the norm in 1212.

<sup>18</sup> M. Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Sister Frances Teresa, (London, 1993): 67.

<sup>19</sup> This was first noted by Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen*, 132, n. 149.

towards the beguine lifestyle is clear in his treatment of Italian manifestations of them. As Gregory IX, he condemned religious women who wandered around the country. What piqued him especially was that they took on the garb of the Poor Clares, and called themselves such. He contested their allegiance to the Clares, on one significant ground: they did not observe enclosure. In his eyes, this was the defining virtue of the Poor Clares, “being given that the true nuns in order to render to God a pleasing service, live always enclosed.”<sup>20</sup>

Hugolino's rule is, above all, an exercise in providing the Clares with a traditionally monastic structure to their life. This was achieved by explicitly stating their affiliation to a conventional monastic rule, the Benedictine rule. Then, he ensured that the hierarchical structure was in place through the imposition of an abbess. Finally, he imposed Cistercian solutions to the problem of ensuring both solicitude and distance; all the conditions of enclosure had precedence in either the Cistercian general chapters, or in the practice of the Cistercian convent of Coyroux.

His concerns for juridical practice were paramount when he stressed that the rule of Benedict had the approval of the Roman Church and possessed a long tradition:

we give you the *Rule of St Benedict* to be observed in all things which are in no way contrary to that same *Form of Life* that was given to you by us and by which you have chosen to live. This *Rule of St Benedict* is known to embody the perfection of virtue and the greatest discretion. It has been devoutly accepted from the very beginning of the Holy Fathers and venerably approved by the Roman Church.<sup>21</sup>

The Benedictine role of abbess was also confirmed by the rule, a position she had taken up in 1216. It was significant that Clare was reluctant to accept such a clear position of authority, and it

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<sup>20</sup> “Ad audientiam nostram noveritis pervenisse, quod nonnullae mulieres per vestras civitates et dioc. discurrantes se sore de S. Damiani Ordine mentiuntur; ut, alii suae assertioni mendaci side crudelitatis accedant, discalceatae vadunt: habitum et cingulum monialium eiusdem ordinis et cordulas deferentes; quas quidem discalceates, seu chordularias, alii vero moniales ipsae, ut gratum praestent Deo famulatum, perpetuo sint inclusae. Unde quia in eiusdem Ordinis confusionem, ac derogationem Ordinis Fratrum Minorum, et ipsorum Fratrum scandalum, ac monialium, earundem praedictarum mulierum religio simulata redunt.” Letter of Gregory IX to archbishops and bishops, 21. Feb. 1241, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, 1, 331: 290.

<sup>21</sup> Hugolino, *The Rule of Hugolino*, (1219) cl. 3; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 88-89.

required the exhortation of Francis for her to obey Innocent's command.<sup>22</sup> The implications of the growing number of members and adherence to the strictures of the Fourth Lateran council should have forced Clare to concede this aspect of government immediately. But she refused three times. This has often been dismissed as an idealised illustration of her extreme humility. However, her resistance may have been for more important reason. At the time she conceded being appointed to the position of abbess, she also was granted the *Privilege of Poverty* by Innocent III. It is highly probable that she accepted Benedictine authority in exchange for this privilege. This hints at the effective negotiating tactics Clare used to ensure papal approval for the most important aspects of her religious vision, in this case poverty.

The particularly austere form of the Benedictine rule Hugolino imposed on the Clares, is actually more reminiscent of the Cistercian lifestyle. A comparison of the rule of Hugolino for San Damiano with Cistercian general chapters and the practice in the Cistercian nunnery of Coyroux will demonstrate the great extent to which the cardinal sought to impose Cistercian precedents and monastic forms upon the Clares.

First, it will be necessary to establish the clear links between the Clares and the Cistercians. The most obvious example is Hugolino's own affiliation to the monks. As he himself was a Cistercian, his first action was to appoint a Cistercian, Ambrose, as the visitor of the convent of San Damiano in 1218.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the thirteenth century it was usual practice to regard the Cistercians as the most able monastic order to deal with fringe religious groups. For example, Innocent III, from 1204 to 1206, ordered a preaching campaign to be carried out by the Cistercian monks against heretics in Languedoc. Before the consolidation of the friars, the Cistercians were a very natural choice for dealing with the still questionable Poor Clares.<sup>24</sup>

Second, Hugolino's pivotal contribution to the Poor Clares was the Cistercian solution to the *cura mulierum* which Francis had so clearly failed to achieve, that is, how to provide adequate care

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<sup>22</sup>This episode was recorded in the *Process* thus: "at the prayers and insistence of Saint Francis, who almost forced her, she accepted the direction and government of her sisters." trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, I, 6: 130.

<sup>23</sup>See Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 80; Brooke & Brooke, "St Clare" 280; L. Oliger, "De origine regularum ordine s. Clarae," *A.F.H.* 5 (1912): 419-420.

for the female branch of an order, without engendering a dangerous familiarity between the two groups. The cardinal's solution was to curb female urban spirituality through the process of enclosure. In his rule, Hugolino mentions enclosure in five of the twelve clauses that made up the rule.<sup>25</sup> Bartoli summarised Hugolino's obsession in these terms:

Their seclusion thus ceased to be one element in the women's new religious life (and, at that, one which was not always present); instead it became the main pivot in their option for religious and community life...In the history of the Church, Hugolino's *Constitutions* are one of the most explicit and thorough affirmations of the need for enclosure in religious life.<sup>26</sup>

As with the Cistercians, Hugolino sought to lay stress on *clausura* as central to Clarissan spirituality:

Therefore, it is proper and it is a duty that all those women who, after condemning and abandoning the vanity of the world, have resolved to embrace and hold to your order, should observe this law of life and discipline, and remain enclosed the whole time of their life.<sup>27</sup>

A comparison of the practice in Cistercian monasteries with the *Rule of Hugolino* will help demonstrate how distance with the outside world was maintained. Hugolino also imposed a series of physical barriers. The Clares' enclosure was separated from the remainder of the chapel by an iron grille, and that grille too was only opened when the Poor Clares received communion and listened to the Divine Office.<sup>28</sup> Hugolino appointed experienced personnel, who scrupulously regulated contact with visitors who brought the necessary daily provisions. Similarly, Hugolino laid much stress on the upright character of the portress, and her companion, along with the responsibility that their task entailed:

Let one of the sisters, who certainly fears God, who is mature in character, who is diligent, discreet and of a fitting age, be appointed to take care of the entrance to the monastery. Let her so diligently take care of and guard the key to the door, that the door could

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<sup>24</sup>W.L. Wakefield & A.P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (1961): 58.

<sup>25</sup> See *Reg. Hug.*, cl. 4, 6, 10, 11, 13; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 88-89.

<sup>26</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 79.

<sup>27</sup>Hugolino, *Reg. Hug.*, cl. 4, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 89.

<sup>28</sup>Hugolino, *Reg. Hug.*, cl.11.

never be opened without her or without her knowledge. Let there be another equally suitable and designated as her companion who may take her place in all things, when she is occupied by some reasonable cause of necessary employment. Let them very zealously take care and beware that the door never remains open, except when it can be fittingly done for a very short time.<sup>29</sup>

Hugolino's vision of Clare's spirituality echoes monastic ideals of flight from the outside world. He wished for the Clares to make a radical renunciation of the world outside their convents, where all their energy was devoted to God. To achieve this, he channelled their image of themselves into becoming brides of Christ:

Therefore, since above all things you are bound to love your Spouse, who loves those who love Him and makes them co-heirs, you should delight with all your affections in Him alone, so that nothing may ever separate you from His love. For divinely inspired to this end you have chosen to place yourselves in an enclosure, so that you may profitably renounce the world and all that is in it and, while embracing your spouse with an untainted love, run after the colour of His ointments, until He introduces you into the chamber of His mother to be refreshed forever by the sweetness of His love.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, he demonstrated his concern for perpetuating the consecrated women's attachment to chastity. It was seen to have a value in itself. For women, their spiritual perfection was defined by their already chaste state, and as virgins, they must apply themselves to its preservation. For this reason, Hugolino appointed himself to the protection of them. A crucial example of this was Hugolino's policy towards the friars. Having not mentioned them in his rule, he deliberately excluded them from regular contact with the Poor Clares, in his bull of 1230, *Quo elongati*. In a harsh reading of clause 11 of his rule for the Clares, he strictly forbade them to enter the Clares' houses, citing the women's enclosure as his reasoning. Furthermore, permission to visit would only be granted by him, himself.<sup>31</sup> Using the excuse of *clausura*, Gregory had again effectively removed the *cura mulierum* from the friars' hands.

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<sup>29</sup>Hugolino, *Reg. Hug.*, cl.13; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 95.

<sup>30</sup>Hugolino, letter as Pope Gregory IX to the nuns at San Damiano, 1228; trans Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 99.

<sup>31</sup>The complete letter is edited by H. Grundmann, "Die Bulle *Quo elongati*, Papst Gregors IX", *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 54, (1961) 20-25.



Finally, Hugolino had effectively reduced the autonomy of Clarissan houses. Having offered the Clares the protection of the Papal See, he expected the Clares, in return, to remain under the government of papally appointed visitors.<sup>32</sup>

To summarise, it is clear that strict cloister was crucial to Hugolino's development of a more traditionally monastic base for the Clares. First, it resolved Franciscan problems as to how to maintain a sense of apartness from their female counterparts, while ensuring regular support. Second, the directions he wrote on enclosure had precedents in Cistercian practice and legislation. Third, his bias towards enclosure reflected Cistercian spiritual concerns, that is, fleeing from the world, and the inherent value of women's chastity. Finally, the maintenance of enclosure further justified his exclusion of the Franciscans from the care of the nuns.

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Hugolino's policy of the conventualisation of the Poor Clares did seem to have some success. In the first place, the Poor Clares accepted the monastic requirement of *stabilitas loci*, that is, professed nuns never ventured beyond the walls of San Damiano, unless they were sent away to found a new one, in accordance with Hugolino's prescriptions:

It is proper and it is a duty that all those women who, after condemning and abandoning the vanity of the world, have resolved to embrace and hold to your order, should observe this law of life and discipline, and remain enclosed the whole time of their life. After they have entered the enclosure of this order and have assumed the religious habit, they should never be granted any permission or faculty to leave, unless perhaps some are transferred to another place to plant or build up this same order. Moreover, it is fitting that, when they die, they should be buried within the enclosure.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the fact that Clare remained at San Damiano for the forty-two years since her

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<sup>32</sup> "You should take solicitous care that, when a cardinal or a bishop of the Roman Church, who has been especially designated for you, has passed from this life, you always ask the Lord Pope for another from his brother-bishops." *Reg. Hug.*: 10; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 92-93.

<sup>33</sup> *Hug. Reg.*: 4; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 89. See also L. Olier, "De origine regularum ordine S. Clarae", 206.

entry at San Damiano, has been cited as evidence for her full acceptance of a cloistered life.<sup>34</sup> Clare's attachment to *clausura* is stressed in Lainati's work. She placed great emphasis on Clare's stability of place, arguing that if Clare desired to go out into the world, in emulation of Francis, she would have affiliated to one of the beguine institutions available to her.<sup>35</sup> To support this, Lainati dismissed the story of Clare leaving the convent to visit the Portiuncula and share a meal with Francis as unreliable because it came from a later, more legendary source, *Actus Fioretti*.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the episode was expressly contradicted by the testimonies of the nuns at San Damiano. For example, the second witness in the *Process of Canonisation*, Benvenuta of Perugia stated that Clare remained enclosed right up to the moment of her death.<sup>37</sup>

Benvenuta also confirmed that the other nuns in the convent had no contact with the outside world. For example, she did not witness Clare cure a friar, as the custom of the convent ensured that the nuns did not observe events taking place outside the enclosure:

Asked if she had known that brother beforehand, how many days she had seen him ill, and how much time well, she replied she did not know all these things, because she was enclosed.<sup>38</sup>

Second, Hugolino's satisfaction at his success in promoting the Poor Clares' enclosed monastic status is reflected in the terms he used to describe them. Gregory IX addressed the Clares as *pauperes moniales reclusae*, *moniales reclusae*, and *pauperes moniales inclusae*, at all times stressing the cloistered nature of their vocation.<sup>39</sup>

However, concentrating solely upon canonical legislation and papal documents would

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<sup>34</sup> Lainati, "The enclosure of St Clare," 272-273.

<sup>35</sup> Lainati, "The enclosure of St Clare," 272-3.

<sup>36</sup> The source was translated by Moorman as *The Little Flowers of St Francis*, See Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 15, 1332-1334.

<sup>37</sup> "From the time she [Benvenuta] entered religion, she stayed with her [Clare] until her death, for almost forty two years" Benvenuta of Perugia, *Proc.*: 2: 2; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 134.

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 2, 134.

<sup>39</sup> For examples see the bull of Gregory to the bishop of Todi, 30 October 1228, where they are described as, "poor cloistered nuns" [Ordinem pauperum monialium reclusarum]; and a bull sent on 20 November 1228 to

result in a skewed vision of the actual practice of the monastery. The imposition of their new papally approved status was far more problematic than Hugolino's legislation implied. What it demonstrated was Hugolino's aspirations towards the Poor Clares, not the actual reality. To understand the impact of his ideals, one must gauge Clare's reaction. Thus, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to Clare's response to the changing *cura mulierum*.

## II

The limited impact of Hugolino's policy of conventualisation is reflected in the response of Clare, who consistently refused to conform to the traditional monastic image, which Hugolino imposed upon her. In the first place, she highlighted how problematic the installation of enclosure was in practice. She consistently broke the Hugolino's rigid dogma on the subject of the passive enclosure of the nuns, when she promoted the use of discretion by the portress upon the entry of visitors. Second, she did not see conventual and beguine lifestyles as incompatible. It was evident that her transferral to a conventual life was more fluid than Hugolino had assumed, and even at San Damiano she retained much of her early beguine spirituality. Third, the persons she allowed into the cloister reflected how aware she was of the urban setting of her convent, which Hugolino tried to ignore. For example, she saw a responsibility in attending to the sick, and saw herself as the protector of the city. Finally, although she herself did not leave the cloister, she allowed valued female members of her community to leave, the *serviziali*, a group left unmentioned in Hugolino's rule.

Clearly, Clare consistently broke, in spirit, Hugolino's prescriptions of enclosure. The reason why she did so is that she recognised that enclosure had been used as a obstacle to distance her order from the Franciscans. With extraordinary stubbornness Clare remained tightly attached to the friars. This is clearly demonstrated, firstly, in her spirituality: she followed the Franciscan ideal of acting as a mirror of Christ, rather than Hugolino's image of her as the passive bride; she saw the cloister in a positive light, stressing its eremitical aspects as an *inclusa*, rather than fleeing from the

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"cloistered nuns" [*dilectis in Christo filiabus Abbatissae et conventui monialium reclusarum*]; as cited by Lainati, "The enclosure of St Clare," 275.

world, as a *reclusa*; and her foundation of new monasteries was seen as an exercise in evangelising the radical gospel ideals of the Clarissans. Second, she acted on her spiritual convictions: her version of the rule states explicitly the inviolability of the *cura mulierum* for the Franciscans. This was manifest in her admittance of Francis and his brothers into the cloister. Finally, she insisted upon their duty to preach to them, in direct defiance of the friars' own rule and Hugolino's legislation.

Enclosure was intended by Hugolino to stress how the women should remain distant from worldly interest. On a simple level, the nuns' refusal to leave the convent walls, that is, break active enclosure, affirmed such a rejection of the world. However, in the case of passive enclosure (other visitors and personnel entering the cloister), it was obvious that Clare was not ready to separate herself from the world completely.<sup>40</sup> It is possible to cite many examples of non members visiting the community at San Damiano.<sup>41</sup> Some visitors were obviously not controversial and had sought earlier permission: Gregory IX's visit, so as to convince her to accept possessions;<sup>42</sup> Innocent IV witnessing her death;<sup>43</sup> or the regular attendance of the friars bringing food for the nuns.<sup>44</sup>

What they do reveal was the problematic nature of imposing strict enclosure, in actual practice. Hugolino's stance on the issue proved to be almost inflexible. He insisted that the nuns should never allow any person into the enclosure, without his permission or that of the Pope:

Concerning the entrance of persons into the monastery, we firmly and strictly decree that an abbess or her sisters may never permit any religious person or secular of whatever dignity to enter the monastery. This is allowed to no one except to whom or concerning whom permission has been granted by the Supreme Pontiff or by us [Hugolino].<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>The division of enclosure as both active and passive was first introduced by Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg. See her influential article, "Strict active enclosure", 51-86.

<sup>41</sup>Other historians have argued against this point in Lainati's stance, and I draw my examples from their work. See I. Peterson, *Clare of Assisi: a biographical study*, (Illinois, 1993): 256-257; Gennaro, "Clare, Agnes and their earliest followers," 45-47; Brooke & Brooke, "St Clare", 280; and H. Roggen, *The Spirit of St Clare*, trans. P.J. Olinny, (Chicago, 1971): 77-78.

<sup>42</sup>*Proc.* 2:22

<sup>43</sup>*Proc.*, 3:24

<sup>44</sup>*Proc.*, 3:13; *Legenda*, cl. 61

<sup>45</sup>*Reg. Hug.*, cl. 11; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 92.

Furthermore, if someone did visit, the circumstances had to be exceptional, the occasion carefully regulated, and permission rarely granted:

If, by chance, permission has ever been given to some Bishop to celebrate Mass within the enclosure for the blessing of an abbess or for consecrating some sister as a nun or for some other reason, let him be content with as few and as virtuous companions and assistants as he can. *Let this permission be rarely given to anyone.*<sup>46</sup>

Hugolino explicitly stated why he was reluctant about the breach of the Poor Clares' enclosure, citing the usual anxieties about the danger of causing a scandal by their presence:

Particular caution should be taken that those, to whom permission has been given to enter the monastery, be such in their words and character, in their life and manners, that they edify those who see them and thus are incapable of generating matter for true scandal.<sup>47</sup>

Hugolino gave the strong impression that the role of the portress was to ward away all visitors, obeying his prescriptions to the letter. However, in Clare's rule, she showed a greater appreciation of the practical difficulty of maintaining such a dogmatic stance on enclosure. Her summary of enclosure is greatly pared down from all the conditions that Hugolino set. Although she repeated Hugolino's instruction against the entry of visitors, without the permission of the pope or cardinal, Clare envisioned a personalised practice of the cloister, allowing discernment to be practised by the portress and the abbess. She regarded the portress as an experienced older woman not just resolved to refuse all comers, but possessing the judgement to recognise exceptional circumstances when visitors ought to be admitted.<sup>48</sup>

They should take the utmost care to make sure that the door is never left open, except when this can hardly be avoided gracefully...The sisters shall not allow anyone to remain within after sunset, unless an evident, reasonable, and unavoidable cause demands otherwise.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>My own italics, *Reg. Hug.*, cl. 11; trans. Armstrong, 93.

<sup>47</sup>*Reg. Hug.* cl. 11; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 93.

<sup>48</sup>J. Leclercq, "The spirituality of medieval female monasticism", *The Continuing Quest for God*, ed. W. Skudlark, (Collegeville, Minn. 1982), 130.

<sup>49</sup>St Clare, *Rule of St Clare*; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 223.

It is difficult to gauge what Clare saw as “evident, reasonable and unavoidable” circumstances, but some suggestions will be put forward.

First, unavoidable circumstances could be situations where the nuns themselves have little control upon who could visit. It is possible that the casual entry of influential patrons and prelates, without the permission of the pope, happened more often than Hugolino was willing to admit. Hugolino's focus on the scandal generated by visitors entering, ignored the scandal generated by the nuns not allowing person in. Further, Hugolino failed to recognise the contradiction of enclosure and the *Rule of Benedict*. Its exhortations to charity obliged the women to see to the needs of their guests:

Let all guests that come be received like Christ, for he will say, “I was a stranger and you took me in.” And let fitting honour be shown to all, but especially to churchmen and pilgrims.<sup>50</sup>

Prescribing strict passive enclosure in the legislation was much easier than refusing entry in reality, leaving women in the dilemma of how to act. Clare's response was considered, taking into account the dilemma of combining obedience with charity. For example, Clare had little choice but to admit the ill friar, Brother Stephen, into the nun's cloister. She had to obey her superior, Francis, who had insisted that the friar be sent to the convent for the cure of his mental illness. Further, the friar could not leave immediately without harm to his recovery, so he was obliged to spend a night within the cloister, “to sleep a bit in the place where the holy mother usually prayed.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, this dilemma also affected the behaviour of Cistercian nuns. In the General Chapter of 1230, the chapter conceded admittance to, “reverend and honourable persons to whom entrance could not be denied without harm and scandal.”<sup>52</sup>

The second way in which Clare refused to conform to Hugolino's vision of traditional monastic living was that she did not wholly reject her beguine background. Hugolino failed to convince Clare of the attractiveness of a wholly conventual lifestyle. When one considers how

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<sup>50</sup>*Rule of Benedict*, cap. 53; ed. and trans. by J. McCann, *The Rule of St Benedict*, (London, 1952): 119

<sup>51</sup>*Proc.*, 2:15; *Legenda.*, cl. 32.

Hugolino categorised the Clares as a conventual movement, distinct from the active charity of the Beguines, it is obvious that such a definition is inaccurate. This stark dichotomy between monastic and beguine lifestyles is not reflected in Clare's own career. In the years before her entry into San Damiano Clare's lifestyle resembled that of the early Beguines. The *Process of Canonisation* indicates a more fluid transferral from one religious life to another, where a number of similar practices remained.<sup>53</sup>

First, Clare was brought up in a household surrounded by pious women, already known for their religiosity. For example, her mother, Ortulana already participated in pilgrimages, on two of which she was accompanied by Clare's sister Pacifica.<sup>54</sup> Second, Clare herself had already made private vows of poverty and chastity and practised severe penance:

Although their household was one of the biggest in the city and great sums were spent there, she nevertheless saved the food they were given to eat, put it aside, and then sent it to the poor...While she was still in her father's house, she wore a rough garment under her other clothes. He also said she fasted, prayed and did other pious deeds.<sup>55</sup>

Even before her conversion Clare was regarded as holy. For one example among many, Lady Bona Guelfuccio, speaking of Clare, "firmly believed, because of the great holiness of her life which she had before and after she entered religion, that she had been sanctified in her mother's womb."<sup>56</sup> And of the women in the Offreduccio household seven went on to join Clare at San Damiano. Therefore, it would be more accurate to regard Clare's conversion, and the subsequent foundation of the convent, as the transferral of previous spiritual activity from a private to a public domain.

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<sup>52</sup> As cited by Boyd, *A Cistercian Nunnery*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> See Peterson, *Clare of Assisi: a biographical study*, 91-93. Katherine Gill's study of Italian *pinzochere* in the later Middle Ages also stresses the need to interpret female communities as more fluid than their male counterparts. Circumstances could conspire to transform a convent to a beguinage, and later to a hermitage, during the lifetime of one of its members. See K. Gill, "Scandala: controversies concerning *clausura* and women's religious communities in late medieval Italy," in *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, eds. S.L. Waugh & P.D. Diehl, (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> "This lady Ortulana went beyond the sea [that is, the Holy Land] for reasons of prayer and devotion. She like wise testified she [the witness, Pacifica] accompanied her beyond the sea for reasons of prayer and devotion. They also went together to Sant' Angelo and to Rome," *Proc.* 1: 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Proc.*, 20:3, 20:4, 20:5; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 174-175.

In particular, Clare continued her practice of active charity, despite the imposition of the cloister. The significance of these intrusions upon the Clares is not merely that they occurred at all, but they show that the Poor Clares were regarded as integral to the well-being of their surrounding community, rather than aloof from it. Reflective of such an urban background is how Clare, without any apparent qualms, welcomed the secular inhabitants of Assisi into her cloister, such was her concern for their physical and spiritual health.<sup>57</sup>

In the first place, she saw attending to the illness of her secular visitors as a “reasonable cause” for admitting them into the enclosure. In the *Process of Canonisation*, the witnesses recalled three examples of Clare curing secular persons: a young boy from Spoleto had a pebble removed from his nose by Clare;<sup>58</sup> another boy had a film removed which covered his eye;<sup>59</sup> and the son of the procurator was brought to Clare twice for cures.<sup>60</sup>

Two final examples will help dispel any lingering doubts about how she saw her relationship with people outwith her immediate community. Clare and her sisters should not be regarded as marginalised and on the outskirts of Assisi's society, but instead as succour and protectors of the citizens. When Clare's convent was attacked by Muslim soldiers (mercenaries for Frederick II), her anxiety was not only for her nuns.<sup>61</sup> Even when they entered into the enclosure, Clare defended the city through her prayers, “please protect this city which for your love sustains us.”<sup>62</sup> In this Clare revealed an awareness of the reciprocal relationship which the city and the monastic community shared. Moreover, this theme is again repeated in the following chapter, when Assisi was besieged by imperial forces. Clare declared, for a second time, her compassion towards the inhabitants of the city, when she addressed her nuns with these words, “Dearest

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<sup>56</sup>*Proc.*, 17:1; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 171.

<sup>57</sup>More controversially, Bartoli produced an example of Clare condoning nuns exercising active charity *outside* the cloister, at the monastery of Agnes of Prague. Her monastery was situated next to a hospital where the nuns worked. Clare must have been aware of this as five nuns were sent from San Damiano to teach them the manner of life. Not once in her correspondence with Agnes did Clare criticise the abbess for permitting this. Chronicle of Nicolas Glassberger, *Analecta Franciscana*, II, (1887): 57; as cited by Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 92.

<sup>58</sup>*Proc.*, 2:18; *Legenda*, cl. 33.

<sup>59</sup>*Proc.*, 4:11; *Legenda*, cl. 33.

<sup>60</sup>*Proc.*, 3:5; 9:6.

<sup>61</sup>Celano recounts the event in cap. 21 of his *Legenda*, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 211-212; and in *Proc.*, 2: 20; 3: 18, 4: 14; 6: 10; 7: 6; 9: 2; 10:9; 12:8; 13: 9 &14: 3.

<sup>62</sup>Celano, *Legenda*, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 211-212.



children, everyday we receive many good things from that city. It would be terrible if, at a proper time, we did not help it, as now we can.”<sup>63</sup> If enclosure was assumed to be the primary concern, then the invasion of the Saracens would be misread as a gross violation of the Poor Ladies' cloister.

The fourth manner in which Clare refused to adhere to Hugolino's programme can be seen in her treatment of the lay sisters attached to the order, the *serviziali*.<sup>64</sup> First, she denied the hierarchical structure of the convent, by placing the *serviziali* on an equal par with the professed nuns. Second, although the professed nuns did not leave the convent on a regular basis, it could be argued that female religious members licitly broke Hugolino's prescriptions on active enclosure, through the *serviziali*. The *serviziali* represented the informal beginnings of the order. Clare's retention and maintenance of their status confirmed her commitment to her early spiritual values.

Hugolino's rule paid scant attention to the duties of the *serviziali*. In it, they were mentioned only once, when he ordered these women to discard their secular clothes and officially dedicate themselves to the Church, in recognition of their enclosure:

All those received into the enclosure should, according to custom, quickly put aside their secular clothes and, if they are old enough to understand, they should make their profession within a few days. This should also be observed as far as the servants are concerned.<sup>65</sup>

Note that Hugolino made no provision for these women to leave the enclosure. Instead, he chose to ignore their contribution, deeming their role in the community as inferior and unimportant.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Celano, *Legenda*, cl. 23, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 212-213.

<sup>64</sup>These are not to be confused with the third order of the Franciscans. These *serviziali*, also known as the *conversae*, lived within the community cloister, took vows of poverty and chastity, and wore black tunics. Their primary function was to carry out manual work for the nuns. They were distinct from the secular tertiaries, who often lived in their own houses, did not take the vow of celibacy, and had more relaxed attitudes to dress and behaviour. See the separate rule for secular tertiaries, in *Rule of the Third Order*, 1221; trans. in M. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 165-175.

<sup>65</sup>*Hug. Reg.*, cl.4; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 90.

<sup>66</sup>Clara Gennaro has made some insightful comments into the role of the *serviziali*, “Clare, Agnes and their earliest followers,” 45-47.

However, Innocent IV in his version of the rule recognised the breach of active enclosure made by these non-enclosed sisters. Thus his rule was more concerned with how their behaviour outside the convent could be curbed. Thus he regulated their age, and manner, when they had to return, whom they could visit, and what they reported back. For Innocent, the women were seen as an active haemorrhaging of the ideal of enclosure. If their forays outside could not be prevented, at least they could be controlled:

Concerning the serving sisters who are not bound to remain always enclosed as the others, we wish this to be observe strictly: no one may leave the enclosure without permission and those who are sent out to be upright and of appropriate age...Let a certain time for returning be given to those who go out. It may not be permitted for any of them to eat, drink or sleep outside the monastery without special permission, or to be separated from one another, or to talk to someone in private, or to enter the dwelling place of the chaplain of the monastery or of the convents of penitents of the brothers staying there. If one of them does contrary to this, let her be severely punished. And let them zealously be careful that they do not stop in suspicious places or become familiar with persons of a bad reputation. Upon their return let them not recount to the sisters worldly or useless things through which they can be disturbed or weakened. And while they are out, let them so conduct themselves that they are able to edify those who see them by their upright manner.<sup>67</sup>

The influence of Innocent's description of the serving sister is obvious in Clare's version of the rule. Comparing them, it is possible to discern the same level of strict regulation of their behaviour outside the monastery:

The sisters who serve outside the monastery should not delay long outside the monastery unless some evident necessity demands it. They should conduct themselves virtuously and speak little, so that those who see them may always be edified. And let them zealously avoid all meetings or dealings that could be called into question. They may not be godmothers of men or women lest gossip or trouble arise because of this. They may not dare

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<sup>67</sup> "De servientibus sororibus, quae semper manere clausae, sicut aliae non tenentur, districtius volumus observari, ut sine licentia nulla claustrum egrediantur et quae emittuntur, honestae sint, et convenientis aetatis...Egredientibus vero assignetur certus terminus redeundi. Nec alicui ipsarum conceditur extra monasterium sine speciale licentia comedere, bibere, vel dormire, nec abinvicem separari, vel alicui in secreto, seu capellani monasterii, aut conversorum, vel fratrum ibidem morantium domicilium introire. Quod si aliqua contrarium fecerit, graviter puniatur. Et sollicito caveant, ne ad loca suspecta divertant, vel cum personis malae famae familiaritatem habeant; nec in suo reditu secularia, vel inutilia sororibus referant, per quae dissolvi valeant, vel turbari et quandiu extra fuerint, taliter studeant se habere, quod de conversatione

to repeat the rumours of the world inside the monastery. And they are strictly bound not to repeat outside the monastery anything that was said or done within which could cause scandal. If anyone should on occasion openly offend in these things, it shall be left to the prudence of the Abbess to impose a penance on her with mercy.<sup>68</sup>

However, relying completely on the legislative sources does present a very negative representation of the women. In actual practice, Clare did not regard them, like Innocent, as a threat to the community's seclusion, but as a valued part of the community. First, Clare saw the *serviziali* as sisters in their own right, who were expected to follow the form of life alongside the professed nuns and novices:

In the examination and reception of the sisters who serve outside the monastery, the same form as above is to be observed. These sisters may wear shoes. No one is to live with us unless she has been received according to the form of our profession.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, other sources, such as Celano's *Legend*, and the *Process of Canonisation* confirm this alternative view of the serving sisters. A pertinent example of the level of esteem she held them in, was that she was willing to debase herself by washing the *serviziali's* feet.

She frequently and reverently washed the feet of the serving sisters who returned from outside and, after washing them, kissed them. Once when she was washing the feet of one of those servants, while bending to kiss them, that [sister] not tolerating such humility, withdrew her foot and, with it, struck the Lady on the mouth. Yet she calmly took the foot of the sister

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honesta ipsarum aedificari valeant intuentes." Innocent IV, *Cum omnis vero*, August 1247; *B.F.*, I: cl.10, 482; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 119.

<sup>68</sup> "Sorores servientes extra monasterium longam moram non faciant, nisi causa manifestae necessitatis requirat. Et honeste debeant ambulare et parum loqui, ut aedificari semper valeant intuentes. Et firmiter caveant ne habeant suspecta consortira vel consilia aliquorum. Nec fiant commatres virorum vel mulierum, ne hac occasione murmuratio vel turbatio oriatur. Nec praesumant rumores de saeculo referre in monasterio. Et firmiter teneantur de his quae intus dicuntur vel aguntur, extra monasterium aliquid non referre, quod posset aliquod scandalum generare. Quod si aliqua simpliciter in his duobus offenderit, sit in prudentia abbatisae misericorditer poenitentiam sibi iniungere." Clare of Assisi, *Rule of Clare*, 10, in M.-F. Becker et al (eds.), *Claire d'Assise: Écrits*, (Paris, 1985)11-18; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 221-222.

<sup>69</sup> "In examinatione et receptione sororum servientium extra monasterium servetur forma praedicta; quae possint portare calciamenta. Nulla nobiscum residentiam faciat in monasterio, nisi recepta fuerit secundum formam professionis nostrae." *Rule of St Clare*, cl. 2, 21-23, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 128; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 213.

again and, on its sole, placed a firm kiss.<sup>70</sup>

Second, Clare held a more positive view of the purpose of the women's trips abroad. Through the serving sisters she could remain in contact with matters outside the convent walls. Indeed, there is one example of Clare exhorting the *serviziali* to take a positive interest in worldly matters, and praise God for being privileged enough to see them:

When the most holy mother used to send the serving sisters outside the monastery, she reminded them to praise God when they saw beautiful trees, flowers and bushes; and, likewise, always to praise Him for and in all things when they saw all peoples and creatures.<sup>71</sup>

Thus it is possible to see that her regulation of *serviziali*' behavior as less prohibitive as Innocent's. She preferred to see the *serviziali* as the public female face of the order, acting as a counter-balance to the familiar sight of the male provosts, who also represented their order, but were really not as much a part of it, when compared to the lay sisters. If Clare wished to curb their behaviour, her motivation was her desire for the *serviziali* to act as a mirror of the professed nuns, who remained within the cloister. Clare preferred to focus on her lay sisters in a positive light, as morally edifying examples of Clarissan spirituality, witnessing to a public audience.

As for their practical purpose, we have almost no evidence. Only one hint remains in the rule of Innocent, where it mentioned that the public would offer gifts to the Poor Clares, through them:

Whatever is given or promised them, let them bring it and report it to the abbess or another who takes her place in this regard.<sup>72</sup>

Implicit in the instruction is the assumption that the *serviziali* were the focus for charitable donations by lay patrons. With such financial responsibility, their reputation had to be

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda sanctae Clarae virginis*, cl. 12, in *A.S.*, August, 2: 755; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 203. See also *Proc.*, 3: 9; 10: 6.

<sup>71</sup> Sister Angeluccia, *Proc.*, 14: 9; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 169.

<sup>72</sup> "et quidquid eis datum fuerit, vel promissum, resignent, et renuncient Abbatissae, vel alii, au haec commiserit vices suae." Innocent IV, *Rule of Innocent*, cl. 10; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 119.

impeachable, a further incentive to ensure their correct behaviour. The best estimation of the role of the *serviziali* is that they were highly regarded secular tertiaries entrusted with an administrative role within the community.

In summary, the practice of enclosure in Clarissan houses was not as strict as Hugolino had imposed. Clare's practice revealed the pressures of maintaining a dogmatic stance on enclosure, as often the women were in no position to resist the entry of their clerical superiors into their cloister, and the demands of Benedictine charity expected the Clares to welcome non members as guests. Consequently, Clare's vision of enclosure placed more of the responsibility with the portress and abbess, restoring a little of their autonomy. Furthermore, Clare's beguine background informed upon her cloistered life, so that she retained her interest in the people outside the convent, especially in their health and spiritual welfare. Finally, the *serviziali* completed their integration into the urban community, because they presented to the citizens visible female witness of the cloistered nuns. Johnson's summary of the situation in France's convents could well apply to Clarissan foundations:

The nunnery walls served communities as permeable membranes rather than water tight seals. Neither active nor passive cloistering was absolute: religious women commonly left their houses on all sorts of errands, and those who were not community members entered the monastic precincts on all sorts of pretexts; much of this movement was seen by nunnery officials as licit, although some were judged as illicit even by themselves.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> P.D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 152.

### III

Having outlined how the Clares conflicted with the imposition of Hugolino's traditional monastic ideal, I shall now attempt to explain the motivations for her behaviour. In the same way that the policy of enclosure was used as a means to achieve the aim of separating the *cura* of the Clares from the Franciscans, the explanation for her resistance can be found within the context of the *cura mulierum*. When Clare resisted Hugolino's cloistered policy, she argued that it was necessary on the grounds of her attachment to the Franciscans. First, her spirituality reflected Franciscan, and not Cistercian values: she saw herself as a mirror of Christ, not the passive bride of Christ; she labelled the Clares as *inclusae*, rather than *reclusae*, stressing the value of the community's sacred space and the eremitical life against Hugolino's emphasis on separation. Second, her action confirmed her determination to ignore Hugolino's prescriptions on enclosure for the higher purpose of retaining the Clares' affiliation to the Franciscans. Her rule stated explicitly the inviolability of the Franciscans' *cura mulierum*. She insisted upon their visits, even if it was in opposition to the Pope.

The first way in which Clare sought a more radical form of spiritual life than Hugolino promoted was when she took up the Franciscan theme of the *imitatio Christi*. It is worth repeating that Hugolino's vision of Clarissan spirituality was based on the conventional motif of religious women as brides of Christ. Within this, Hugolino described a strictly formal relationship between Clare and the Holy Trinity. He saw these contemplative women as gifts to God, reliant on whether the Father chose to accept them. Further, the nuns had no active role, but were passive receptacles of the Holy Spirit. Only after their death, could they take their place as brides of Christ, and experience union with Christ's divinity:

God the father, to whom you have offered yourselves as servants, has mercifully adopted you as His daughters. Through the operation of the grace of the Holy Spirit, He has espoused you, who are to be crowned in the kingdom of heaven with your heavenly Spouse, His only begotten Son.<sup>74</sup>

Thus the Clares were regarded almost as chattels to be exchanged in a patrician marriage.

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<sup>74</sup> Gregory IX to the nuns at San Damiano, 1228; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 99.

Unsurprisingly, such an image of contemplative life was unattractive to Clare. Instead, she developed away from the *epithalamium* ideal, of nuns as the brides of Christ, and took three innovative steps. First, rather than wait for the grace of God, Clare actively encouraged her sisters to seek it. Second, she did not settle for becoming merely the spouse of Christ, but claimed that in contemplation she imitated Christ, so much so that she was transformed into Christ. Finally, she saw such a transformation as possible even on earth. For example, in her third letter to Agnes of Prague, she explicitly states her radical vision of the *imitatio Christi*:

And I sigh with such happiness in the Lord, because I know and testify that you supply most wonderfully what is lacking in me and other sisters in the imitation of the poor and humble Christ...Place your mind in the eternal mirror; place your soul in the splendour of the glory; place your heart in the figure of the divine substance and transform your entire self into the image of divinity itself, through contemplation.<sup>75</sup>

The theme of becoming a mirror of Christ was further developed by Clare for its instructive value. She encouraged the imitation of Christ in her community in the hope that they might, in turn, inspire the outside world. This confirms the idea that Clare valued the *serviziali* as potential witnesses of Christ, and also public witnesses of the sanctity of the professed nuns, within the cloister:

For the Lord Himself has set up an example and mirror for others, even for our own sisters whom the Lord has called to our life, in order that they themselves may then become mirrors and examples in the world. The Lord has, therefore, called us to great things, that in us others may see an example and a mirror.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> “tantaque in Domino exultatione respiro, quanto te novi et arbitror vestigiorum pauperis et humilis Jesu Christi tam in me quam in aliis ceteris sororibus imitationibus mirifice supplere defectum...pone mentem tuam in speculo aeternitatis, pone animam tuam in splendore gloriae, pone cor tuum in figura divinae substantiae et transforma te ipsam totam per contemplationem in imagine divinitatis ipsius.” Clare’s third letter to Agnes, in Becker et al, *Écrits*, 4, 100; 12, 102; trans. Armstrong & I. Brady *Clare and Francis*, 199; 200. See also the article by P. Ranft, “An overturned victory,” 130. Clare’s vision of the imitation of Christ fed into contemporary female expectations of their relationship to Christ in the later Middle Ages. See Bynum, *Holy Feast & Holy Fast* (California, 1987): *passim*; esp. 155-159.

<sup>76</sup> “Ipse enim Dominus non solum posuit nos ut formam aliis in exemplum et speculum, sed etiam sororibus nostris, quas ad vocationem nostram Dominus avocabit, ut et ipsae sint conversantibus in mundo in speculum et exemplum. Cum igitur nos vocaverit Dominus ad tam magna, ut in nobis se valeant speculari quae aliis in

Most importantly, Clare admitted that the source for her innovative form of spirituality came from Francis:

The son of God became for us the Way which our blessed father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.<sup>77</sup>

The second way in which Clare's spirituality differed from Hugolino's and adhered to Franciscan ideals, was that she chose to label herself as *inclusa*, rather than *reclusa*. This is not merely a semantic quibble. Hugolino's expectation of the cloister presumed that as *reclusae*, they wished to flee from all worldly matters in spirit, as well as in body. However, the examples in the first part of the chapter hint that Clare remained very much within the world, in spirit. Now, I shall demonstrate the spiritual basis that influenced her attitude. Clare saw her community as based upon eremitical values.<sup>78</sup>

First, she drew a positive value out of the need for cloister, seeing it as a sacred space assigned to prayer and contemplation. This was revealed in her choice of naming the Clares as *inclusae*, rather than dwelling on their seclusion, as the term *reclusae* denoted. Second, she did not regard enclosure as an obstacle to the evangelisation of Clarissan spirituality. Alexander IV's *Bull of Canonisation*, described the permeability of Clare's cloister in the following terms:

How brilliant is the power of this light, how strong is the bright shining of this luminous source! This light was enclosed in the hiddenness of the cloister and yet outside [the cloister] she shone with dazzling shining; she contained herself within a small monastery yet she was spread as far as the world is wide; she kept herself within yet she was diffused far and wide. Clare hid herself, but her life was known to everyone. Clare was silent but her fame cried

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speculum sunt et exemplum." Clare of Assisi, *Testamentum*, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 19-21, 168-170; trans. in Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 6, 227-228.

<sup>77</sup> "Factus est nobis Filius Dei via, quam verbo et exemplo ostendit et docuit nos beatissimus pater noster Franciscus, verus amator et imitator ipsius." Clare of Assisi, *Testamentum*, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 3, 166; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 2, 227.

<sup>78</sup> For a nuanced reading of Clare's spirituality as eremitical, see Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 85-97.



aloud. She kept herself hidden in her cell and the whole city knew about her.<sup>79</sup>

Third, Clare justified this position on enclosure by turning to Francis' ideal of eremitical life. When one compares his *Rule of the Hermitages* (1217-1223?) with the actual practice of Clarissan convents, the similarity is striking. In both there is a division of lifestyles into those that pray and those who collect alms, following the life of Mary and the life of Martha respectively. For the community at San Damiano, we observe that the professed nuns' relationship with the *serviziali* echo exactly the situation in Francis' hermitages:

Those who wish to live religiously in hermitages should be three brothers or four at the most; two of these should be mothers and they may have two sons or at least one. The two who are mothers should follow the life of Martha, while the two sons should follow the life of Mary and they may have an enclosure in which each one may have his small cell in which he may pray and sleep...and let them [the Marys] seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice...and, whenever it pleases them, they can seek alms from them [the Marthas] as little poor ones.<sup>80</sup>

Fourth, Clare's vision of an open community led her to participate in the evangelising ideals of the Franciscans. Her vision was on many levels: it could extend to distant lands, or focus within the country itself, or even concentrate on only local concerns. An example of her active interest in matters abroad was her attitude to the friars' missions. Although, she herself did not leave the cloister, one cannot infer from this that she felt no desire to leave. The testimonies of Cecilia Cacciaguerra and Balvina of Coccorano report Clare's reaction to the news that some friars had been martyred in Morocco, and Clare "expressed a desire to go there."<sup>81</sup> This incident took

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<sup>79</sup> "O quanta huius vehementia luminis, et quam vehemens istius illuminatio claritatis! Manebat quidem haec lux secretis inclusa claustralibus, et foris micantes radios emittebat: colligebatur in arcto coenobio, et in amplo saeculo spargebatur; servabatur integra, et extra manebat. Latebat namque Clara, sed eius vita patebat: silebat Clara, sed sua fama clamabat: celabatur in cella, et in urbibus noscebatur." Alexander IV, *Bull of Canonisation*, 19. Oct. 1255, in *B.F.* 1: 118, 81.

<sup>80</sup> "Illi, qui volunt religiose stare in eremis sint tres fratres vel quattuor ad plus; duo ex ipsis sint matres, teneant vitam Marthae et duo filii teneant vitam Mariae et habeant unum claustrum, in quo unusquisque habeat cellulam suam, in qua oret et dormiat...et primum quaerant regnum dei et iustitiam eius...Et quando placuerit, possint petere ab eis elemosynam sicut parvuli pauperes propter amorem Domini Dei." Francis of Assisi, *Rule of the Hermitages*, in C. Esser, *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, (Rome, 1978): 296-297; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 147.

<sup>81</sup> "She also said Lady Clare had such a fervent spirit she willingly wanted to endure martyrdom for the love of the Lord. She showed this when, after she heard certain brothers had been martyred in Morocco, she said she wanted to go there." *Proc.* 6: 6; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 151; "Before she was sick, she desired

place in 1220, two years after the supposedly strict imposition of Hugolino's rule. Clare was obviously deeply involved in the evangelical values that the Franciscans promoted.

Her rule itself supported such a vision of an open community, even among the professed nuns themselves. When she stated the conditions when she felt the nuns could leave, she again demonstrated a more flexible concept of enclosure:

Thereafter [after profession] she may not go outside the monastery except for some useful, reasonable, evident and approved purpose.<sup>82</sup>

One of the spiritual reasons she gave for excusing the Clares' absence from San Damiano, was so that they could spread their lifestyle of contemplation and gospel poverty. The process of extending the influence Clarissan spirituality was achieved through the foundation of new monasteries, outside of Assisi. For each nun who remained all her life at San Damiano, there was another who was sent out of the confines of the enclosure and returned some months later. This mitigates the impression Hugolino gave that such transferrals were permanent, or that nuns felt an obligation to remain attached to a single foundation. For example, Pacifica remained for a year at "the monastery of Valle Gloria in Spello for the formation of the sisters in that place."<sup>83</sup> And Balvina of Coccorano was sent to Arezzo for one and a half years.<sup>84</sup>

On a local level, the effectiveness of Clare's innovative attitude towards enclosure is proved in the impression of Clare, drawn from local patrons. When she rescued the city from external sieges, though her active response took place inside the cloister, the details were reported to the inhabitants of Assisi, and this informed their judgement about her:

"It was firmly believed by all citizens that the monastery was protected and the city liberated from the enemy through the prayers and merits of Lady Clare."<sup>85</sup>

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to go to those parts of Morocco where it was said the brothers had suffered martyrdom", *Proc.* 7, 2; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 154.

<sup>82</sup> "Deinceps extra monasterium sine utili, rationabili, manifest et probabili causa eidem exire non liceat." Becker et al, *Écrits*, 2: 12, 126; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 2: 7, 212.

<sup>83</sup> *Proc.*, 1:14, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 132.

<sup>84</sup> *Proc.*, 7:1, trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 155.

<sup>85</sup> The testimony of Lord Ranieri de Bernardo of Assisi, *Proc.*: 18:7; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 173.

Having examined how Clare's spirituality reflected Franciscan ideals, I shall now examine how her fierce attachment to the friars was manifest in her action. First, I shall examine how she had carefully revised the rule to reinstate the friars' position as the official carers for the nuns. Second, I shall show that she had a deliberate policy of disobedience to Gregory, because she owed her primary allegiance to Francis. A particularly good example was her response to his restrictions on the preaching of the friars at Clarissan houses.

In Clare's rule she stated explicitly her attachment to Francis and his followers. First, she implicitly rejected the *Rule of Benedict*, and substituted it with, "the form of life of the order of the Poor Sisters which the blessed Francis established."<sup>86</sup> Second, she stressed her traditional association with Francis, as his "little plant", and with pledging her obedience to the pope, she also added a clause that offered obedience to Francis as well. Note how she claimed that her obedience to Francis was inviolable:

Clare, the unworthy handmaid of Christ and the little plant of the most blessed father Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and to his canonically elected successors, and to the Roman Church. And, just as at the beginning of her conversion, together with her sisters she promised obedience to the blessed Francis, so now she promises his successors to observe the same obedience inviolably.<sup>87</sup>

Most importantly, Clare accentuated her association with the Franciscans by recalling them to the Clares' *cura mulierum*. She insisted that the visitor should be a Franciscan; requested that priestly duties be assigned to a Franciscan chaplain; and that two lay friars should be appointed to assist in the day-to-day running of the convent:

Our visitor, according the will and command of our Cardinal [at this time, Raynaldus],

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<sup>86</sup> "Forma vitae Ordinis Sororum Pauperum, quam beatus franciscus instituit," Clare of Assisi, *Rule of Clare*, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 1, 3-4: 124.

<sup>87</sup> "Clara, indigna ancilla Christi et plantula beatissimi patris Francisci, promittit obedientiam et reverentiam domino papae Innocentio et successoribus eius canonice intrantibus et ecclesiae Romanae. Et sicut in

should always be taken from the Order of the Friars Minor...With respect for the love of God and of blessed Francis, we ask as a favour from the Order of the Friars Minor a chaplain and a clerical companion of good character and reputation and prudent discretion, and two lay brothers who are lovers of holiness of the life and virtue, to support us in our poverty.<sup>88</sup>

Obviously, between the imposition of Hugolino's rule and the blessing of Clare's version thirty-five years later, the papacy had been forced to change its position on the *cura mulierum* of the Clares. This highlighted Clare's dilemma of what to do when the two men she held in highest authority disagreed on the treatment of her order. Even though Clare had offered obedience to both Francis and the papacy, it was clear that she chose to prioritise her affiliation to Francis and his followers. A pertinent example was her response to the ban on the entry of the friars in Gregory IX's bull *Quo elongati* (1228). As *Quo elongati* strictly interpreted the prohibition on friars visiting the Clares as previously articulated in Francis' *Regula bullata* (1223), it was evident that the Franciscans ceased to visit San Damiano.<sup>89</sup> Celano described Clare's reaction to this prohibition:

Once when Lord Pope Gregory forbade any brother to go to the monasteries of the Ladies, without permission, the pious mother, sorrowing that her sisters would more rarely have the food of sacred teaching, sighed: 'Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with food that is vital.' At once she sent back the minister of all brothers, not wanting to have questors who acquired corporeal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread. When Pope Gregory heard this, he immediately mitigated that prohibition into the hands of the General Minister.<sup>90</sup>

The episode in 1230, that Celano described, was nothing short of blackmail: Clare had encouraged her sisters to go on a hunger strike to stress their disapproval of the removal of the Franciscans. As Hugolino's policy was meant to ensure the Clares' security, he had to concede to her subversive tactics to retain that security. In turn, the request for her own rule demonstrated how uncomfortable she felt with Hugolino's prohibitions, and sought to replace it with her own

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principio conversionis suae una cum sororibus suis promisit obedientiam beato Francisco, ita eandem promittit inviolabiliter servare successoribus suis.", *Rule of Clare*, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 1, 3-4: 124.

<sup>88</sup> "Visitator noster sit semper de Ordine Fratrum Minorum secundum voluntatem et mandatum nostri cardinalis...Capellanum etiam cum uno socio clerico bonae famae, discretionis providae, et duos fratres laicos sanctae conversationis et honestatis amatores in subsidium paupertatis nostrae...intuitu pietatis Dei et beati Francisci, ab eodem Ordine de gratia postulamus." *Rule of Clare*, 12, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 12, 5-8: 162.

<sup>89</sup> Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 224, n.132.

idea of who should look after the Clares; and how their cloistered spirituality should be expressed.

It seemed that Hugolino's policy of enclosure was unsuccessful as a method to lever away the association of the Franciscans with the Clares. All Clare's efforts were focused on forcing Hugolino to recognise this association. However, enclosure directly influenced another crucial Franciscan aspect of Clarissan spirituality, the development of Clarissan poverty. Thus, the final section will be devoted to the economic impact of enclosure and its consequences on Clare's vow of absolute poverty.

#### IV

On the issue of poverty, one can again see the tensions between the popes and Clare, as to how to ensure the survival of her order. First, one must examine what informed the popes' attitude towards poverty. In Hugolino's case, he was aware of the resentment bubbling up amongst the Cistercians who had to provide regular financial support for their female houses. The drain on the formers' resources discouraged them from accepting women into their order. This, in turn, destabilised the fate of these religious women. As a consequence, Hugolino saw strict poverty and the maintenance of the cloister as two incompatible ideals. Moreover, both Gregory and Innocent IV were influenced by the controversies taking place amongst the Franciscans. They recognised that the expansion and consolidation of the male order necessitated a secure financial basis. As protectors of the order, both offered to resolve the question of ownership by establishing an agent, who procured alms and property on behalf of the friars, and gave the friars the "use" of these goods.

Therefore, papal policy insisted that the security of the Clares was only possible through the renunciation of their vow of absolute poverty. The popes attempted to achieve this aim in two ways. First, Hugolino, as Gregory IX, tried to resolve the financial insecurity of their houses, by forcing Clare to retain some property. He asserted that poverty led to moral decadence and the

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<sup>90</sup> Celano, *Legenda Sanctae Clarae Virginis*: cap. 32, *Acta Sanctorum*, August, 2: 762; trans. Armstrong (1988): 32: 223-224

dissolution of houses. Moreover, he isolated Clare and San Damiano, as he forced other Clarissan convents to accept extra land as property, and reissued a strictly reduced version of Innocent III's, *Privilege of Poverty* (1228).<sup>91</sup> Second, Innocent IV included in his rule the Franciscan compromise, when he introduced the office of agent, which gave the Clares the use, if not the ownership, of the agent's goods.

Clare's response was threefold. First, she maintained Francis' own precepts on absolute poverty. Second, she appealed to Francis' authority to justify her stance. Third, she devoted a chapter to her rule, where poverty was seen as the most crucial aspect of Clarissan religiosity. One might have supposed that her rule was the last word upon the subject. However, in reality, enclosure did have an effect on Clarissan expression of poverty. If Clare is fitted into Little's model of religious poverty<sup>91</sup>, one can observe that her order straddled religious groups that confronted poverty and those that did not. Clare could be seen, along with the friars, as willing to confront the issue of poverty. Her sympathy for the urban poor clashed with the monastic vision of voluntary poverty as the better part, which regarded those who chose poverty as more virtuous than those poor by circumstance. Conversely, the Clares were unable to adhere effectively to Francis' vision of poverty. This was a direct consequence of her cloistered nature. First, Francis used his poverty as a sign of his status as a social outcast, while Clare was unable to confront poverty on such a face-to-face level, because of her clausturation. Second, their poverty could be more closely described as patrician, with a background as noble ladies, and their everyday practice limited to the production of expensive altar cloths. In this, one can observe the conventional monastic expression of poverty. Third, Clare, right from the beginning, had accepted the corporate ownership of Clarissan houses, a position Francis refused to condone for the first order.

Clare's conflict with Gregory over absolute poverty mirrored the controversy over poverty that appeared, at the same time, amongst the Franciscans. The friars had expanded from a small group, all of whom had personally known Francis, to a large unwieldy movement, which now needed a centralised base at which they could congregate with the means to maintain it. Further, the canons of the fourth Lateran Council upon the office of preaching required the Franciscans to professionally train their preachers.<sup>92</sup> These long term demands made the ideal of collecting alms

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<sup>91</sup> Little, Lester K. *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, (London, 1978).

<sup>92</sup> See canon 10, (*De predicatoribus*); canon 27, (*De instructione ordinandorum*), in N. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, (London, 1990) 12.

on only a day-today basis impractical. The Franciscans too needed some form of financial stability, in the form of a predictable and regular income.

Unfortunately, Francis' position on absolute poverty was unequivocal. For example, his *Testament* (1226) warned against recourse to regular and wealthy patrons precisely because it compromised the vow of poverty and material instability:

Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with holy poverty which we have promised in the rule, and let them always be guests as pilgrims and strangers. And I firmly command all the brothers through obedience that, wherever they are, they should not be so bold as to seek any letter from the Roman Curia either personally or through an intermediary, neither for a church or for some other place or under the guise of preaching or even for the persecution of their bodies.<sup>93</sup>

The popes offered a possible solution. As the order was under the protection and jurisdiction of the Papal See, both Gregory and Innocent IV suggested that the papacy could officially be named as the owners of Franciscan property. Ignoring the *Testament* of Francis, the popes provided a legalistic interpretation of Francis' *Regula bullata* (1223). For example, Gregory's bull *Quo elongati* suggested that a papal *nuntius* who collected alms and owned the property be appointed as an agent. Through another secular helper, the *amicus spiritualis*, the friars were allowed the "use" of these goods and properties.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, from the solutions presented to the two former orders, Gregory and Innocent IV developed the view that the security of the Clares could only be established through their

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<sup>93</sup> "Caveant sibi fratres, ut ecclesias, habitacula pauperula et omnia, quae pro ipsis construuntur, penitus non recipiant, nisi essent, sicut decet sanctam paupertatem, quam in regula promissimus, semper ibi hospitantes sicut advenae et peregrini. Praecipio firmiter per obedientiam fratribus universis, quod ubicumque sunt, non audeant petere aliquam litteram in curia Romana, per se neque per interpositam personam, neque pro ecclesia neque pro alio loco neque sub specie praedictionis neque pro persecutione suorum corporum." Francis of Assisi, *Testament*, 24-25, Desbonnets et al eds., *François d'Assise: Écrits*, (Paris, 1981), 208; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 155.

<sup>94</sup> The bull is published in full in H. Grundmann, "Die bulle, 'Quo elongati' Papst Gregors IX," *A.F.H.* 65 (1961): 20-25. The explication of the roles of *nuntius* and *amicus spiritualis* can be found in lines 63-76: 22

renunciation of the vow of absolute poverty. Gregory went on to apply Cistercian practice to temper Clarissan poverty, and Innocent IV included the role of the *nuntius* in his rule for the Clares.

First, Gregory explicitly claimed that poverty was the cause for the collapse of female houses. He argued in a letter to the Poor Recluses of Santa Maria in Milan of 1232 that, “terrible poverty, caused by abundant wickedness and the flagging charity of many people, would (God forbid) compel nuns to abandon their vocation.”<sup>95</sup>

With this justification, he isolated the practice of the convent of San Damiano. He forced all the other Clarissan monasteries to accept papal donations of goods and property. For example, in 1231 he donated land, a vineyard, an olive grove and the mill to the convent of Mont Lucidi, which was not far from San Damiano itself.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, he amended the *Privilege of Poverty* of Innocent III, when he reissued it in 1228.<sup>97</sup> Clare's anxiety to gain Gregory's affirmation of this privilege was a result of her unease at his interference with the Franciscans' vow of poverty. Her suspicions were well founded, as Gregory limited the scope of Clare's own privilege. It was valid only up to the death of Clare, as he omitted Innocent III's clause that granted it into perpetuity. And, it applied only to San Damiano itself: despite petitions from other monasteries, such as Mont Lucidi, he forbade them to rid themselves of the property that he had granted them.<sup>98</sup>

Third, Innocent IV appointed Franciscan-style procurators, as mentioned in Gregory's *Quo elongati*, to the Clares themselves. In his rule of 1247 he stated that the Clares:

may be permitted to receive, to have in common, and to freely retain produce and possessions. A procurator-one who is prudent as well as loyal-may be had in every monastery

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<sup>95</sup> Cited by Gennaro, “Clare, Agnes and their earliest followers,” 48, ff. 37.

<sup>96</sup> “Ad faciendam vobis gratiam specialem merito vestrae religionis inducti moleridinum, terras, vineas, oliveta, hortos et alia nostro nomine apud Perusiam comparata, iura et actiones nobis inde competentia, de mera et pia liberalitate vobis et per vos monasterio vestro praesentium auctoritate concedimus et donamus.” Gregory IX, 18. July 1231, in *B.F.*, I: 73.

<sup>97</sup> See P. Ranft, “An overturned victory,” 127-131.



of the order to deal with these possessions in a becoming way.<sup>99</sup>

Having been forced to accept the property donated by Gregory, Innocent's inclusion of procurators was an attempt to resolve any aversion that the Clares might have had to it. Rather than handling the goods themselves, or worse still abandoning them completely, Innocent firmly placed the ownership of extra goods in the hands of a secular agent.

Against this tide of papal exhortation and Franciscan compromise, Clare stubbornly resisted any encroachment upon her vow of absolute poverty. Again, one can observe how crucial her association with Francis was for her, as she appealed to Francis' authority as promoter of the ideal of material instability. She quoted word for word the text of his *Regula bullata* (1223):

The sisters shall not acquire anything as their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all; instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them send confidently for alms.<sup>100</sup>

Second, she devoted a whole chapter to poverty, putting it both literally and figuratively at the centre of her rule. The importance of this particular chapter was that it articulated a value that had been pointedly ignored or abused in the earlier papal rules. Unlike the rest of the rule, Clare's contribution of this chapter was an entirely original expression of her own thoughts. In it, she repeated that their privilege to practise absolute poverty was inviolable and should be granted into perpetuity:

And that we might never turn aside from the most holy poverty we had embraced,

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<sup>98</sup> Innocent III's privilege was all inclusive, "tam presentibus quam futuris regularem vitam professis, in perpetuum," *Privilegium Paupertatis* (1216), cl. 1; Becker et al, *Écrits*, 196. For his refusal to grant the privilege to Mont Lucidi, see *B.F.*, I, 341.

<sup>99</sup> "Ad haec liceat vobis in communi redditus, et possessiones recipere, et habere, ac ea libere retinere; pro quibus possessionibus modo dicto pertractandis Procurator unus prudens pariter, et fidelis in singulis monasteriis vestri Ordinis habeantur, quandocumque expedire videbitur." Innocent IV's rule in bull, *Cum omnis vero* (1247) cl. 11, in *B.F.*: I, 476-83; trans. Armstrong, Clare of Assisi, 119.

<sup>100</sup> "Sorores nihil sibi approprient nec domum nec locum nec aliquam rem. Et tamquam peregrinae et advenae in hoc saeculo, in paupertate et humilitate Domino famulantes, mittant pro elemosyna confiderent." Clare of Assisi, *Rule*, (1253), cap. 8, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 8, 1: 146. The parallel passage in Francis' rule reads, "The brothers shall not acquire anything at all. Instead as pilgrims and strangers in the world, who

shortly before his death he wrote his last will for us once more, saying: "I brother Francis, the little one, wish to follow the life and the poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy mother and persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and in poverty. And to keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone."...so, too, the abbesses, who shall succeed me [Clare] in office and all the sisters are bound to observe it inviolably to the end.<sup>101</sup>

No matter how strongly Clare held her ideals in regard to poverty, in actual practice her poverty was severely limited because of the strictures that enclosure imposed on the Clares. One historian worth examining on this issue is Lester K. Little. In his seminal work, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy* (1978), he recognised only two responses to rising urban poverty, the result of the mercantile revolution. His basic paradigm was to divide neatly religious groups into two categories, "between those that confronted the issue [of urban poverty] and those that ignored it", and proceeded to treat each group in a separate chapter.<sup>102</sup> In the former category he placed friars, laymen and regular canons, in the latter, the monks and the hermits. However, if one tried to fit the Clares into Little's model, one can see how such a simplistic division was inappropriate for them. Clare and her followers straddled both categories. Simply, her aspirations for confronting urban poverty were tempered by the strictures imposed on her by the cloister. Therefore, this final section is devoted to the extent in which the cloister actually impinged on her development of poverty.

The first way in which Clare differed from her monastic models, on the issue of poverty, was in her regard to the involuntary poor, and their relation to herself. Unlike conventional monastic movements, Clare showed a greater sympathy towards those who fell into poverty. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux emphasised the moral superiority of the monks in relation to the involuntarily poor. He argued that it was better for a patron to donate to those who had chosen poverty:

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serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms in trust." cap. 6, 1; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 141.

<sup>101</sup> "Et ut nusquam declinarem a sanctissima paupertate quam capimus nec etiam quae post nos venturae essent, paulo ante obitum suum iterum scripsit nobis ultimam voluntatem suam dicens: 'Ego frater Franciscus parvulus volo sequi vitam et paupertatem altissimi Domini nostri Jesu Christi et eius sanctissimae matris et perserverare in ea usque in finem et rogo vos, dominas meas, et consilium do vobis, ut in ista sanctissima vita et paupertate semper vivatis et custodite vos multum, ne doctrina vel consilio alicuius ab ipsa in perpetuum ullatenus recedatis'...sic teneantur abbatissae quae in officio mihi succedent et omnes sorores usque in finem inviolabiliter observare.", Clare of Assisi, *Rule*, Becker et al, *Écrits*, 6: 6-9, 143-144.

<sup>102</sup> L.K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, (London, 1978): xi, et passim.

It is one thing to fill the belly of the hungry, and another to have a zeal for poverty. The one is the service of nature, the other the service of grace.<sup>103</sup>

But for Clare, such complacent aloofness sat uncomfortably with her. She appreciated the suffering of the involuntary poor, and dedicated her life to relieving it. For example, right from the beginning of her ministry, her attention to the poor of Assisi was a primary concern:

She freely stretched out her hand to the poor and satisfied the needs of many out of the abundance of her house. In order that her sacrifice would be more pleasing to God, she would deprive her own body of delicate foods and, sending them secretly through intermediaries, she would nourish the bodies of the poor. Thus, from her infancy as mercy was growing with her, she bore a compassionate attitude, merciful towards the miseries of the destitute.<sup>104</sup>

Although it is clear that Clare made some radical attempts to confront the problem of urban poverty, it is also important to stress that because of her cloistered status, she was unable to express her poverty in the same way as Francis. First, she did not have Francis' marginalised status. Francis' vision of poverty involved taking on the role of social outcast, and thus becoming on a par with the poor and lepers of the communes. He welcomed the scorn and insults of the citizens of the city, as an act of penitence. But for Clare such a literal interpretation of outcast status was impossible. On a practical level, women entering among prostitutes, lepers and the poor was inappropriate.<sup>105</sup> But most importantly, her position reflected how, in some ways, Clarissan poverty followed the conventional patrician mode.

First, though she did give up her property, she did not give up her noble status. Clare was still regarded by her lay patrons as the daughter of two noble parents. For example, Ranieri de Bernardo was at pains to point out her aristocratic extraction:

Lady Clare was of the most noble [families] of the city of Assisi, on both her father's

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<sup>103</sup> "Aliud est reficere ventrem esurieritis, et aliud sanctam zelare paupertatem. Ibi enim servitur naturae, hic gratiae." Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistola*, 95, in *Patrologia Latina*, col. 228.

<sup>104</sup> Celano, *Legenda Sanctae Clarae Virginis*: 3; in *A.S.*, Augusti, ii: 755 ; as trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 191-192. See also *Proc.* 1:3, 17: 1-4; 18: 1, 3; 20: 3, 5.

and her mother's side. Asked how he knew these things, he replied that it was public knowledge throughout the area.<sup>106</sup>

Second, her ideal of becoming the working poor did not reflect the hard labour of the beguine movement. Jacques de Vitry wrote that the Clares were, “women who live a community life from the work of their hands, but accept no income.”<sup>107</sup> However, if one turns to the canonisation processes, it is clear that their practical labour resulted not in coarse cloth, similar to that of the Flemish beguines, but that they produced luxury textiles in accordance to a more traditional expectations. For example, Sister Pacifica testified to Clare spinning silk to produce altar clothes. Moreover, these altar cloths were not a source of income, but were donated as gifts:

She also said that when she [Clare] was so sick that she could not get up from bed, she had herself raised to sit up and be supported with some cushions behind her back. She spun [thread] so from her work she made corporals and altar linens for almost all the churches of the plains and hills around Assisi...When the cloth was made and the sisters had sewn it, it was hand-delivered by the brothers to those churches and given to the priests who came there.<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, the donatory aspect rather than their practical use was emphasised by the value of the presentation boxes Clare offered these cloths in. These were boxes lined with silk and blessed by the bishop.<sup>109</sup>

Third, although Clare stressed that she was following Francis' complete rejection of all goods, she did accept the principle of corporate ownership from the very beginning of the foundation of her order. It is significant that in 1218, Honorius implied that these women acknowledge the ownership of the enclosure. He put their interests forward as, “to have built for them some small houses to live in while possessing nothing under heaven, *except these houses*.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>See Manselli, *St Francis of Assisi*, 151-152.

<sup>106</sup>*Proc.* 18: 4; trans. R.J. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 173.

<sup>107</sup>See his description in Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, 76.

<sup>108</sup>Sister Pacifica, *Proc.* 1:11; as trans. in R.J. Armstrong (1988): 131. For a discussion of this and a more anthropological approach to Clare's poverty, see A. Volland's study, “Thirteenth century Umbrian poverty and the life of the first Poor Clares,” *Clare of Assisi: a medieval and a modern woman*, ed. I Peterson, (New York, 1996): 31-52.

<sup>109</sup>Sister Benvenuta, *Proc.* 2: 12; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 136.

<sup>110</sup>“quamplures virgines, et aliae mulieres...desiderant...fabricari sibi aliqua domicilia, in quibus vivant nihil possidentes sub caelo, *exceptis domiciliis ipsis*,” [my italics] Letter of Honorius III to Cardinal Hugolino

Clare in her rule also repeated this intention to hold common property. In it, she justified this as one of the requirements of maintaining the security of the cloister. Again, Clare demonstrated that the cloister was an obstacle to true Franciscan ideals of absolute poverty. She needed:

as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and proper seclusion of the monastery, and this land not to be cultivated, except as a garden for the needs of the sisters.<sup>111</sup>

The demands of the cloister did encroach on Clare's vision of absolute poverty. She could not take on the role of social outcast, as it required face-to-face contact with Assisi's outcasts. Instead, Clare had to rely on the male provosts relaying her sympathy to the destitute. Her own noble status prevented her from being regarded as a social outsider. In key ways, her poverty followed patrician lines, such as the donations of silk corporals, and the security of her enclosure, as afforded by its papal protection.

## Conclusion

To understand the development of enclosure in the rule and the practices of the Poor Clares, it is essential that enclosure is examined in the context of the *cura mulierum*, and the Clarissan vow of absolute poverty. Evidence from the rule of St Clare demonstrated that her main concerns were maintaining the close association between themselves and the Order of Friars Minor, and ensuring the Clares' strict adherence to their vow of absolute poverty.

These two conditions were regarded by Hugolino as incompatible with conventual life. Thus this promulgator of the early rule of the Poor Clares prioritised enclosure over Clare's own spiritual aspirations. In papal eyes, the permanent location of Clarissan foundations rendered their association with the itinerate Franciscans as worthless. Instead, Hugolino attempted to transfer authority from the seemingly less reliable friars to more established monastic orders and place the

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(1218) ; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 85. This distinction was first made by Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 87, n. 2

<sup>111</sup> "nisi quantum terrae pro honestate et remotione monasterii necessitas requirit; et illa terra non laboretur, nisi pro horto ad necessitatem ipsarum." Clare of Assisi, *Rule*, cap. 6: 14-15; Becker et al, *Écrits*, 144.

Clares under the jurisdiction of the pope. As a result, Benedictine and Cistercian precepts on the settlement and conduct of religious women, where *clausura* was a primary value, replaced Clare's own attachment to Francis.

Second, Clare's attachment to radical poverty was also regarded as untenable. Again the anxieties of Hugolino and also Innocent IV contrast with Clare's faith in Christ as provider. For the popes, sole reliance on the donations of urban supporter was disavowed, in favour of the maintenance of property, and so ensuring that the security of the cloister was maintained. Unlike its effect on the *cura mulierum*, enclosure was effective in limiting the way Clare and her followers expressed their poverty. It was a result of the conventualisation of her order, and her status as a noble woman, which resulted in her expression of poverty following conventional patrician lines.

Hugolino's method of managing the foundation of the order of Poor Clares at the beginning of the thirteenth century had set the tone for later papal attitudes towards religious women. As Gregory IX, he envisioned universal enclosure and papal supervision as the most effective means to control new aspirations, even if it was to the detriment of women's spiritual autonomy. However, the status and expectation surrounding religious women were not confined solely to professed religious women's relationships to clerical authority. The demands of lay followers and supporters of a community also influence their development. Turning from the documentary to the archaeological evidence, it is possible to gain further insights into the realities of the cloister and its effect on Franciscan women's contemplative experience.

## **Chapter Four. Interpretations of monastic space: Clarissan contemplative spirituality and the conflicting pressures of enclosure and pilgrimage.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will attempt to explain the link between the Clares' spiritual values and how they found aesthetic expression in the architecture and decoration of their houses. It examines how the cloister ideals set out in monastic writings and legislation were expressed in terms of the physical lay-out of the Poor Clares' convents and other female monastic houses. Recent interpretations of monastery plans by art historians and archaeologists will be reviewed. In particular, I wish to challenge their assumption that the lay out of the buildings were drawn, in all cases, from a stable blueprint. When examining the convent of San Damiano it becomes obvious that the building and the manning of the convent was hampered by a lack of money and personnel that had consequences on the implementation of cloister regulations. This is evidenced by the various building phases the Clares' convent went through. When Francis first began to rebuild the church of San Damiano he had no coherent vision of the site being used as a convent. Instead, what can be observed is its gradual adaptation to use as a monastic house. Moreover, the convent's transformation to the pilgrimage site of Santa Chiara, after the death of St Clare, resulted in more changes to its design and siting. The intrusion of both the commune of Assisi and the papacy in the use of the Clares' convent profoundly affected the nature of the Clares' enclosure. Monastic houses are better treated as fluid projects rather than planned properties that directly express its founder's unerring vision.

While outlining the development of the Clares' monastery I also compare its inception and growth to that of other female orders, namely, the Cistercians and the nuns at Fontevraud. Such comparison reveals that the contemplative spirituality of each order found diverse expression in their treatments of the cloister and the creation of their monastic complexes.

## I

In this first section, three methods used to interpret physical space shall be outlined: how the design of space is dictated by its function; how space is interpreted by social actors; and how space reflects the social hierarchy. These abstract theories have been used successfully in a monastic context by art historians. For example, the affective dimension of space in the decoration of Cistercian monasteries reflected Bernardine spirituality; and the hierarchy of space regulated the lives of the nuns and monks living in the double convent of Coyroux. Finally, how these methods have been applied to work on Clarissan art and architecture shall be explored, namely, Caroline Bruzelius' reflections on how the choirs of Clarissan churches supported an anchoritic form of devotion.

The theories offered to interpret physical space are found in disciplines as diverse as archaeology, ethnography, anthropology, art history and architecture.<sup>1</sup> What each approach has in common is the value they place on the interpretation of space as an aid to understanding the culture that produced such building layouts. Speaking of monastic sites, Roberta Gilchrist recommended that archaeological remains ought to be treated as evidence as important as written sources. She objected to the practice of written evidence being seen as more reliable. Instead, the archaeology of space should be used not only to support, but also to question written sources:

In this agenda, documents would be used but they would not be privileged to a position in which they provide explanation, while archaeological evidence merely illustrates. Documents and archaeological data are best used as sources of contemporary analogy. They are integrated not to provide illustration of explanations but to link themes

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<sup>1</sup> Prominent in the field of archaeology, and in particular women's monastic sites, is the work of Roberta Gilchrist. The best examples of her gendered approach is found in her two books, *Gender and material culture* (London, 1994) and *Action and Contemplation* (London, 1996). Much of her thinking is based on the ethnographic study of the Marakwet by Henrietta Moore in, *Space, Text and Gender* (Cambridge, 1996), who recognised how physical space was regulated by gender. This is supported by the anthropologist Shirley Ardener in, *Women and Space* (London, 1981). In the field of architecture, the seminal book on the cultural interpretation of space is B. Hiller and J. Hanson's, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge, 1984). Art historians appear to have a more cautious approach, which relies heavily on written sources to support any suppositions made on the use of space. One can see a more traditional approach in the studies of Cistercian art and architecture, such as C. Norton & D. Park (eds.), *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1986). Despite their varying subject matter, there have been attempts at the cross-fertilisation of ideas, most notably in Susan Kent (ed.), *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space* (Cambridge, 1990).



between media.<sup>2</sup>

But how does one understand this kind of data? From often complex matrices interpreting physical space, I have crudely simplified them into three basic methods.<sup>3</sup> The most obvious method is described as the form/function model. In this, building design is wholly related to the mechanistic function of the rooms, as each space within a building is catalogued according to its use, such as the chapter house, the refectory, the cloister or the kitchen. Naturally, this method of classification is inadequate, acting only as a labelling process. For example, it fails to explain why different building types exist for the same function, or why there are individual variations in a wider cultural pattern, in other words, why two monasteries never look the same.

One way in which to overcome this inadequacy is developed in the second method of spatial theory, which highlights the symbolic and affective qualities found in space. For a space to function coherently it requires human beings to inhabit it, and it is they, the social actors, who assign space with meaning.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is possible to categorise space by the symbolic value attached to it by a social group.

Moreover, the symbolic value is not inherent in the space, but dependent on who is viewing it. This development, which argued that space is also perceived differently, according to the age gender and experience of the social group, is the third method in interpretation. Space can be divided and regulated according to the above criteria, and produce what is known as a hierarchy of space.<sup>5</sup> Often, this hierarchy reflects social order, and is also used to organise and reinforce this order:

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<sup>2</sup> R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these methods see R.J. Lawrence, "Public collective and private space", Kent, *Domestic Architecture*, 73-75.

<sup>4</sup> For the Saussurian background into the way in which human beings perceive, build and classify space see Moore *Space, Text and Gender*, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, the level of sophistication in dividing and interpreting space along these lines is witnessed in the work of Roberta Gilchrist. Drawing from the model of "syntactic access analysis" of Hiller and Hanson, Gilchrist argued that, "Access analysis charts the arrangement of spaces as levels of permeability, measuring relative degrees of depth and shallowness. Each component and entrance is represented as a node connected by lines to other components to which it has access. The resulting network of nodes and lines forms an unjustified access map. This map is justified, or calibrated, according to the position of the observer, placed at any single point outside or within the complex." For examples of such access maps see Gilchrist's spatial

Space was used to regulate encounters between groups. The precinct [of the monastery] was separated into an outer court, which was accessible to seculars and served non-religious functions, and the inner religious cloister. This inner area was constructed to manage contact between groups of differing social, religious and gender identities. Such control was achieved through the physical manipulation of space through which the inhabitants travelled, and by the conceptual spatial division inherent in monastic ideals. Attitudes toward space were created through shared knowledge and transmitted through sermons, written liturgy and rules. This codified behaviour informed attitudes towards space, thus reproducing the social order of the nunnery.<sup>6</sup>

The simplest way to understand these theories is to put forward some practical examples. I shall first examine the affective and symbolic dimension of space by describing how monastic churches were decorated by the Cistercians, and compare this with the monasteries of the Clares. This comparison highlights two different contemplative practices, and how they produced opposing aesthetic ideals.

The lack of church decoration in Cistercian monasteries was informed by their contemplative practice. In the statutes of the General chapter their disapproval of decorated images resulted from a fear that such visual display might distract monks from meditation.<sup>7</sup> In the context of contemplative practice, decorated images were a temptation for a monk who was lured away from thoughts of God, through *curiositas*, the first step of pride. To avoid *curiositas* the monk had to practise, “the discipline of the eyes,” and shun such images.<sup>8</sup> Bernard puts this view forward unequivocally:

There is here [in contemplation] as I think no need or use of material, sense transmitted images of Christ's flesh or cross or any other representations which belong to

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analyses of a monastery at Leiston, and a nunnery at Burnham in Gilchrist, *Gender and material culture*, 164-165, fig. 67 & 68.

<sup>6</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and material culture*, 152.

<sup>7</sup> “Sculpture vel picture in ecclesiis nostris seu in officinis aliquibus monasterii ne fiant interdicimus, quia dum talibus intenditur, utilitatis bone meditationis vel disciplina religiose gravitatis sepe negligitur. Cruces tamen pictas que sunt lignea habemus.” Cited from C. Norton, “Table of Cistercian legislation”, Norton & Park, *Cistercian Art and Architecture*, 324.

<sup>8</sup> See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Steps of Humility*, X, 36, *C.F.* 13 (1974): 66.

the weakness of his mortality.<sup>9</sup>

The theological reasoning for such a hostile stance on decorating space was Bernard's belief that in the higher realms of contemplation, the monk's union with Christ was not experienced on any corporeal level:

The coming of the Word was not perceptible to my eyes, for he has no colour; nor to my ears, for there was no sound; nor yet to my nostrils, for he mingles with the mind, not the air...His coming was not tasted by the mouth, for there was no eating or drinking, nor could he be known by the sense of touch, for he is not tangible.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of the Clares' contemplative practice, the presence at San Damiano of a decorated cross, depicting Christ crucified, highlights a difference in understanding of the corporeality of Christ. Clare's spirituality responded far more positively to the idea of Christ's humanity. This veneration was so important that when the Clares moved to the new convent Santa Chiara in 1260, they took the decorated cross with them. By this action, they demonstrated their belief in the efficacy of images. Instead of demoting the experience of Christ's humanity to the lower realms of contemplation, Clare thought that visualising the suffering of Christ was a form of imitating his experience and so becoming close to him. In a letter to St Agnes, she recommended that her sister should do that very thing:

*Look upon Him* who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in the world for Him. Your spouse, though more beautiful than the children of men became, for your salvation, the lowest of men, despised, struck, scourged untold times throughout his whole body, and then died amid the sufferings of the cross. O most noble queen, *gaze upon [Him]*, consider [Him], contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him].

If you suffer with Him, you shall reign with Him,  
[If you] weep [with Him], you shall rejoice with Him  
[If you] die [with Him], on the cross of tribulation,  
You shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendour of the saints,

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, IV, trans. by I. Edmonds, C.F. 40 (1980): 90; as quoted by E. Melczer & E. Soldwedel, "Monastic goals in the aesthetics of St Bernard", *Studies in Cistercian Art and Architecture*, ed. M Lillich, vol. 1, Cistercian Studies, 66 (Kalamazoo, 1982): 33.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 90.

and, in the Book of Life, your name shall be called glorious among men.<sup>11</sup>

Because Clare said nothing specific about her attitude to decorative images, it is difficult to surmise much about her attitude to devotional objects in general. During her life at San Damiano, the decorated crucifix and a fresco of a Madonna and Child with Saints, in the apse of the church, were the only decorations.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of decoration in a period where even the most isolated parish church had a little, might signify her own strong attachment to the ideal of strict poverty. Clare exhorted her sisters,

not to receive or hold onto any possessions or property [acquired] through an intermediary, or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and the proper seclusion of the monastery; and this land is not to be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters.<sup>13</sup>

Even after their move to Sta Chiara the women were close to destitution. Donations for the first few years at Sta Chiara were earmarked for necessities, such as food, clothing and payments to the priest for saying Mass. It was not until the 1330s that alms were increasingly assigned for works of art.<sup>14</sup> Thus, either voluntary or involuntary poverty seems to have influenced the unadorned style of the church of San Damiano.

It has been argued that the Cistercian aesthetic mould was also influenced by the moral imperative of voluntary poverty. Bernard's dislike for art which had no apparent use, except display, confirmed his view that such money was better spent on the poor, "the walls of the church are aglow, but the poor of the church go hungry...the food of the poor is taken to feed the eyes of the rich."<sup>15</sup> Cistercian legislation appeared to support such a stance, by offering a quarter of the abbey's wealth to the poor.<sup>16</sup> However, if poverty had reflected their aesthetic ideals towards

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<sup>11</sup> My own italics. Clare's second letter to blessed Agnes of Prague, trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 197.

<sup>12</sup> See Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality: the Poor Clares in Early Modern Italy*, (Cambridge, 1996) 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> Clare of Assisi, *The Rule of St Clare*, chapter VI, trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 219.

<sup>14</sup> M. Bigaroni et al, *La Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi*, (Perugia, 1994) 229-30 .

<sup>15</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia for Abbot William*, 28; trans. by M. Casey, *C.F.* 1 (1970); as cited by E. Stiegmann, "St Bernard: the aesthetics of authenticity", in Lillich, *Studies in Cistercian Art*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> "Decimas quoque aiebant a sanctis patribus...in IIII portiones distributas, unam scilicet episcopo, alteram presbytero, tertiam hospitibus ad illam ecclesiam venientibus, seu viduis et orphanis sive pauperibus aliunde victum non habentibus, quartam restaurationi ecclesiae." *Exordium Parvum*, XV, as quoted by C.H. Talbot,

space, then it would not have been necessary to repeatedly order the monasteries to limit their spending on buildings or decoration to 50 or 100 Marks a year, as is evident in the statutes of 1188, 1192 and 1240.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the grisailles which decorated their windows were as expensive as the coloured glass they prohibited.<sup>18</sup>

For the way in which space regulated social groups by gender, age and experience, one can turn to the study of Loraine Simmons, who stressed that the division of the church of Fontevraud, between the nuns and the monks, reflected a “proximity anxiety”. This hierarchy of space is also echoed by Caroline Bruzelius' study of Clarissan architecture, when she highlighted how “proximity anxiety” affected the Clares' experience of liturgy.

At Fontevraud, the division between social groups within the convent was most clearly stressed in the physical division of the church. First, during the twelfth century, Simmons surmised that the priest and the monks occupied the chevet of the church, while the nuns were placed in the nave.<sup>19</sup>

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“The Cistercian attitude towards art: the literary evidence”, in Norton & Park *Cistercian Art and Architecture*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Cistercian statutes of the General Chapter: cl. 10; cl. 90; cl.1 respectively; as cited by C.H. Talbot, “The Cistercian attitude towards art”, 64.

<sup>18</sup> M. Lillich, *Studies in Cistercian Art*, xiv.

<sup>19</sup> L. Simmons, “The abbey church of Fontevraud in the later twelfth century: anxiety, authority and architecture in female spiritual life”, *Gesta*, 31, (1992) 102 (see fig.1).

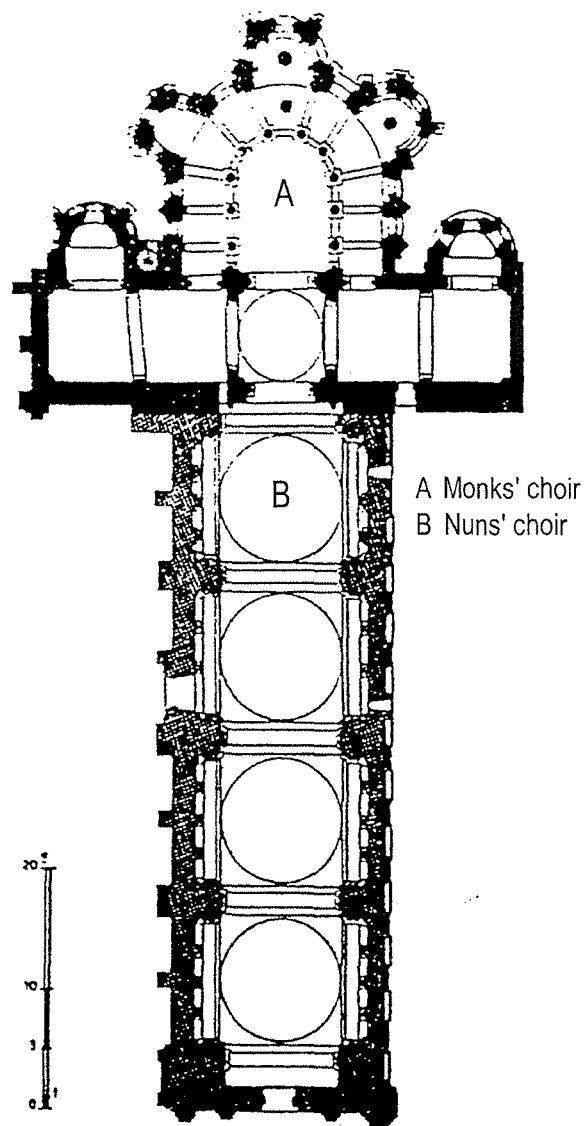


Fig. 1. Fontevraud abbey, church of the Grand Moutier, plan. From L. Simmons, "The abbey church of Fontevraud in later twelfth century," 102.

Second, this division was reinforced by the barrier of a door, which separated the altar from the nuns' choir. Most importantly, the statutes of the order stressed the careful regulation of the door by imposing behavioural as well as physical boundaries:

Item, that the door towards the altar never be opened except by the cellarer and

that no one enter into the other choir alone, neither the cellarer nor anyone else.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the social organisation of the monastery placed the abbess and the choir nuns in overall authority.<sup>21</sup> The protection of the integrity of the enclosure of the nuns was prioritised over the usual social norms, in particular the respect given to the sacerdotal function of the priest. In this example, the nuns guarded the priest as though his necessary presence was somehow threatening:

The [male] presence and movement in the church are carefully orchestrated and they must be chaperoned by a senior nun. Men have an aura of danger: “when the monks come to say Mass, the aforesaid door should never be opened except when the nuns receive God, and then the abbess, the chief prioress or the cellarer should assist in guarding them.”<sup>22</sup>

This “proximity anxiety” extended beyond the church into the rest of the monastery. For example, the dormitory belonging to the nuns had to be guarded by one lay sister during the day, a number which was increased to two or even four during the night.<sup>23</sup>

Not only was the hierarchy of space based on gender lines, there were also class divisions. In the monastery complex there existed four separate cloisters. The largest belonged to the aristocratic enclosed choir nuns, and within the complex, there were two more cloisters, one for the nuns in the infirmary and one for the lay sisters. The lay brothers and monks were situated outside the enclosure.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Simmons made the point that the physical and behavioural boundaries worked closely together to dictate how the nuns experienced their church, through repeated daily use:

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<sup>20</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, Nun's statutes, XXX; as edited by Cosnier in *P.L.*, 162: 1079-86; trans. Simmons, “The abbey church of Fontevraud,” 103.

<sup>21</sup> This is less surprising when one considers that other double monasteries insisted on the abbess' overall authority as a means of avoiding dissent between the two sexes. See C.H. Berman, “Men's houses, women's houses: the relationship between the sexes in twelfth century-monasticism”, in A. MacLeish (ed.), *The Medieval Monastery* (St Cloud, 1988): 43-52.

<sup>22</sup> Simmons is quoting from Robert of Arbrissel's directives for the nuns at Fontevraud, *Nuns' statutes*, XXXIII; Simmons, “The abbey church of Fontevraud,” 103.

<sup>23</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Nuns' statutes*, XXXII.

In doing so the statutes may be seen to acknowledge, perpetuate and manage sensitivity and anxiety between the women and the men, and to bring that anxiety into their daily prayer life. They did this by incalculating boundary consciousness so firmly in the women's minds that, as they read the statutes, so they read the architecture. They experienced, in a sense they reconstructed, the visual features of the building in which they prayed, in sharp awareness of this anxiety. In an indirect way Robert of Arbrissel, the patron-founder of Fontevraud, participated in the design of both the chevet and the nave. Through his statutes, Robert shaped the behaviour and the thinking of the Fontevraud religious, giving them a framework in which to perceive, experience, and reconstruct their built environment. In spiritual and physical terms he arranged for the nuns to live along a border charged with anxiety, a border which they observed in ritual and architecture.<sup>25</sup>

Caroline Bruzelius' study of Clarissan architecture has also highlighted how the physical boundaries of the church maintained behavioural prescriptions found in the written sources.<sup>26</sup> In her examination, the desire for the Clares to maintain their enclosure was physically manifested in the position of the choirs and the implementation of the grille. For example, at San Damiano Bruzelius located the nun's choir at right angles to the main altar of the church (see fig. 2).

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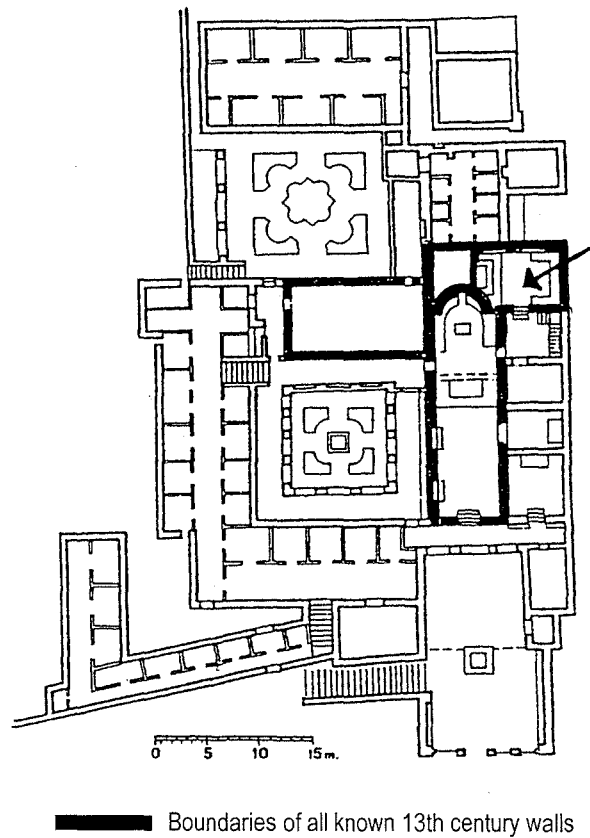
<sup>24</sup> Robert of Arbrissel, *Nuns' statutes*, XXXII.

<sup>25</sup> Simmons, "The abbey church of Fontevraud," 106.

<sup>26</sup> See C. Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing", *Gesta*, 31 (1992): 83-91; "Nuns in space: strict enclosure and the architecture of the Clarisses in the thirteenth century", in I. Peterson, *Clare of Assisi: a Medieval and a Modern Woman*, 53-74.



Fig. 2 San Damiano, Assisi, plan. The arrow indicates the present choir. From Bruzelius, "Nuns in space," 59



In combination with the imposition of a grille between the choir and the altar, the nuns were prevented from viewing the consecrated host:

At the grille a curtain is to be hung inside which is not removed except when the word of God is being preached, or when a sister is speaking to someone. The grille should also have a wooden door which is well provided with two distinct iron locks, bolts and bars, so that, especially at night, it can be locked by two keys.<sup>27</sup>

Bruzelius saw this as a determined attempt to live up to the requirements of strict claustration.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as in the case of Fontevraud, such physical boundaries were reinforced by strict parameters on behaviour. This is particularly noticeable in the version of the Clares' rule written by Cardinal Hugolino in 1219.<sup>29</sup> For example, Hugolino imposed strict guidelines on the supervision and selection of the priest as San Damiano, which echoed the proximity anxiety found

<sup>27</sup> Clare of Assisi, *Rule of St Clare*, chapter 5, 10-11; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Clare of Assisi*, 217.

<sup>28</sup> Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing," 83-85.

in Robert of Arbrissel's convent. To prevent the possibility of scandal, the priest had to be vetted for his age and experience:

When they have their own chaplain, let him be religious in life and manner and possess a good reputation. He should not be young but of a suitable age.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, his access into the cloister was strictly limited to emergencies, such as when a nun was too ill to receive communion in the church. Though his time in the cloister was as brief as possible, he remained under the constant supervision of the nuns:

When this chaplain sees that one of the sisters, who is gripped by a bodily illness, is coming to her end and she finds it necessary to confess her sins or receive the sacrament of the body of the Lord, he may enter the enclosure clothed in a white stole and maniple. After he has heard confession and given her the sacrament of the body of the Lord, he should leave, dressed as he entered, and not delay there any longer. He may not enter to fulfil obsequies at the grave, this duty should be fulfilled at the chapel...Nevertheless, if the Abbess sees fit that he should enter for these obsequies, let him enter in the manner described above, and after burial let him leave without delay...But for the rest let him not presume to enter the enclosure.<sup>31</sup>

The spiritual consequence of such a division of the convent's space has led Bruzelius to conclude that Clarissan devotion developed along anchoritic lines:

The possible succession of ancillary rooms as choirs in San Damiano reflects the arrangements found in churches to which the cells of recluses were attached. These often took the form of small rooms open to a church through a grated window. Since Clare had been housed in the beguinage of Sant' Angelo in Panzo, and her mission was conceived by Francis as one of meditation, the model of the anchoress and anchoritic practice may well have been a source for the arrangement at San Damiano.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hugolino's rule mentions the practice of enclosure in seven of its clauses.

<sup>30</sup> *Rule of Hugolino*, 11; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 93

<sup>31</sup> *Rule of Hugolino*, 11; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 93

<sup>32</sup> Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing," 84

Finally, because the visual line between the nuns' cloister and the altar was impaired by the position of the cloister and the grille, she speculated that such devotion was based upon hearing the celebration of the Eucharist, rather than seeing it. Indeed, Bruzelius argued that the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian spirituality only occurred at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and only then were Clarissan choirs allowed to view the host. Thus, she cited the fourteenth century church of Sta Chiara, Naples, as the first choir with such a view.<sup>33</sup>

But for the thirteenth century, however, it is important to recall that Christianity has always contained a tradition that especially blessed are those who can believe without seeing, touching, or tasting. This was the lesson of the episode of Doubting Thomas, reaffirmed in the hymn to the holy Eucharist attributed to Aquinas. Until the feast of Corpus Domini was firmly established, and given expression in architectural form, for women in religion, that which was most holy often came only through the ear.<sup>34</sup>

## II

The insights offered by the spatial analysis of convent plans can be rather questionable. As space can be interpreted in a variety of ways, it is possible to have to opposing explanations as to how the Clares' monastic space was utilised. Against Bruzelius' thesis that social division and proximity anxiety was expressed in the architecture of San Damiano, Bigaroni contended that San Damiano was an expression of a democratic religious sentiment, intent on breaking down social barriers.

To understand Bigaroni's thesis, it is necessary to describe the two building phases of San Damiano. In the first period, between 1204 and 1206, Francis' project was that of restoration. The

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<sup>33</sup> Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing," 87-88

<sup>34</sup> Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing," 88. Anthropologist Shirley Ardener commented that although women were excluded from participating or visually witnessing an important event, they were usually permitted to "listen from the doorway". S. Ardener, "Ground rules and social maps for women: an introduction", *Women and space*, 13.

original church consisted of three bodies on three different levels; a presbytery, a crypt and a nave (see fig. 3).<sup>35</sup>

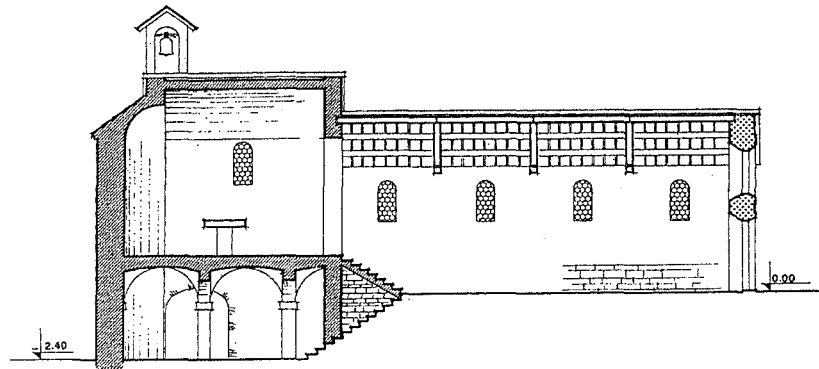


Fig. 3. San Damiano-longitudinal section of the original building (M. Brozzetti) From Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi: the first church of Saint Francis", *Franciscan Studies*, 47, (1987) 92.

When Francis was obliged to convert it to a convent church he and his followers made these adjustments (see fig. 4):

1. A single aisleless nave was created by raising the floor of the crypt and lowering the floor of the original nave by 1.2 metres, both upwards and downwards.
2. Over the barrel vault of the new nave Francis extended the building upwards by building a dormitory.
3. He converted the presbytery into an oratory, within the nuns' enclosure, by eliminating the stairs up to the original presbytery and raising its floor.
4. Between the new oratory and dormitory, Francis placed a communicating door and steps.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> M. Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi: the first church of St Francis", *Franciscan Studies*, 47 (1987): 63-64.

<sup>36</sup> Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi," 78.

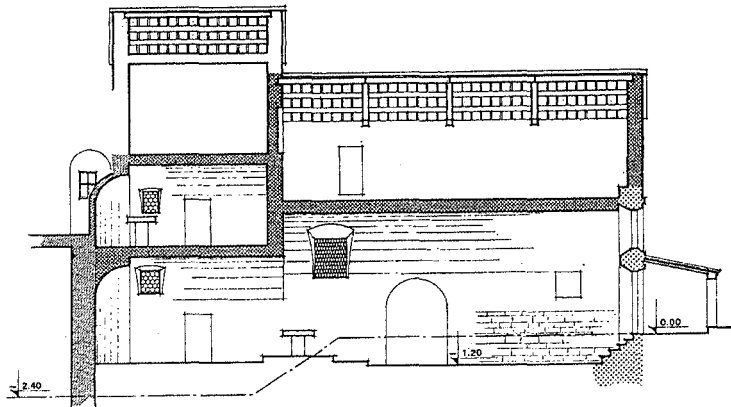


Fig. 4 The present San Damiano- longitudinal section (M. Brozzetti). From Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi: the first church of Saint Francis", *Franciscan Studies*, 47, (1987) 88.

Bigaroni interpreted the space of San Damiano by vertical, rather than horizontal mapping, and came up with this startling conclusion. For Bigaroni, Francis' conversion of San Damiano was an expression of a coherent vision of the church as a socially democratic space. First, he argued that its original division of crypt, presbytery and nave was typical of small rural monastic communities, such as the nearby San Masseo de Platea.<sup>37</sup> In such a space the monks and priest occupied the higher level of the presbytery, while the parishioners assembled in the nave, thus preserving the social hierarchy:

Up there [in the presbytery], far removed from all social contact and worldly care, the monk met with God...Because of its location the presbytery was ever the centre of worship and the focus of the attention of the people, a kind of Holy of Holies. There were celebrated the sacred mysteries, there the Bible was read and the word of God proclaimed.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi," 63-64.

<sup>38</sup> Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi," 64.

However, during the second building period in 1212, that of conversion, Bigaroni saw Francis attempting to break down social divisions. This is articulated in the design of the new monastery. In the new San Damiano:

Evidently Francis was already expressing his own clear idea of what the church should be for the people of his time: a church in a single hall, where clergy and people could come together in communion of prayer and word—a word popular rather than scholastic, moral rather than doctrinal, exhortative rather than exegetical...<sup>39</sup>

And so, Bigaroni concluded triumphantly, that a church built on a single level,

was a prophetic gesture of a new way of forming an ecclesial community: the one family of the children of God gathered like the first Christians of the catacombs within a single liturgical space devoid of hierarchical levels, of stairs and dividing screens, where the prayer of the faithful could merge with that of the priests and rise as a cloud of fragrant incense to God in the warmth of a new Christian family.<sup>40</sup>

That such polarised interpretations of the church of San Damiano can be presented begs the question that the interpretation of space is more problematic than it at first appears. In the next section, I shall outline the criticisms directed against such theorisation: first, its failure to account for historical change; and second, to account for how people resist dominant cultural ideologies of space.

### III

The most striking impression gained from such theories is how the authors often regard the building layouts as the perfect expression of the builder's intent. This has come from the presumption that the building layout remained static throughout the years. Thus, many of the studies on the relationship between the ideology and how it was reflected architecturally are

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<sup>39</sup> Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi," 79-80.

<sup>40</sup> M. Bigaroni, "San Damiano-Assisi," 84.

examined only on a synchronic basis.<sup>41</sup> Lawrence argued that for a better understanding of the development of monastic architecture, it is necessary to envision the sites as fluid entities subject to change, rather than a polished end product. In short, to interpret space diachronically:

...the relationship between habitat and resident is dynamic and changeable, and it includes factors which may remain unresolved over a relatively long period of time<sup>42</sup>

In the case of San Damiano, the factors which affected the design and the use of the monastery were the limitation in resources, both of money and personnel, that it experienced. The cost of building the convent from scratch was prohibitive, so the Clare's first monastery was built through economic compromise, rather than from a thought out plan. However, in the case of Sta Chiara, tensions as to how private and public space was ascribed had an impact on its design. An improvement in the Clares' material circumstances had to be balanced against the accompanying obligations owed to their enthusiastic patrons. The pressures of Sta Chiara becoming a pilgrimage site, and the Clares' association with the commune of Assisi and the papacy, dictated the location of the monastery, and, within the basilica, the location of the nuns' choir.

Having highlighted how social and economic factors influenced the design of both monasteries, it is important to discuss architecture's relation to the dominant cultural ideologies. First, current theories on interpreting space rely on the assumption that architecture reflected an all pervasive contemporary religious ideal. Henrietta Moore explicitly points up the problem of such a homogenous view of culture:

Culture is understood as an ideology or 'world view' which consists of a set of meanings, values and beliefs. If however, the organisation of space is understood merely as a reflection of an ideology, then it becomes extremely difficult to specify how social change might occur, except as a result of changing values.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> An exception to this is Caroline Bruzelius, who has pointed out, albeit briefly, the changing social circumstances of Clarissan architecture. Developing her ideas, I wish to produce a more comprehensive vision of the development of Clarissan monasteries.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence, "Public collective and private space," 78.

<sup>43</sup> Moore, *Space, text and gender*, 87.

On the issue of the hierarchy of space, it has been argued that its regulation and division is maintained through social actors, sublimating the rules set before them. Simmons assumed that Robert of Arbrissel's statutes on "proximity anxiety" were unquestioningly accepted by all members of the community. It was as though,

Individuals play the game but cannot change the rules. The situation is akin to that produced by the functionalist idea that individuals are subordinate to the workings of the system and that social action is governed by the internalisation of rules and norms.<sup>44</sup>

Against such an interpretation I would like to hold up the example of Clares. Their relationship with dominant cultural ideologies was not only top to bottom. They did not wholly accept the hierarchy of space dictated by their patrons. Within their new basilica, the Clares can be seen actively adapting the idea of partitioned space. After their move to Sta Chiara their material circumstances made the Clares question their vow of absolute poverty. One can observe through their contemplative practice how they reconciled the desire for poverty with their duty to decorate the church.

#### IV

In this section, an analysis of the economic and social context of the development of San Damiano and Sta Chiara will show that these factors seriously inhibited the possibility of creating a coherent and perfect design.

The first theme that affected the design of San Damiano was the lack of monetary resources which funded its building. Indeed the motivation for the restoration period of San Damiano, 1204 to 1206, was religious rather than practical:

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<sup>44</sup> Moore, *Space, text and gender*, 5-6.



Changed now perfectly in heart and soon to be changed in body too, he was walking one day near the church of San Damiano, which was nearly fallen into ruin and was abandoned by everyone. Led by the spirit, he went in and fell down before the crucifix in devout and humble supplication; and smitten by unusual visitations, he found himself other than where he had been when he entered. While he was thus affected, something unheard of before happened to him. The painted image of Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name, it said: 'Francis, go, repair my house, which as you see, is falling completely to ruin.' Trembling, Francis was not a little amazed and became almost deranged by these words. He prepared himself to obey and gave himself completely to the fulfilment of this command...and devoted his nurturing efforts toward repairing the church.<sup>45</sup>

Second, Francis, unlike Bigaroni's thesis, did not possess a clear vision which dictated that San Damiano was to be used as a monastery for women. In the restoration period, it is apparent that Francis had first intended to restore it to be used as a parish church, not as a monastery. Even after Clare had fled from her family and joined Francis at Portiuncula, Francis did not decide to place her at San Damiano. Instead, he placed her in the Benedictine convent of San Paolo in Bastia, and then transferred her to another convent, Sant' Angelo de Panzo. Only her unhappiness in both places forced Francis to think of an alternative home.<sup>46</sup>

Third, Francis' choice of San Damiano was motivated more by poverty, rather than a thought-out plan. Possessing nothing, Francis had no money to purchase a home for them. The simplest and cheapest method of providing a monastery was to build on a pre-existing parish church. This practice was not particularly unusual. Indeed, Augustinian canons during the same period had converted an increasing number of parish churches to form small rural communities in Italy. For example, a community of regular priests were confirmed as inhabitants of the old parish church of Sant' Agnese Talaono in Siena, as early as 1056.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, although Francis had no property rights over San Damiano, because he had rebuilt the ruined parish church, he was

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St Francis*, book 1, chapter 6, 10; trans. by P. Hermann in M. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 370-371; cf. Anon., *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 13c: 903-904; & Bonaventure, *Major Life of St Francis*, book 1, chapter 2, 1: 640-641.

<sup>46</sup> It is understandable why Bigaroni drew such a conclusion, as an episode in Francis' restoration of the church, has him prophesying that San Damiano would become a monastery for virgins. But this is most likely a hagiographic convention to strengthen the association between Francis and Clare. Moreover, if Francis had made such a prediction in 1206, it is surprising that he did not start at least some of the conversion work necessary to make San Damiano a working convent.

regarded as its major patron. His patronage of the site justified its conversion. Indeed, the church was owned by Bishop Guido of Assisi<sup>48</sup>, the man who had witnessed Francis' dramatic conversion and had advised him to return his money to his irate father, encouraging him to rely on God for his resources:

“Trust in the Lord, my son, and act manfully, fearing nothing, for he will help you and provide you with all that is necessary for repairing the church.”<sup>49</sup>

Guido might have felt obliged to donate San Damiano to Francis, because of his earlier advice.

Bruzelius' and Bigaroni's interpretations of the use of space at San Damiano do not address the reality of the lack of personnel in the early years. Both interpretations of space are dependent on the use of San Damiano as a local parish church, as well as a monastic church. Therefore, they rely on the frequent presence of a priest and of parishioners, who through daily communion reinforced the church's social organisation, either stressing the cloistered nature of the nuns' lives, or highlighting the unity of the whole Christian community. Without the priest or parishioners the “playing out” of either social order is seriously inhibited. Indeed, on closer examination, there is little evidence for the assumption that frequent sacerdotal duties were carried out there. Rather the evidence is to the contrary: no friar appeared to have a priestly function at San Damiano in the early years; Francis demonstrated a distinct reluctance to appoint someone in the post of priest; and the concept of even weekly communion was not found at San Damiano. Moreover, Bruzelius' conclusion that Clarissan spirituality was based on hearing, while condemning the use of sight is not borne out in their relation to Francis.

In the lives of St Francis, a poor secular priest was identified as being attached to the church. Francis stayed with him when he first ran away, while he was restoring the church, from 1204 to 1206. Fortini, quoting Anonymous Peruginus, claimed that his name was Pietro.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> J.C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons* (London, 1950): 44.

<sup>48</sup> The church was originally built in the early eleventh century by a consortium of local families, who in 1103 gave the church to the prior of San Rufino, and was later transferred to the bishop. See A. Fortini, *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, (Rome, 1951), vol. 3: 85-91.

<sup>49</sup> *Legend of Three Companions*, chapter 6, 19: as trans. by N. de Robeck, in Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 909.

<sup>50</sup> “Invento ibidem residente quondam paupere sacerdote nomine Pietro”, in *Miscellanea Francescana*, IX (1902): 37; cited by Fortini, *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, 278.

Because the church was utterly ruined at that time, it is unlikely that he was carrying out sacerdotal duties in that parish. This was confirmed by Celano, who commented that all the parishioners had left it, as it was, “abandoned by everyone”.<sup>51</sup> It was probable that Pietro’s association with the ruined church was financial, that is, for its benefice. In any case, he was not mentioned in the sources after 1206, nor in connection with the new convent, at the time of the Clares’ arrival in 1212.

Amongst Francis’ own followers, there is no evidence that any were attached to San Damiano. Having traced the lives of the early Franciscan priests, Sylvester and Leo, neither had any permanent affiliation to the monastery.<sup>52</sup> Sylvester had accompanied Francis on a preaching tour of Tuscany in the summer of 1211, and by 1213 was living as a hermit on the Subasio, the mountain above Assisi, having chosen a life of contemplation.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Leo’s time was also occupied in other activities making it unlikely that he was committed to sacerdotal duties at San Damiano, as he accompanied Francis as his close companion and secretary. Thus, in the early years of Clare’s convent he went on a mission with Francis to the Apennines in 1213, and thereafter was often away from Assisi. With the obvious upheaval of his itinerant lifestyle, he could not have provided frequent solicitude to the Clares.<sup>54</sup> The only friar with a long term association with the Clares, Philip the Long, was only their visitor and not their chaplain. Thus, it was only at the death of Clare in 1253, that we have a reference to a priest at San Damiano, a brother Marco, who was a witness to the canonisation process of Clare.<sup>55</sup> His role in the process seems to have been limited to witnessing the testimonies of the nuns and visitors to the convent, rather than making his own testimony. This suggests that his contact with Clare was limited, or that he was new in this position.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St Francis*, book 1, chapter 6, 10; trans. by P. Hermann in Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 370.

<sup>52</sup> Raoul Manselli has argued that another early follower of Francis, Peter Cattani, was also a priest. This is doubtful when one considers that in their early apostolate, the friars had relied on a disreputable secular priest for confession. See Thomas of Celano, *The First Life of St Francis*, 46; as trans. by P. Hermann in Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 267-268. As Celano places Cattani as the second man to follow Francis, it is difficult to understand why they should have resorted to a secular priest, if Cattani was a priest himself. Moreover, Glassberger states explicitly that Sylvester was the first priest to join the order in 1209. See N. Glassberger, *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, in *Analecta Francescana*, 11, 7; as cited by J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, (Oxford, 1968) 14.

<sup>53</sup> See Fioretti, 16; cf. Bonaventure, *Major Life of St Francis*, 12, 2; ed. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 1334 & 722 respectively.

<sup>54</sup> See Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 56, 60, 76

<sup>55</sup> “Also on the same day, the twenty eighth of November, in the house of the cloister of San Damiano, in the presence of Lord Leonardo, archdeacon of Spoleto, Don Jacobo, parish priest of Trevi who accompanied Lord Bartholomew, bishop of Spoleto, and brother Marco of the order of the Friars Minor, chaplain of the monastery, the entire convent of the monastery assembled.” *Acts of the Process of the Canonisation of St Clare*, X, 13; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 167-70.

That no friar appears to have taken up the role of priest for the Clares is less surprising when Francis' own reluctance to meet with religious women is taken in account. Importantly, this supports Bruzelius' contention "proximity anxiety" was a specific feature of contact between religious women and men. In his earlier rule Francis explicitly stated:

That all brothers, wherever they are or go, shall be on their guard against evil looks and associations with women, and none shall confer alone with them.<sup>56</sup>

In an episode from his own life when a religious virgin approached him for advice, he kept his interview brief, as he argued, "What business should a friar minor have to transact with a women, except when she piously asks for holy penance or advice concerning a better life."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Francis' warning against frequent and unnecessary visits to convents had led him to punish a young friar who decided to go to a convent on a errand of sympathy.<sup>58</sup> As a result of exhorting only the most unwilling to attend to the needs of the women, there was little incentive for any friar to volunteer as chaplain.

This situation was reflected in sacred offices of the Clares, where communion was practised infrequently. The friars themselves were expected to attend communion every day.<sup>59</sup> But in stark contrast at San Damiano, the lack of a priest for regular religious services might have led her to order Communion only a mere seven times a year: once at Christmas, twice at Easter (Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday), Pentecost, the Assumption of the Virgin, the feast of Francis (4th October) and the feast of All Saints (1st November). At certain times of the year the Clares had to wait for a considerable period before Communion, such as between Christmas and Easter, or the forty days between Easter and Pentecost.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Earlier Rule*, chapter 12; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 119-120.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St Francis*, 114

<sup>58</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St Francis*, 162; as trans. by P. Hermann, Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 527.

<sup>59</sup> "Therefore I admonish and urge in the name of the Lord that only one Mass according to the form of the Holy Church be celebrated each day in the places where the brothers stay." Francis of Assisi, *A Letter to the Entire Order*, 30; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 58.

<sup>60</sup> Clare of Assisi, *Rule of St Clare*, chapter 3, 13; trans. Armstrong & Brady, *Francis and Clare*, 214.

Without the frequent religious services it appears that the opportunity for social reinforcement of the social order was somewhat lost. Furthermore, Bruzelius appears to have overstated her belief that Clarissan spirituality was reliant on hearing the Mass, as a way of mortifying the Clares' sense of sight. Even though the architectural details may point to a restricted view of the church outside the cloister, it is possible to show that preaching was seen as well as heard. On one of the few occasions Francis came to San Damiano, the Clares gathered together to observe his sermon:

Repeatedly asked by his vicar<sup>61</sup> to preach the word of God to his daughters when he stopped off for a short time at San Damiano, Francis finally, overcome by his insistence, consented. But when the nuns had come together, according to their custom, to hear the word of God, though no less to see their father, Francis raised his eyes to heaven, where his heart always was, and prayed to Christ. He then commanded ashes to be brought to him and he made a circle with them around himself on the pavement and sprinkled the rest of them on his head. But when they waited for him to begin and the blessed father remained standing in the circle in silence, no small astonishment arose in their hearts. The saint suddenly rose to his feet and to the amazement of the nuns recited the *Miserere mei Deus*, in place of a sermon. When he finished he quickly left. The servant of God were so filled with contrition that their tears flowed in abundance and they could scarcely restrain their hands from inflicting punishment on themselves. By his actions he taught them that they should regard themselves as ashes and that there was nothing in his heart concerning them but was fitting this consideration.<sup>62</sup>

The only way this silent sermon could be transmitted was through sight. If the nuns remained in their choir behind the grille, they still must have assembled before it to see Francis. The prescription that mentions that the curtain before the grille ought to be removed when the word of God was spoken, suggests that the barrier of the grille was at times semi-permeable. It was not only removed to aid better hearing of the sermon, but in this case to see it.

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<sup>61</sup> In this context Celano used the word vicarius, which meant minister general of the order, rather than priest as one might suppose. By 1220 Francis had resigned from the leadership of the friars and Elias was nominated as his successor. See Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 527.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St Francis*, 207; trans. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 527-528.

In conclusion, compromise and improvisation dictated the building layout of the Clare's first real home. The development of the monastery of San Damiano is more a tale of deprivation and false starts, than of a coherent vision of contemplative life. First, Clare's entry into that monastery was not at first anticipated by Francis. Second, the choice of that particular church was not because Francis thought it appropriate, but because it was the only church available to him. Third, spiritual life at San Damiano was isolating, not just as a result of barriers and cloisters, but because the Clares were left often with inadequate spiritual supervision.

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Turning to the establishment of the new monastery at Sta Chiara, the improvement in the Clares' material circumstances as a result of the patronage of the commune and the papacy is highly significant. The pressure of the cult of St Clare resulted in an invasion of the nuns' private space, and was detrimental to their values of poverty. First, as a pilgrimage site, the new basilica of Sta Chiara was built as a mirror to San Francesco, and this dictated its scale and style. Second, the presence of pilgrims also affected the integrity of Clare's tomb and the enclosure of the Poor Clares. This is evident in the way both Clare's tomb and the nuns' choir were moved around the church. Third, the planning of Sta Chiara reflected more the ambitions of its patrons than the inhabitants of the convent. This was architecturally expressed in the decoration and the siting of the convent.

The amount of outside influence in the planning and the execution of Sta Chiara can be witnessed in the speed in which the new basilica was erected. From the exchange of the property, with the canons of San Rufino, to its completion, the time elapsing was only three years. In 1257, the canons of San Rufino accepted S. Giacomo di Murorutto with appurtenances, in exchange for the church San Giorgio and the hospital of San Rufino, which became the site of the new monastery.<sup>63</sup> The first mention of building work done by the Clares at the site is found in the same year. The nuns had constructed before San Giorgio a temporary home from which they could carry

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<sup>63</sup> See M. Bigaroni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio in Assisi," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 83, (1990): 13-20, for an exhaustive account of the fraught exchange.

out vigils for St Clare.<sup>64</sup> And by September 1260 at least the walls, choir, transept and the altar must have been completed, when Alexander IV felt ready to invite the bishops for the translation of Clare's body to the high altar.<sup>65</sup> Finally, by 21st August 1265, Clement IV consecrated the buildings, signalling its full completion.<sup>66</sup>

The achievement of Sta Chiara is more surprising when one considers the amount of resistance encountered from the canons of Rufino, during the exchange. The amount of religious personnel assigned to the task of affecting the change-over demonstrated how serious the popes were in securing this site for the Clares. For example, Alexander IV was instrumental in the process. Discussions about San Giorgio had begun as early as 1253, with the bishop of Assisi, Niccolò da Calvi (and incidentally, a Franciscan), negotiating on behalf of the Clares.<sup>67</sup> Impatient at the bishop's lack of success, Alexander himself ratified the exchange in 1255.<sup>68</sup> Despite the offer of San Giacomo di Murorutto, from the abbot of Farfa, the canons still stalled the exchange.<sup>69</sup> In 1257, the pope ordered the bishop of Spoleto, and an abbot of the monastery of S. Pietro di Perugia to exhort the canons to obey.<sup>70</sup> Alexander gave the canons eight days to hand over San Giorgio, or they would be excommunicated.<sup>71</sup>

Having gone to so much trouble to secure San Giorgio as the new site for the monastery of Sta Chiara, it is essential to explain why San Giorgio was so desirable a site. The reason is its potential as an influential pilgrimage site. It was here, in the original church of San Giorgio, where two major local saints were buried, an increasing focus for the spirituality of the citizens of

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<sup>64</sup> This home was described as a *palatia dominarium*, "et ante ipsam S. Giorgii, et ubi fuit constructum ipsum hospitale; et sunt palatia dominarum" *B.F.* II, 342, as cited by M. Bigaroni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio," 20

<sup>65</sup> *B.F.*, II, 407: 578. See H. Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi: Architektur und Funktion im Schatten von San Francesco", *Arte Medievale*, IV, 2, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 157.

<sup>66</sup> *B.F.*, III, 108: 118; as cited by Meier, 157.

<sup>67</sup> *B.F.*, II, 22: 5. Bigaroni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio," 14.

<sup>68</sup> *B.F.*, II, 22, 30. Negotiations had halted at this point because the canons objected to the close proximity of a group of friars, who were attached to the Clares, worried that the proximity of Franciscans might infringe on their sacerdotal privileges. Note that the Clare's spiritual supervision had also improved at this point.

<sup>69</sup> Archivio capitulo S. Rufino, fasc. IX, 15; cfr. in *L'antica chiesa e monastero di San Giacomo de Murorutto in Assisi*, (1939): 49; cited by Bigaroni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio," 16.

<sup>70</sup> See *B.F.*, II: 338; *B.F.*, II: 341.

<sup>71</sup> His extreme frustration is evident with the words he used to describe the canons, "da inobedientiae tantae reatu et de contemptu et superbiae suae detestabili insolentia", and, "Nos nolentes tantam eorum inobedientiam et contemptum ulterius tolerare", as cited by Bigaroni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio," 16.

Assisi.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, when the body of St Clare was translated to San Giorgio, it was with the same level of local interest and accompanying ceremony, “they carried it [Clare’s body] with hymns and [songs of] praise, the sound of trumpets and solemn rejoicing, and brought it honourably to San Giorgio.”<sup>73</sup>

The pilgrimage site of Sta Chiara was built in a manner so as to reinforce the association between St Francis and Clare. Thus, Sta Chiara was built to mirror the basilica of San Francesco, even if it was to the detriment of the privacy of the nuns. First, the priority of the pilgrims was clear in that Clare's body had to be translated from the original crypt of San Giorgio to the new basilica's high altar, in 1260, only seven years after Clare's death. Therefore, Clare was made accessible to the faithful who came to venerate her.<sup>74</sup> Indeed the date for the translation of Clare's body, 3rd October, had the maximum public impact, as it deliberately coincided with the vigil of the feast day of St Francis. Further, Alexander IV ensured outside interest by insisting on the presence of three local bishops (from Perugia, Spoleto and Assisi) and granted indulgences to commemorate the translation.<sup>75</sup>

That Clare had to be moved to her permanent resting place under the high altar was also due to the pressure of pilgrims at San Giorgio, even before her official translation. The small group of nuns, attending their mother abbess' tomb, were disturbed by the influx of pilgrims seeking a

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<sup>72</sup> “Et licet felix Pater, beatus Franciscus desideravit in illa ecclesia sepeliri, populus tamen et cives de Assisio timentes, ne propter signa, quae per ipsum et in vita et post mortem Deus dignatus est operari, a Perusinus videnter ipsum tolleretur, ipsum prope muros Asisii in ecclesia sancti Giorgii...transtulerunt et honorifice condiderunt.” Giordano da Giano, *Chronica, Analecta Francescana*, I, 16; cited by Bigaroni “La chiesa di S. Giorgio,” 4.

<sup>73</sup> “levatur (corpus S. Clarae) cum ymnis et laudibus cum tubarum clangore et iubilatione solemnibus, et ad s. Georgium honorifice deportatur; nam et hic locus est ille ubi sancti Patris Francisci corpus primo conditum fuerat.” Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*, edited by F. Pennachi, Assisi (1910), c. 48; cited by Bigaroni, “La chiesa di S. Giorgio,” 5.

<sup>74</sup> “Instaurato denique absolutoque templo, idem sacrum corpus ad aram maximum eius nomine Deo dictatam quinto nonas octobris anno millesimo ducentesimo sexagesimo honorificentius ibidem summa fidelium veneratione ad haec usque tempora colitur.” See M. Bigaroni, “Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa” in *La Basilica di S. Chiara*, ed. M. Bigaroni et al, (Perugia, 1994), 30.

<sup>75</sup> “Cum in vigilia festa Beati Francisci proxime venturi corpus B. Clarae debeat in maius altare transferri; volumus, et praesentibus vobis Apostolica auctoritate districte praecipiendo mandamus, quatenus translationi huiusmodi personaliter interesse aures, propenentes humiliter verbum Dei populo. Nos enim vobis largiendo in festo translationis eiusdem indulgentiam duorum annorum, et duarum quadragenarum annuatim; quam utique indulgentiam, in quantum protenditur indulgentia concessa in praedicto festo eiusdem B. Francisci, protendi volumus.” *B.F.*, II, 407: 578.



cure from so holy a site, in the years following her death. One such example is a blind man by the name of Iacobello, who had a vision of Clare in 1255:

When he arrived in Assisi, however, he encountered such large crowds of people gathered before the burial place of the virgin that there was no way for him to enter the tomb. He placed a stone under his head and, with great faith yet sorrowing that he was not able to enter, he caught some sleep before the gates. And behold, a third time the voice said to him, 'The Lord will bless you, if you can enter'.

Waking up, therefore, he begged the crowds with tears [in his eyes], shouting and repeating his requests, for the love of God to let him through. Once a way had been given to him...[he] humbly touched her tomb, and fell into a light sleep. 'Get up!' the blessed Clare said to him, 'Get up because you have been freed!'...He glorified Clare through his praise and invited all peoples to bless God for the wonder of such marvels.<sup>76</sup>

It is obvious that the number of pilgrims surrounding the tomb was so substantial as to make access to Clare's body in the crypt of San Giorgio very difficult. Moreover, the report of such miracles and the crowds witnessing them would encourage yet more to come to the site.<sup>77</sup>

Architecturally, the public nature of the new basilica was evident in its form. To protect the integrity of Clare's body, she had to be buried in a crypt below the main altar.<sup>78</sup> This altar was placed in the centre of a Latin cross, in correspondence with Francis' body at San Francesco, and incorporated a processional path, with chapels and the nuns' choir off to the sides. That the Clares had been relegated to the sidelines of the church was due to the influx of pilgrims, rather than any original intention to locate the choir out of the view of the high altar.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 235.

<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting that as early as 1255 Alexander IV had given out indulgences for those who made the pilgrimage to San Giorgio. *B.F.*, II, 84: 118, as cited in H. Meier, "Protomonastero e chiesa di pellegrinaggio," in M. Bigaroni et al, *La Basilica di S. Chiara*, 131.

<sup>78</sup> The steps up to the altar were inscribed with the words: "Hic iacet corpus S. Clarae Virginis". Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 30.

<sup>79</sup> This point is rather controversial because of conflicting arguments on the location of the original church of San Giorgio. Historians, such as Bracaloni and Casolini, have argued the chapel of San Giorgio was built upon the site of the old church. See L. Bracaloni, "La chiesa di S. Giorgio e la basilica di S. Chiara", *Fonti Francescana*, 2, (1925) 332-42; and F. Casolini, *Il protomonastero di S. Chiara in Assisi*, (Milan, 1950). This chapel became the choir of the nuns when they moved into the new basilica. However, Bigaroni has made nine architectural points against the location of the original church at this place, and that the chapel was

Again the priorities of the pilgrims dictated the lay out of the new basilica, as the Clares were forced to move their choir. A bull of Urban IV, dated 22nd June 1263, indicated that the church of San Giorgio had been incorporated into the monastery and was located beneath the cloister, the private domain of the nuns. However, pilgrims wished to go down into the old church (called the “Sottosanti”) to pray in the crypt where Clare and Francis were originally interred.<sup>80</sup> Such intrusions greatly disturbed the peace of the cloister, “and made for them not a little inconvenience”. Thus, three years after the basilica had been built, the nuns requested that the old chapel of San Giorgio be destroyed and transferred to the right side of the basilica, where the choir of the nuns was relocated.<sup>81</sup> (see fig. 5) The new choir remained within the cloister of the nuns because the only access door was from the enclosure, and there was no communicating door between the chapel and the rest of the basilica.

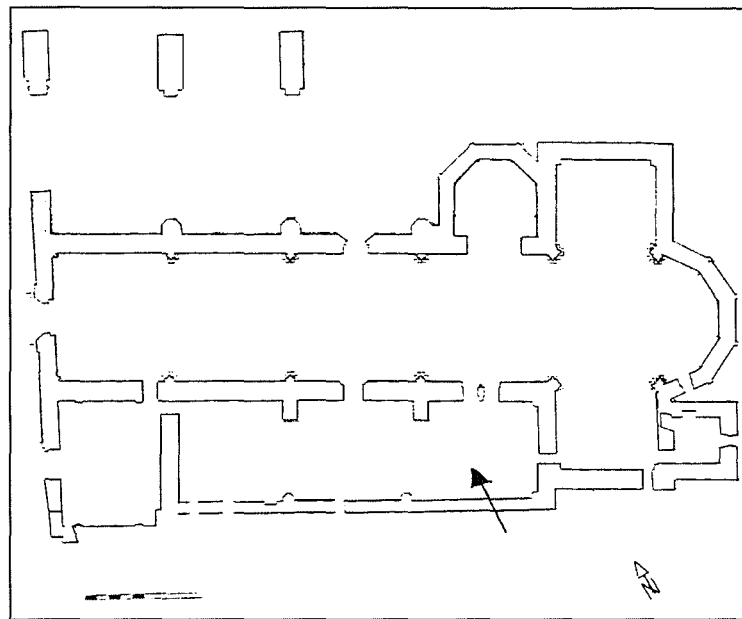


Fig. 5. Sta Chiara (M. Pucci). Arrow indicates the location of the nuns' choir. From Meier, “Sta Chiara in Assisi: Architektur und Funktion im Schatten von S. Francesco”: 153.

built at the same time as the basilica. Primarily because the walls of the chapel buttressed that of the basilica, indicating that the chapel must have been built independently of the basilica and attached to the main building at a later date. See Bigaroni, “La chiesa di S. Giorgio,” 29-32 for a full discussion. Also Meier also pointed out that the brickwork of the chapel is also from a later period, “Santa Chiara in Assisi,” 156.

<sup>80</sup> Bigaroni, “La chiesa di S. Giorgio,” 42-47.

<sup>81</sup> “Ex parte dilectarum in Christo filiarum...Abbatissae, et conventus monialium inclusarum monasterii sanctae Clarae de Assisio ordinis S. Damiani fuit nobis humiliter supplicatum, ut capellam sancti Georgii; quae infra claustrum ipsius monasterii, antequam idem monasterium inceptum fuisset, constructa extitit; eisque non modicum parit incommodum, dirui, et transferri ad certum locum praefati claustri, ut in ea Missarum sollemnia sibi facere celebrari valeant, faceremus.” *B.F.*, II, 473: 69.

The evolution of Sta Chiara was also overshadowed by the vested interest of the patrons who had so enthusiastically supported the new basilica. Both the papacy and the commune of Assisi wanted to possess the holy virgin. In the case of the papacy, this manifested itself in the control it exercised on sanctioning and spreading the cult of Clare. Meanwhile, the commune showed its interest in the protection of her tomb and Sta Chiara. The tension between these two groups was expressed architecturally in the heraldic lions carved on the portal of the church, and the relocation of the monastery of the Clares to within the city walls. Their interest meant that the Clares themselves had little say in location and construction of the new basilica.

Annexing a holy person as important as St Clare was one way in which the papacy could control the religious life of the city. The high level of spontaneous religious devotion at her death indicated her great value:

Like an unexpected piece of news, the word of the untimely passing of the virgin struck the entire population of the city. Men and women ran to the place; people flooded the place in such a great number that the city seemed deserted. Everyone proclaimed her a saint; everyone proclaimed her dear to God. Among the words of praise not a few flowed with tears.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, the emotion at her funeral almost moved Innocent IV to canonise her immediately,

It came time to celebrate the divine praises when, after the brothers had begun the Office of the Dead, the Lord Pope suddenly declared that the Office of the Virgins should be celebrated, not that of the Dead. It seemed as though he would canonise her before he placed her body in the tomb. When the most eminent Lord of Ostia replied that it would be better to proceed more slowly in these matters, the Mass of the Dead was celebrated.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*, 47; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 230.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*, 47; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 231.

Why did the bishop of Ostia (and also the cardinal protector of the Poor Ladies) call a halt to her canonisation?<sup>84</sup> To understand this, one must turn to the context of papal control of local saints' cults. All the previous popes, from Innocent III to Gregory IX, had attempted to get the translation and canonisation of holy men and women under papal jurisdiction. For example, in 1234 Gregory IX had incorporated papal canonisation into official canon law, in his *Decretals*.<sup>85</sup> Clare's death was an opportunity to annex a local cult, only declaring her sainthood when she had gone through the rigours of a canonisation process, and received official papal sanction. The delay was to ensure that proper canonical procedure was reinforced.

Moreover, her cult might have remained only a local experience if the pope had canonised her then and there in Assisi. However, the institutionalised flavour of sainthood was deliberately emphasised because her feast was ordained away from the town itself, and amongst papal delegates:

when the College of Cardinals had been convened, a gathering of archbishops and bishops was present, and a very large number of clergy and religious, as a well as the wise and powerful was in attendance.

Thus

On the day close to the second anniversary of her passing over to the Lord, before a crowd of prelates and all the clergy, the happy Alexander, for whom this grace had been reserved by the Lord, after delivering the sermon, inscribed Clare with the greatest solemnity in the catalogue of saints and solemnly ordained that her feast be celebrated throughout the entire Church. He himself was the first most solemnly to celebrate it with the entire Curia. These things occurred in the cathedral of Anagni in the year 1255.<sup>86</sup>

Alexander's determination to maintain the international and papally sanctioned style of Clare's cult moved him also to elevate her as a saint of the Franciscan order. For example, the pope ordered the Franciscans in 1260 to celebrate *officium duplex* on the anniversary of her death and include her name in their litany, thus accrediting her with the status of a close companion of

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<sup>84</sup> The bishop of Ostia later became Pope Alexander IV in 1254, already discussed for his intense support of the new basilica.

<sup>85</sup> Goodich, *Vita perfecta*, 38-40.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*, 72; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 240.

Francis.<sup>87</sup> The fact that Robert of Napoli visited the basilica in the fourteenth century showed the success of his policy. Finally, papal control of the Clares was complete when Clement V placed the monastery of Sta Chiara under the direct jurisdiction of the pope, exempting it from local episcopal control.<sup>88</sup>

Architecturally, Sta Chiara can be regarded as a papal church through the frequent Roman motifs and elements found there. Most interesting of these may be the heraldic papal lions which flank the main door of the basilica.<sup>89</sup> Their presence was especially significant because, contemporaneous with the building of Sta Chiara, two sitting lions were placed at the pope's throne in the cathedral of Anagni (1260).<sup>90</sup> However, such a straightforward analogy of heraldic lions with papal authority is not necessarily accurate. Indeed, the commune itself used heraldic lions to signify its patronage of the cathedral of San Rufino.<sup>91</sup> The conflict in interpretation of the meaning of Sta Chiara's portal lions reflects the tensions which existed between the papacy and the commune.<sup>92</sup>

The attitude of the citizens of Assisi towards Clare was obviously patriotic. For example, she was regarded as the spiritual defence of the city, when the imperial troops of Vitale d'Aversa laid siege to Assisi, 1240-41.<sup>93</sup> The value of such an effective counsellor to God, who assisted in the victory of the city, made them determined, in return, to bring her followers under the protection of the commune. At her death in San Damiano, the commune went out to guard the body against the possibility of relic stealing:

The podesta with a squadron of soldiers and the crowd of armed men kept careful guard that night and day, so that the loss of the precious treasure that lay within might be prevented.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See Meier, "Protomonastero e chiesa di pellegrinaggio," 131, ff. 101.

<sup>88</sup> *B.F.*, III, 108: 18.

<sup>89</sup> See Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 162-164.

<sup>90</sup> as cited by Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 162.

<sup>91</sup> See Casolini *Il protomonastero di S. Chiara*, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Meier admitted in a later article that the lions could also be associated with the commune. Meier, "Protomonastero e chiesa di pellegrinaggio," 124.

<sup>93</sup> See chapter 3, p. 93

<sup>94</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Legenda S. Chiara*, 47; trans. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi*, 230.

Their reason for relocating the monastery of the Clares to San Giorgio followed from this same desire to protect, but also to annex. First, the commune could justify the new site by arguing that remaining outside the city was too dangerous for the Clares. This was not merely a glib excuse. San Damiano was currently two miles south east of the city, and the constantly warring communes made attacks on convents a very serious threat. For example, in 1291 Assisi went to war against Perugia, and by 1321 it was under siege by troops from Perugia. Therefore, the relocation of the female convents became standard practice in the second half of the thirteenth century, so San Paolo, Sant' Appolinaire and Sant' Angelo di Panzo were all moved within the city at that time.<sup>95</sup>

To bring the new monastery under the influence of the commune meant physically incorporating it within the city walls. In 1257, the old church of San Giorgio was outside the city walls.<sup>96</sup> But by 1286, the commune had provided the financial and administrative support, so that Sta Chiara was incorporated into the city, with one wall of the monastery providing the boundary wall of the city (see fig. 6)<sup>97</sup> Moreover, when the wall was rebuilt in 1316, it was clear that the new monastery was now well within the confines of the commune.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See Fortini, *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, 242, 347.

<sup>96</sup> A papal bull of May 1259 described the boundaries of the church in 1257, but made no mention of the city walls. *B.F.*, II, 487: 344, cited by Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 153.

<sup>97</sup> *B.F.*, III, 68: 586; cited by Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 153.

<sup>98</sup> H. Meier (1990): 153. A fresco at San Damiano, which Bracaloni dated as between 1305 and 1315, shows Santa Chiara within the boundary wall. See L. Bracaloni, "Assisi medioevale, studio storico critico," *A.F.H.*, 7 (1914): 4-19.

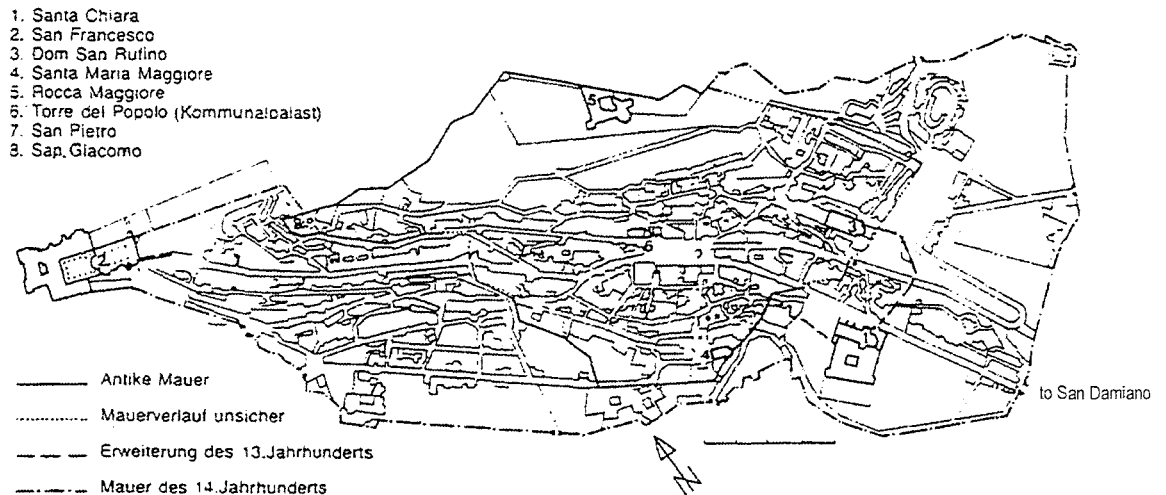


Fig. 6. Plan of the commune walls. From Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 153.

The wish to possess Sta Chiara was as a means also to enhance the prestige of the city, by adding another landmark to the municipal landscape. The presence of high level lay figures, during the hand over of San Giorgio to the Clares, indicates their involvement in the negotiations.<sup>99</sup> These included citizens such as the podestà, Guglielmo di Pietro, his successor, Iacobino Bovaterio and all the members of the general council of the Commune. Within the city the new basilica joined the other four public buildings which dominated it and represented the essence of the commune: the Torre del Popolo, the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, the basilica of San Francesco, and the cathedral of San Rufino. These buildings were the symbols of the strong institutionalised nature of the commune, and articulated architecturally the confidence and autonomy of Assisi.<sup>100</sup> To match these current buildings, the commune felt obliged to build Sta Chiara on the same scale.

Somehow the religious intentions of the Clares themselves, those of enclosure and poverty, seemed to be drowned out by the empire-building of its patrons. The final section explores how the Clares coped with this upheaval and the effects it had on their contemplative spirituality.

<sup>99</sup> Cited by Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 18, ff. 23 & 25.

<sup>100</sup> H. Meier, "Santa Chiara in Assisi," 151.

## V

The changes in the Clares' material circumstances, and physical environment were to effect some profound changes in their spiritual expression. First, the rollercoaster development of the new cult of St Clare affected how the church in the new basilica was decorated. The Clares' acceptance of the historiated panels, depicting the life of Clare, is one example of how far the Clares had accepted their abbess' public fame. However, public intrusion into the new basilica was not total. The Clares can be observed as adapting and sometimes resisting the hierarchy of space imposed on them by their patrons. The Clares managed to distinguish between public and private space in the monastery complex, and preserve the integrity of the church as one only dedicated to Clare, while reserving the crucifix of San Damiano for their own contemplation.

The commission, in 1280, of a historiated dossal of the life of St Clare, demonstrated how much the Clares realised that their previous abbess had become a public figure.<sup>101</sup> They recognised that it was important to accept the decorative piece as a confirmation of Clare's saintly status, and as the basilica's status as her pilgrimage church. In the dossal eight episodes from the authorised life of Celano were depicted, so as to popularise her cult to the visitors of Sta Chiara.

The acceptance of the dossal was also symptomatic of a change in the Clares' spiritual outlook. The fact that the Clares accepted that donation can be seen as a sign of the further erosion of their ideal of absolute poverty. Indeed their move to Sta Chiara had been dependant on breaking this vow. The Clares had accepted the donation of San Giacomo di Murorutto, the property which was granted to the canons of San Rufino. Moreover, only eight years after the commission of the new dossal, Nicholas IV put into writing the Clares' renunciation of the *Privilegium paupertatis*. He confirmed that the Clares had the right to retain, inherit and acquire property in his bull, *Devotionis vestrae precibus*.<sup>102</sup> The domination of outside interests and their money seemed complete.

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<sup>101</sup> The dossal was painted by the anonymous master of Sta Chiara. We do not know who was responsible for commissioning it, though in all likelihood it was either the papacy or the curia.

<sup>102</sup> L. Oliger, "De origine regularum Ordinis S. Clarae," *A.F.H.*, 5, (1912): 181-184.



Nevertheless, the Clares' vision of the hierarchy of space was not only solely dictated by the cultural ideology of their patrons. It was possible to see the Clares adapting and resisting their patrons' aesthetic vision of the new basilica. Firstly, although they accepted the hagiographic artwork, none of the nuns permitted themselves to see it. This, and most of the other pieces of decorative art were assigned to the body of the new basilica. Only the public had the privilege to appreciate or be instructed by the paintings and the frescos that dominated the church. In this way, the Clares adapted their hierarchy of space, dividing the church in private and public zones, and perhaps this was how they retained some concept of spiritual poverty.

Second, the Clares resisted outside interests, when they maintained the integrity of the basilica's dedication to their old abbess, in the face of possible encroachment by its patrons. In Sta Chiara, the building of family chapels or altars for saying private masses was prohibited. This went against usual monastic practice, as even the lower basilica of San Francesco possessed private family chapels.<sup>103</sup> A Cistercian example can demonstrate how much of a nuisance the obligation of the rights of burial could be. In the general chapter of 1263, the abbot of Royaumont complained of an over-elaborate royal tomb, situated near the high altar, which went against, "the humility and the simplicity of our ancient order".<sup>104</sup> Refusal to condone the privilege of burial rights for outsiders ensured that, in part, the integrity of the Clares' cloister was preserved.

However, one piece of decorative art was kept within the Clare's own choir; the decorated crucifix of San Damiano. Why was it that, having deprived themselves of the vision of the other images, the Clares held on to this piece for themselves? The answer, I think, is three-fold. First, the crucifix can be seen as a sign of psychological continuity. In a few short years the Clares went through tremendous upheaval and had to make the difficult decision to leave San Damiano. Taking the crucifix with them was a way in which to bring stability of place into their lives; even if they could not stay at their old home, they could at least bring a symbol of it with them. Second, the cross was also a statement of their attachment to Francis. It was this decorated crucifix which had spoken to Francis, and had ordered him to rebuild San Damiano.

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<sup>103</sup> See Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality*, 226, ff. 37.

<sup>104</sup> The abbot described the addition of "pictures, images and sculptures, vessels, and pillars [decorated] with angels". For the full report, see Norton, "Table of Cistercian legislation," 380-382.

The final reason is the one most relevant to their contemplative practice. It was used as an aid to their meditations on the humanity of Christ. Having a visual representation of Christ crucified must have helped the Clares to consider the suffering of Jesus, as Clare had directed Agnes, to, “gaze upon [Him], consider [Him], contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him].” The proof that they held the cross in such high esteem, and used it for contemplation can be demonstrated in their commission of a second cross for the church of Sta Chiara. The dating of the cross at Sta Chiara can be pinpointed to 1260 or a few years earlier, as this painted crucifix was commissioned by Clare's successor, the abbess Benedetta, who died in 1260. This cross bears the inscription, “Domina Benedicta post sanctam Claram prima Abbatisa me fecit fieri”.<sup>105</sup> (see fig.7)

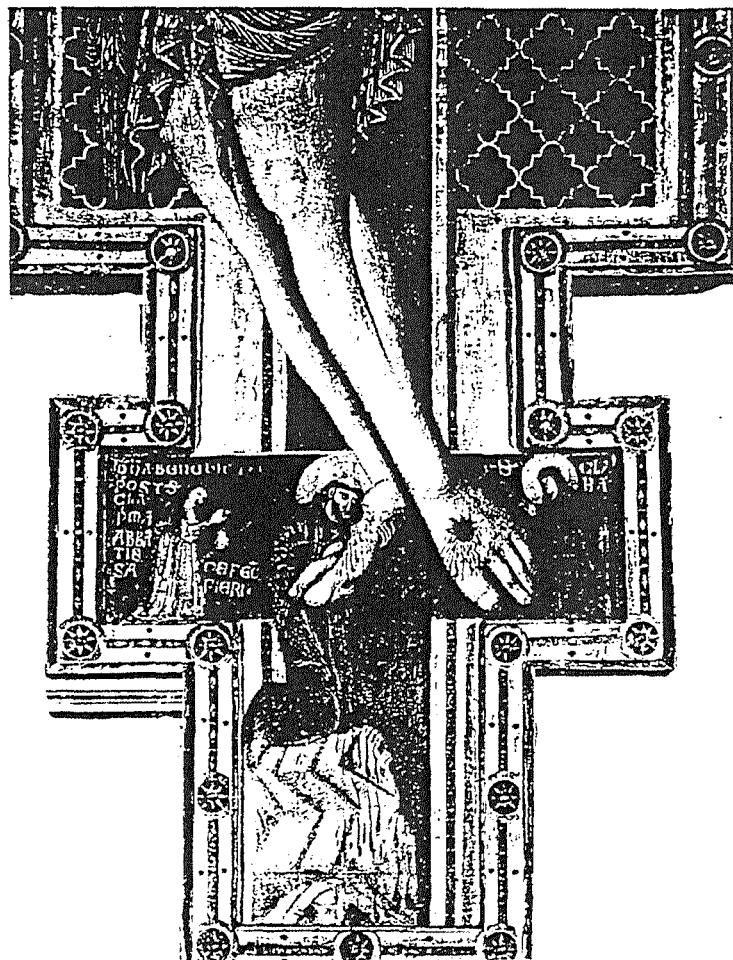


Fig. 7. Detail, Santa Chiara Crucifix (photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY.) From J. Wood. *Women, Art and Spirituality* (1996): 59.

<sup>105</sup> J. Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality*, 57-58 .

In all probability, Benedetta commissioned the cross in anticipation that the crucifix of San Damiano would occupy a space in the nuns' own choir, and needed another cross for the body of the church. Moreover, the detail depicting Benedetta and Clare praying at the feet of the crucifix, might well be visual evidence of actual contemplative practice.<sup>106</sup> Finally, it is worth pointing out that this is further evidence that Clarissan contemplative practice was not based on mortifying their sense of sight, which Bruzelius argued. It was incorrect to categorise the Clares within a Christian tradition, “that especially blessed those who can believe without seeing or tasting.” Indeed, their devotion to the human aspects of Christ's life began with the meditation methods of Clare, and provide spiritual continuity, which made their interest in the feast of Corpus Domini a natural progression.

## VI

In conclusion, the relationship between the Clares' contemplative practice and aesthetic values is not straightforward and timeless, but adaptable and mitigated by their material circumstances. To fully understand how the Clares expressed their contemplative spirituality through their art and architecture, it is essential to analyse the social and economic issues which affected their choice of sites. The initial choice and use of San Damiano as a monastic house was more from a lack of resources, than of a coherent vision of contemplative life.

However, after the death of Clare and her canonisation the interest of the new basilica's patrons came to the fore. In their desire to promote Sta Chiara as a pilgrimage site and an expression of their own power and prestige, the papacy and the commune ignored the needs of the Clares for segregation, when they transformed the basilica into a public site. The practical consequence of this was that Clare's body was not allowed to remain in the privacy of the Clares' cloister but had to be translated to the high altar. Furthermore, the nuns' choir was rebuilt as a side chapel of the basilica, to allow pilgrims access to the old burial site. Thus, the needs of enclosure suffered, according to the dictates of their patrons. Finally, the rich decoration of the new basilica was symptomatic of the erosion of the Clares' ideal of absolute poverty.

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<sup>106</sup> Bruzelius recalled that at a later period, not specified, the nun's choir was again moved and the old site was transformed into the chapel of the Crucifix, where the San Damiano crucifix was now placed in public

In spite of the material advantage, the Clares adapted and resisted their patrons' aesthetic vision of the new basilica. The Clares adapted their hierarchy of space, dividing the church in private and public zones: refusing permission for private chapels, while the nun themselves avoided the main body of the church. Finally, despite the profound upheaval that took place in their transfer to Sta Chiara, the nuns tenaciously retained one expression of their contemplative spirituality. By taking the cross of San Damiano to their private cloister, the Clares continued to use this image of Christ crucified to meditate on their bridegroom's humanity.

Clarissan contemplative spirituality represents only one facet of Franciscan women's religious experience. An examination of Clare of Montefalco, abbess of the convent of Santa Croce, challenges expectations that religious women should be categorised as members of a single order. The fluidity of her spiritual experience will be analysed in the following chapter; from her informal beginning in her sister's hermitage, to the establishing of the Augustinian rule at the convent of Santa Croce, to her close association with the Spiritual Franciscans. By contrasting the image of Clare as a cloistered abbess in her *vita* with witness depositions from her canonisation proceedings, the extent to which clerical expectations of her claustration influenced the construction of her saintly persona will be called into question.

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view. Although the nuns no longer were the sole observers of the cross, a gallery was built for them so that they could still see it. Bruzelius, "Hearing is believing," 85.

**Chapter Five. *Duties to neighbours: miracle working as justification for breaking the cloister.***  
**Clare of Montefalco's cloistered spirituality as presented in Béranger's *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce Ordinis Eremitarum S. Augusti* (c.1309-1316) and her canonisation proceedings, Sept. 1318 – July 1319.**

The virgin Clare held up this principle of her office; the guardianship of her reputation by concealing her virgin face and emotions from worldly view. She wished that honour in her monastery be most strictly observed, and as an example to the other sisters, even when she was of an advanced age, when she used to speak to any person for whatever reason, she covered her hands and her face from their view.<sup>1</sup>

When Clare of Montefalco's hagiographer, Béranger of Saint-Affrique, attempted to articulate Clare's spirituality, he was hampered by the strictures of early hagiographic models which presented women's spirituality as specifically cloistered and introspective. Reading the life and comparing it with the canonisation proceedings, it becomes increasingly obvious that her portrayal as a cloistered Augustinian abbess by Béranger did not reveal the complexity of the origin and development of Clare's spirituality.

In examining the development of the ideal of the cloister in hagiographic sources, it is essential to acknowledge that the need to promote the sanctity of a potential candidate often modified the vision of the cloister held by the saint herself. Canonisation proceedings are crucial in providing a useful comparison between the original witness testimonies and the *vitae* used to promote the saint's life. The distinctiveness in intention of these two types of sources has often not been made explicit. The *vitae* have silenced the diversity of voices found in the canonisation proceedings, by concentrating many witnesses' attitudes to a saint into the voice of one male clerical speaker. Rather than address the transformation in female religiosity, Béranger sometimes hid the secular, urban, and more importantly public nature of Clare's life. In this process of producing an acceptable version of her life Béranger silenced any dissenting conceptualisations of female spirituality. Similarly, current historiography repeats the hegemony of hagiographer's ideals, by contenting itself with describing how sainthood is constructed as narrow categories but failing to

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<sup>1</sup> "In doctrina sui officii hoc ponebat precipuum virgo clara, honestatis custodiam et a mundanis conspectibus vultus et sensus virginum sequestrari. Honestatem volebat in suo monasterio strictissime observari, et pro dominarum aliarum exemplo, postquam etiam fuit provectae etatis cum pro aliqua necessitate alicui homini loquebatur, manus suas et faciem ab ipsius conspectibus retrahebat." Béranger of St Affrique, *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, ed. Semenza, repr. (Vatican City, 1944), 23.

question these categories adequately. In this way, Vauchez's study, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, narrated a straightforward transformation of female sanctity from active lay penitence in the thirteenth century to cloistered introspective contemplation during the fourteenth century:

The almost exclusive emphasis on female sanctity-when men had previously been more numerous-was a sign of new orientations. Through the example of these female saints, the regulars sought to impose their own conception of sanctity, based on contemplation and the mystical life. Among the lay saints of the thirteenth century, such concerns had been accompanied by a deep feeling for suffering humanity and a pronounced interest in temporal activities; the spirit of prayer went hand in hand with good works and the desire to pacify and moralize the society in which they lived. The values now proposed for the imitation of the faithful were purely spiritual. What mattered most was the search for union with God through solitary meditation on the mysteries of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

To move beyond such an approach is especially important in the discussion of female saints' lives, as their agency in creating models of saintly behaviour is not acknowledged. In this chapter, some suggestions as to how to compare these sources to rediscover women's own ideals of sainthood, will be discussed. In distinguishing between *vitae* and canonisation proceedings as representations of sanctity, the manner in which the material for proceedings is collected and the implications of this become much more obvious. In essence, canonisation proceedings are a series of structured interviews, where questions (*articuli interrogatorii*) upon the saintly characteristics and acts of a candidate are defined by clerical investigators, and the testimonies that resulted were witnesses' responses to the questions set. The canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco produced a set of notarised statements which record the saint's life as witnessed by her contemporaries. What is passed down to historians is the written transcript of oral interviews with their own unique insights and problems, which should be treated differently from the primarily textual *vitae*.

Reading the proceedings against the *vitae* one is immediately struck by the fluidity, variation and ambiguities of the testimonies in the former source. Here, the recent reassessment of the difficulties of oral testimony by historians of oral history provides some valuable approaches.<sup>3</sup> Witnesses try to relate how their personal experience of a saintly candidate fits into the expected

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<sup>2</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 212.

<sup>3</sup> I am referring to the current debates on discomposure and intersubjectivity in oral history. See Summerfield, *Reconstructing women's wartime lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*. (1998) for an impressive summary of the issues and an extensive bibliography.

image of the saintly behaviour. Proceedings are precious as they are axes of transformation, articulations of the changing collective meaning of sainthood. Witnesses are keen to present the cultural norm, but are sometimes unsure what this is, so revise their comments during interview. Their confused testimony is an important counter to the confident statements in the *vitae*, which present a settled, stable and coherent vision of the saint. In Clare's case, the proceedings revealed, foremostly, that she was illustrative of a type of female spirituality which stood on the cusp between monastic cloistered environments and active charity of lay religious movements. Witness testimonies highlighted the fluidity of women's religious lives, where narrow definitions should be avoided. Second, the sense of instability and flux in these sources also extends to the period and region in which Clare lived. The Spoletan valley in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was a ferment of heterodox spirituality, heresy and attitudes critical to the unpopular Avignon papacy. The proceedings reveal how involved Clare was with these dissenting elements in highlighting the extent of her associations with the Spiritual Franciscans and their supporters. Finally, Clare's transgressive lifestyle contradicted Béranger's contemplative cloistered image in the frequency and innovative elements of her preaching, which went beyond earlier models of women preachers as divinely inspired prophetic speakers. Instead, we see Clare drawing her authority to speak from her own experiential understanding of Christ's crucifixion.

## I

Clare of Montefalco's canonisation proceedings are particularly precious as she is one of the few subjects for whom canonisation proceedings and a contemporaneous *vita* have survived.<sup>4</sup> For the proceedings, the circumstances of their writing and the nature of what survived is complex. After her death on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1308, Clare aroused local interest when her sisters at the convent of the Holy Cross opened her body and found symbols of Christ's passion etched on her heart: the crucifix, whip, pillar, crown of thorns, three nails, the lance and the rod with a sponge. In her gall bladder they found three globes arranged in the form of a triangle, which the nuns interpreted as a sign of the trinity. These discoveries aroused the interest of Montefalco's *podestà*, [Gilbert of Spoleto], who arrived to view the symbols on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. Only after this discovery was Béranger, the chaplain of the bishop of Spoleto, despatched to the convent of the Holy Cross.

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<sup>4</sup> I have not included later canonisation proceedings for other Umbrian saints precisely because they lack contemporaneous witness testimonies, as often the cult was not seen as worthwhile investigating by the papacy until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. In the cases of Agnes of Montepulciano, Humiliana de Cerchi, Humilitatis, Giovanna di Orvieto, Juliana Falconieri, Margaret of Cortona and Zita of Lucca. Some are even as late as the twentieth century as in the case of Rosa of Viterbo. See Congr. Riti, *Processus*, indice 1147, passim.

Even after Béranger became convinced of the genuine nature of the instruments and the worthiness of Clare of Montefalco's cause, steps towards her canonisation were prolonged. It took a further ten months after her death for the bishop of Spoleto, Pietro Paolo Trinci, to open a preliminary local enquiry and this lasted for six years, from 18<sup>th</sup> June 1309 to 1315. The result of the local enquiry was presented to Pope John XXII on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1316. And it was in the following year, when John promulgated the bull, *Magna nobis exultationis*, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1317 that official canonisation proceedings began. Note, then, that it took nine years after Clare of Montefalco's death to begin the official papal investigation.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the wait, the canonisation proceedings when begun were very thorough and comparatively speedy, lasting from 6<sup>th</sup> September 1318 to July 1319. The papal inquiry interviewed four hundred and eighty six witnesses, asking them two hundred and twenty two different questions. The proceedings are an important source as they included diverse witness testimonies of people both in and outside the convent's community. There were those who were intimate with Clare, such as her brother Francesco and the sisters at the monastery. And they also questioned witnesses from not only Montefalco, but Spoleto, Todi and Perugia, and from all social groups from ordinary citizens to the professional classes such as doctors, jurists and notaries. Even within the ruling establishment Clare had her supporters, such as Napoleone Orsini, the cardinal in charge of the investigation, and the Lateran canon, Angelo Tignosi, both of whom had visited her while she was alive.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is a summary of Menestò's exhaustive account into the background of the proceedings. See Menestò, "The apostolic canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco, 1318-1319," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. D. Bornstein & R. Rusconi, (Chicago, 1996) 105-108; E. Menestò, ed. *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, (Spoleto, 1996) XXVII-XXXVI.

<sup>6</sup> Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, CLX.



## II

The dating for the production of the *vita* is not entirely clear, but most commentators have presumed that it was completed by 14<sup>th</sup> October 1316 in time for Béranger to present the work to Pope John, and was based on the preliminary informational proceedings of 1309-1315.<sup>7</sup> By comparing the *vita* with the later canonisation proceedings, it can be seen that some of the episodes related in *vita* were not as straightforward as Béranger presented them. In his desire to promote Clare's suitability as a saintly candidate, modelled along the lines of a contemplative cloistered abbess, Béranger used three main techniques. First, he preferred to stress the monastic over the innovative elements of her early spiritual life in the *recluserium*, under the supervision of her sister Giovanna. Second, Clare regarded the cloister as more permeable than her hagiographer preferred, and although remaining within it, she demonstrated public virtues such as healing and assisting the poor. To reconcile her behaviour with the image he promoted of her, he described these episodes as exceptional moments which showed her thaumaturgical powers. Added to this was Béranger's discomfort with her correction of the ecclesiastical hierarchy who visited her, and her close association and disputation with the more heretical elements of the Spiritual Franciscans. When narrating these encounters his presentation of Clare emphasised her power of prophecy to excuse her usurpation of the male clerical office of preaching.

Béranger followed the established patterns of hagiography when he showed that her special relationship with God began at an early age. For him, central to her spiritual precocity was her particularly contemplative and cloistered personality. Even when she was four Clare would hide herself in her father's house and pray only in her shift for whole days.<sup>8</sup> Then, at the tender age of six Clare was admitted into her sister Giovanna's *recluserium* in 1274. He detailed daily life at the *recluserium* which was similar to that of convent life. The community observed silence from Compline to Terce; they prayed most of the day and night following the canonical hours set for the "unlettered", and fasted.<sup>9</sup> While in the *recluserium* she was especially observant of the strictures of the cloister. For example, when friars came to offer the sisters alms Clare was careful to ensure

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<sup>7</sup> Menestò, *Il processo di Chiara da Montefalco*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 6, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 6.

that she covered her head and hands with a veil so that she would not see them or be seen by them.<sup>10</sup>

Having described their practice of strict claustration in the *reclitorium*, one might have presumed that there was little difference when they transferred to the cloistered lifestyle at the monastery of Santa Croce in 1281. However, other sources demonstrate that Béranger's *vita* might have ignored the flexible attitude to enclosure at the *reclitorium* and the fluidity of the community's adjustment to their new house. The canonisation proceedings reveal, in her brother Francesco's testimony, that, at the age of five or six, he himself was admitted into the *reclitorium*, so that Giovanna could, "instruct him on goodness and good morals."<sup>11</sup> In addition, at the hermitage there was the expectation of guests and provision was made for them.<sup>12</sup> For example, Clare's mother and brother stayed with the two sisters when Giovanna was ill.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, another episode in Clare's early career reinforces how problematic it was for religious women to maintain any strict regulation of the cloister, when transferring a community. The actual building of their new monastery was not completed when they arrived and they had to endure a difficult winter without adequate shelter. The poverty of the new house is clear when one sees that in 1283, Clare and Marina volunteered to go out eight times in the period of about one month to beg for bread from the houses of Montefalco and the villages nearby.<sup>14</sup> Béranger's version only contextualised their poverty as a result of hostility from other monasteries, without explaining how it arose.<sup>15</sup> In Montefalco there were already three other religious houses, Santi Maria e Paolo (Augustinian), Santi Benedetto e Agnese (Benedictine) and Santa Maria Maddalene de Castellano (Franciscan). In this period of deprivation (1283 was a year of famine) the commune could ill afford to support another community requiring regular donations of alms and food. Thus, the existing monasteries objected to the establishment of Giovanna's new house, but an appeal to the duke of Spoleto had found in favour of the sisters.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Béranger preferred to view their opponents' objections as against the will of God, and as an opportunity for Clare's community to

<sup>10</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Menestò, *Il processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 45: 267.

<sup>12</sup> Nessi, "Dal reclusorio di Damiano al monastero di S. Croce e Caterina," in Menestò, *Il processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 557.

<sup>13</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Il processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 38: 116-117; test. 38: 190; Relatio, 1c.

<sup>15</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Menestò, *Il processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 117.

demonstrate patience in adversity. He was careful to state that the choice of the site was revealed to Giovanna in a divine revelation, when she saw the cross standing where her new monastery was to be built.<sup>17</sup> The hostility towards the new monastery manifested itself in a campaign of persecution: with insults, stoning the house, and physical violence. Despite this antagonism Clare, above all the rest of her community, wept and grieved over their injuries, but still felt compassion for her enemies.<sup>18</sup> Their begging was seen as a role for the *serviziali* so Clare was virtuous for volunteering willingly for the task.<sup>19</sup> Béranger also felt it was necessary to mention that this task was carried out with careful observance to cloistered ideals; she covered herself completely, she avoided the gaze of alms-givers, and kept her eyes cast downwards at all times, and she limited her response in receipt of alms to a brief, “Deo gratias.”<sup>20</sup>

Béranger’s narration of their transferral seems to be a seamless inexorable rise of a model *recluserium* into the expected and deserved position of an Augustinian convent. He played down the fact that for nine years the house of Sta Catarina was without affiliation to an order and it went through a period of mendicancy. This period of begging had more in common with the innovating beguine houses. It was only on 10. June 1290 that a letter from the bishop of Spoleto to Giovanna confirmed its official status as a monastery. He recognised that the sisters were living religious lives, conceded to them the rule of Augustine, and allowed them to build an oratory with a tower, a cemetery for their own use, and the right to receive other ladies.<sup>21</sup> It was then that the sisters professed the rule of Augustine, and changed its organisation and Giovanna, “who before was the rectrix was promoted to abbess.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Iuncto etiam ut fundaret monasterium in loco sibi divinitus designato ubi scilicet in quadam revelatione videbat crucem quadam erectam mire pulchritudinis et sanctarum dominarum consortium circumstare.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> “Clara autem sponte se optulit et humiliter petiit se in omnibus officiis famulam deputari.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 12-13.

<sup>20</sup> “Set ne vagandi oportunitate captata honestas inreprehensibilis in Clara virgine ad ipsius infantia cordaliter radicata corporalium sensuum posset lascivitate diffundi et ut suam pulchritudinem corporalem quam sibi pro magna verecundia reputabat fortius et secretius occultaret se faciendo talia inter clamidem recludebat quod vultu et corpore circumclusis ipsam esse Claram et facie non potuisset agnoscere. Ricipiendo elemosinam genuflectebat humiliter et sic alte deo gratias respondebat quod ab aliis posset intelligi. Et tamen in suo incessu sic se ab hominum conspectibus precavebat ut nec videret aliquem nec ipsa ab aliquo videretur. Declivos in terram oculos deferebat vultum et manus sub clamide abscondebat.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, ch.1, 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Nessi, *Documentazione*, 1: 44; cited in Menestò, *Il processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 564.

The contrast in the way in which the cloister was perceived by Clare and her biographer was informed by their different expectations as to how far women should assume public roles. Indeed, Béranger's concern with promoting a cloistered image of Clare did not make her participation in the public sphere appropriate. However, as I shall now demonstrate, she did participate and Béranger had to find a way of justifying such aberrant action. To reconcile his image of the contemplative saint he contextualised such episodes as exceptional moments with the purpose of revealing her thaumaturgical powers, especially as prophecy and healing.

Clare's interest in outsiders was manifest in her anticipation of the arrival of visitors. In one intriguing episode she predicted the arrival of a Dominican preacher, Egidius of Spoleto. The whole of the community was present at chapter and at one point Clare stared fixedly and stopped speaking:

And after a little while had passed, she turned to a certain lady who was deputed to look after the custody of the revolving door, and who was present at the chapter, saying: go to the door because a brother of the order of preachers has been waiting as you should answer him. And having turned to the ladies she said: You should receive him in charity as he is a man of good spirit and you will be able to speak to him confidently. And when that rota mistress obeying her most high abbess had gone through to the rota...She asked him to which order was he affiliated, saying.: I feel certain that you are a brother of the order of preachers. At which words the friar was very much astonished because not only was this a monastery in which he had never been, but he had not been in the habit of frequenting this area, and, moreover, it was impossible for her to see him through the rota and the wall. She had identified him without the means to do so. And the brother said: in what manner were you able to recognise me thus? The rota mistress replied: I did not recognise you at all, but Clare recognised you in spirit and then speaking in chapter told me that I ought to return to join you.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "que antea rectrix extiterat, in abbatissam promota (est)". *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> "Et cum post modicum temporis spatium ad se fuisset reversa cuidam domine ad rote custodiam deputate que tunc erat in capitulo iniunxit: Vade ad rotam quia frater talis de ordine praedicatorum incontinenti est ibi et sibi respondeas. Et ad dominas conversa dixit: Receptiatis eum caritative homo est boni spiritus et cui loqui poteritis confidenter. Cumque domina illa rotaria abbatisse obediens pererexisset ad rotam ad quam aliquid petentibus est consuetum in ipso monasterio responderi dictus frater pulsavit ad rotam. Quem rotaria interrogans quis esset adiunxit: An esset frater talis de ordine predicatorum. Ad cuius verbum dictus frater nimium admiratus eo quod nedom in monasterio in quo numquam alias fuerat, sed nec in terra illa umquam consueverat conversari, praesertim quia per muri et rote interpositionem ipsum videre nequiverat, quem etiam si vidisset, nullatenus congnovisset. Et dixit frater: quomodo vos me taliter congnoivistis? Rotaria responsit: Ego nullatenus vos congnoisco, sed Clara in spiritu vos congnoovit et nunc loquens in capitulo mihi ut vobis responderem iniunxit." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 34.

In this example Clare used her supernatural powers to see beyond the physical walls and barriers of the convent. Not only did she pre-empt the friar's arrival but she was also able to give an account to her sisters of his moral worth. Interestingly, although Clare's community, at this point, was under the rule of Augustine, it was typical for the monastery to receive direction from religious in other orders.

So far the example is not particularly controversial, showing merely that Clare was obviously interested in the concerns of those outside the convent, when she anticipated their arrival. However, when one looks to the canonisation proceedings certain incidents which do not appear in Béranger's *vita* paint a more problematic picture, and remind one of the value of the additional information provided in the proceedings.

For example, episodes from the proceedings revealed that passive enclosure could be broken concertedly and provided the opportunity for more intimate contact between Clare and her visitors. Giovanna mentioned that while Clare was in the *reclitorium* she attended to and cleaned the wounds of leprous women.<sup>24</sup> This practice continued even when the community had transferred to the new monastery. In one instance a leprous woman, by the name of Carella, arrived at the grille of the monastery, and Clare took her hands, kissed them, and offered her clothes and alms.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, sister Marina witnessed Clare doing the same for another leprous women, Cinctia. What follows is Marina's testimony:

...and [there was] one other leper, who was called Cinctia, who was greatly deformed by her infirmity, and Marina saw her hands kissed by Clare, and heard from one sister, who was the nearest to Clare, that Cinctia's mouth was kissed and Clare comforted her with good words about bearing it patiently, and the great compassion she had for Cinctia's infirmity. Asked who was present during the kiss involving the aforesaid Cinctia the leper, the current abbess [Giovanna] was present and Illuminata and Thomassa. Asked about the frequency, she said that there were many times she thought that those lepers came. Asked about who was present [at those times] she said amongst the sisters, sometimes one, sometimes another. Asked about the place, she said inside the grille. Asked at what prompting, she said that Clare was moved

<sup>24</sup> "soror Clara mundaret leprosis mulieribus loca infirmitatis sue" Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 1: 40.

<sup>25</sup> "Dixit etiam ipsa testis quod, postquam in monasterio, pluries vidit et presents fuit quando s. Clara obsculata fuit manus cuiusdam leprose, nomine Clarelle, et eidem Clarelle dicta s. Clara manibus suis dedit eidem ad comedendum. Et dixit quod vidit et presens quando dicta s. Clara vestes et alias elemosinas eidem leprose mictibat." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 1: 40.

in the spirit of charity.<sup>26</sup>

Analysing the testimonies in more depth, the sisters' contributions to defining Clare's spirituality show contradictions and hesitations when a witness did not know how to reconcile her experience of Clare with the dominant cloistered vision promulgated by Béranger. To put it more broadly, women talk about their life experience from two perspectives: "one framed in the concepts and reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience." Nevertheless, when their experience does not fit the dominant cultural mode they may "mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions".<sup>27</sup>

In the case of the canonisation proceedings, the *articuli interrogatorii* presented a strongly pre-defined expectation of female sanctity as cloistered. Thus, one witness, Thomassa, seemed to show excessive anxiety about the kiss given to Cinctia. She felt obliged to add that she never actually saw Clare kiss Cinctia on the mouth as it was hidden behind the veil that Clare wore before her face.<sup>28</sup> There are two possible reasons why she felt it necessary to add this detail. First, her distancing of Clare from physical interaction might have informed how she interpreted Clare's encounter with Cinctia. Rather than seeing it as an act of charity, as Giovanna and Marina did, Thomassa reveals a particular discomfort with this close physical encounter, "she [Thomassa] said that it was from the particular motive and reason of defeating her [Clare's] body and crushing it, and because she was nauseated and by nature chafed against this, she wished to conquer herself in this matter."<sup>29</sup> Second, Thomassa may have been trying to model her answer on her understanding of what the investigators wanted to hear about Clare's behaviour, which she suspected emphasised

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<sup>26</sup> "...et unam aliam leprose que fuit vocata Cinctia, que erat valde destructa de infirmitate, et vidit ei osculari manum, et audivit ad una domina, que erat magis prope, quod osculata fuit ei os et confortaverat eam per bona verba ad patientiam, cum magna compassione quam habebat pro infirmitate eius de ipsa. Interrogata de presentibus, dixit de Thomassa et Iohanna, que tunc erat retri, antequam haberent regulam; sed in osculo illo de Clarella leprosa predicta, fuit presens abbatissa que nunc est et Illuminata et Thomassa. Interrogata de tempore, dixit quod pluribus vicibus quando cogitabat ipsas leprosas venire. Interrogata de presentibus, dixit de dominabus monasterii, nunc una, nunc alia, successive. Interrogata de loco, dixit intra cratem. Interrogata ad cuius invocationem, dixit quod motu compassionis caritatis." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 38: 134-35.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson & Jacks, "Learning to listen: interview techniques and analyses" in Gluck & Patai (eds.) *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (New York, 1991): 77-92.

<sup>28</sup> "expresse tamen de osculo videre non potuit propter velum ipsius sancte Clare, quod profundum portabat ante faciem suam" Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 39: 209-210.

Clare's claustration. Thomassa's was, at this point in her interview, responding to the eighty-second question. Before then, twelve out of the eighty one questions were concerned with how far Clare maintained the integrity of the cloister.<sup>30</sup> For example, she had been asked earlier if when a doctor or any other person visited the cloister did Clare ensure that she covered herself completely in a cloak, and placed a veil before her face and eyes.<sup>31</sup> Thomassa had conceded this was the case.<sup>32</sup> To confirm that Clare also covered her face for other visitors was perhaps to reassure the investigators of Clare's observance of the strictures of the cloister was all-encompassing.

However, Thomassa's confusion also related to an earlier encounter at the grille, when Clare demonstrated the inconsistency of her attitude to the cloister. She might order her nuns to behave in one way and yet contradict this order in her own action. Despite Clare's sisters confirming in their own responses to Béranger's direct questions<sup>33</sup> that she zealously maintained the integrity of the cloister, Clare would on occasion make exceptions. In the deposition of Giovanna, the current abbess of the monastery, she recalled an episode when an ill child was allowed access within the cloister. When a woman by the name of Brancina brought her son to the grille, which separated the monastery from the church, the two nuns present, Thomassa and Catherine, refused to allow him into the cloister, "because it was not the custom of the monastery, and they feared St Clare, the abbess."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, they felt they had to concede to the mother's request when she claimed that if they did not take the child to Clare they would be permitting the child to die. When Clare received the child she did so without reference to the violation of the cloister, as Thomassa had expected, but was concerned instead with the boy's welfare.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the maintenance of the cloister was not merely reliant on the good intentions of the saintly candidate and her sisters. As the episode with Lady Brancina

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<sup>29</sup> "dixit quod motu proprio et causa vicendi corpus et affligendi illud, et quia erat naufragativa et nature indignantis (sic) de eo, voluit se ipsam vincere." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 39: 210.

<sup>30</sup> See art. 31, 33, 34, 40, 41, 43, 44, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73 Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 5-12.

<sup>31</sup> "si medicus intrabat ad eam visitandam in infirmitatibus, ipsa sancta Clara cohoperiebat se totam cum mantello et faciem etiam cum velo" art. 69. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 10

<sup>32</sup> "...ut vidit ipsa testis, dicta sancta Clara profundabat velum ante oculos et faciem suam et claudebat se taliter cum mantello." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 39: 167.

<sup>33</sup> All the witness testimonies confirm the statements, concerning Clare's careful maintenance of the cloister set by Béranger as true. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 1: 34-35; test. 38: 117-119, 129-130.

<sup>34</sup> Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 1: 63-64.

showed, visitors often felt they could ask to see and speak with the inhabitants, showing little regard for the convent's customs. Although Clare's hagiographer might have wished that his candidate experienced a fully cloistered existence, the women themselves were still subject to the expectations of their visitors. The breaking of the passive enclosure of the convent was regular occurrence, and the proceedings are precious in recording the frequency and nature of these violations.

### III

Examining how Clare was presented in relation to the heretical sect of the Free Spirit, Béranger's claim that she was the first to recognise and actively condemn the sect will be explored. This emphasises how far she was involved with contemporary religious controversy, despite her claustration. Béranger promoted her sanctity by stressing her access to divine revelation as an important counter to the complacency of her clerical visitors, who were either taken in by Bentivenga of Gubbio's doctrine or failed to recognise the threat it presented to the Church. Moreover, a deeper analysis into the contemporary religious tensions in the period of the development of her cult (1306-1319) should point up how much her sanctity was a negotiated and dynamic phenomenon. Her associations with the Spiritual Franciscans, the Colonna and Orsini families and the instability of papal power militated against the likelihood of her immediate canonisation. Béranger's presentation of Clare showed an strong awareness of these issues, although he did his best to play them down.

Amongst religious female models their efficacy in preaching and prophecy were particularly delicate themes. In doing so the women impinged not only on male but on clerical prerogatives. To resolve this apparent intrusion into the public sphere, Béranger presented Clare in the tradition of holy women who were in the unique position of having personal access to the divine. This privilege was reflected in the admiration felt for them by their clerical visitors. As Coakley has pointed out, friars found devout women particularly attractive because they possessed spiritual talents which they assumed they themselves could not achieve. The dynamic of power between the clerical visitor and the saintly candidate could, in this way, be reversed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Coakley, "Gender and the authority of friars: the significance of holy women for thirteenth-century Franciscans and Dominicans," *Church History*, 60, (1990) 449-450.



In her encounters with her spiritual supervisors one can see how their authority was called into question. In spite of Clare's claustration, her prophecies were often directed at men in ecclesiastical office. Clare's access to divine revelation gave her the impetus to rebuke one friar from Spoleto, who had developed an overly familiar relationship with a woman he visited, and with whom he engaged in spiritual conversation:

The danger of their sinning having been revealed by divine means to Clare, she sent for him to come to her.

Then Clare proceeded to tell him how the conversation between him and the lay woman was based on lascivious and diabolical temptations and for this she strongly reprimanded the friar. When his fault was revealed to him by Clare he felt great shame, wept and sought consolation from her.<sup>36</sup>

As seen with the last example Béranger demonstrated that the friars accepted her privileged authority with a surprising level of equanimity. In some cases her advice was actively sought. Marina reported that Clare had frequent visits from theologians:

...great readers and learned men used to come to St Clare and she answered all of them and saw that all were satisfied. And these learned men used to say that they received much consolation from her...[Marina] saw them come many times and over many years at the grille of the monastery in the presence of the sisters of the monastery.<sup>37</sup>

In one specific episode the admiration expressed for Clare's theological knowledge by her superiors was made explicit:

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<sup>36</sup> "Nam quamvis in familiaritatis illius principio fuisset solum intentio propter deum in progressu tamen inter eos turpia et inhonesta secretissime tractabantur. Quorum peccandi periculo clare divinitus revelato, misit clara pro illo ut veniret ad eam. Cui cum venisset indecentia signa et dyabolice suggestionis ac temptationis ordinem que conversationi illi inciderant retulit, ac eum inde graviter reprehendit. Unde predictus vir totus stupore et verecundia stupefactus vehementer ploravit. Clara vero sibi compatiens quid deberet agere prudenter edocuit ut evitaret periculum et ageret penitentiam de commissis." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> "quod videbat quod magni lectores et sapientes, quodrecedebant ab ea multum consolati...per multos annos et vices vidit eos venire ad cratem monasterii presentibus dominabus monasterii." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 38: 146-7.

Brother Francesco, warden of Todi of the order of the Friars Minor, and Lord Thomas of Eugubio sought out StClare so that she she could respond to certain issues pertaining to the Holy Scriptures which they proposed to her. To which Clare replied: why do you ask me? I do not know the Scriptures...To which response Lord Thomas remarked to the witness [Giovanna] that Solomon could not have answered better.<sup>38</sup>

One suspects that here Thomas was not making a comparison with Solomon only on the basis of his wisdom, but was also pleased that Clare did not undermine his own position as she showed an appropriate humility, which accorded with her status and her sex.

Furthermore, her active attempts to maintain distance from her visitors, by emphasising the strictures of the cloister, ensured that she was made a safer oracle. Clare was unlikely to enter into active public ministry, and while she remained in the monastery she did not interfere in their own preaching roles. Béranger recorded that she rebuked the admiring Thomas when he had the presumption to ask to see her face.<sup>39</sup>

In the promotion of Clare's cult Béranger was careful to stress the critical role she had in discerning and condemning the heretical sect of the Free Spirit. The regularity of her contact with religious visitors made some form of encounter with members of the sect, which thrived in the Spoletan valley, almost inevitable. Clare had two interviews with the heresiarch and leader of the sect, Bentivenga da Gubbio, during which Béranger was at great pains to highlight the orthodoxy of Clare even under the pressure of so persuasive a heretic. His arrival was presaged by an introduction offered to him by Giacomo de Cocorano, a Franciscan friar. According to Béranger, Clare was able to discern that the sect he supported was heretical, and rather than refuse entry to the monastery, she kept silent on the issue and appealed to the Lord in prayer in the following

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<sup>38</sup> "...frater Franciscus, custos tudertinus de ordine Minorum, et dompno Thomas de Eugubio petebant s. Clare quod responderet ad quedam pertinentia ad Scripturam Sacram que ipsi proponebant ei. Quibus s. Clara respondit: Quare me interrogatis? Ego nescio Scripturas...Quem responsum dictus dominus Thomassus retulit dicte testi, [dicens quod] Salomen non respondisset melius" Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, test. 1: 68.

<sup>39</sup> "Dominus thomas canonicus eugubinus interrogavit eam dicens: Clara quomodo dominus ad moysen dixisse legitur: posteriora mea videbis, faciem autem meam videre non poteris, cum tamen frequenter sanctis personis in hac vita dominus apparuisse legatur? Clara respondit: Quicquid in hac vita de deo videtur, dei tamen posteriora dicuntur ostendi, non quod in deo propie sit antierius vel posterius, sed per quamdam similitudinem quodammodo loquitur, quia ea que in hac vita de deo videntur posteriora videri dicuntur respectu eorum que in gloria videbuntur." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 46-47.

nights for assistance.<sup>40</sup> The interviews as portrayed in Béranger's *vita* read rather like a perverse form of catechism where Bentivenga asked her contentious questions upon doctrine and she provided the orthodox Catholic response:

The heresiarch was astonished and upset because Clare did not believe his errors and questioning her he said: Don't you believe that it is possible for a man to be with a woman and know her carnally, and following that receive the body of Christ with his hand? The heretic said this, even without the defence of marriage, having only known the lust of the flesh. Clare although she had been, in truth, shocked by such corrupt words, nevertheless responded in the defence of faith and truth: No. The heresiarch said: Did not God make this so? Clare answered that God was not the author of sin, and if one committed sin, it was not God who did so, but oneself. And then the heresiarch, as he despised her and her words, smiling said: Does God permit this? Clare answered: He permits this. The heresiarch said: Nothing happens unless the Lord permits it; according to the testimony of scripture even the leaf of a tree cannot fall upon the earth without divine permission. Therefore, when God permits a thing it is good because God is good. He may not permit anything unless it is good. Clare responded: There are two strands in this. For within Man is a mechanism of forbidden sin which is always bad. Similarly, within God is the permission which is always good. Thus, God makes there that which is good precisely because he permits it and good therefore is the result, because the fruit and the excellence of virtue appears better because of the baseness of sin. Then the heresiarch, having been reminded of the foundation of his error, started on another mode of questioning. Since Mary Magdalene is held in greater esteem than Agnes, what is more pleasing to God: either Agnes' virginity or Magdalene's corruption? Clare responded: I do not doubt that the virginity of Agnes pleases God, and that similarly he is displeased by Mary's corruption. Nor do I deny that Mary will be held in greater esteem than Agnes, because in Mary after sinning she was able to be so contrite, so great in her devotion, so fervid in her charity and plenitude of virtue. So much so that her virtue further exceeded that of Agnes' virginity. It is not the sin that pleases God, but the good that results from it.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "Clara autem quia verba huiusmodi sibi videbantur venenum horroris habere et pregnantia intellectu subito non respondit, sed verborum intelligentiam per prolixę orationis fervorem nocte sequenti a domino requisivit." *Vita sanctę Clare de Cruce*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> "Ex quibus heresyarcha miratus et turbatus eo quod clara suis erroribus non credebat ipsam interrogando dixit: Potest ne homo mulierem cognoscens carnaliter mane sequenti recipere corpus christi? Hoc dicens dictus hereticus etiamsi absque excusatione matrimonii, ex sola carnis libidine cognoscatur. Clara vero quamvis ex verborum turpitudine turbata fuisset, tamen propter defensionem fidei et veritatus respondit: Non. Heresiarcha (sic) dixit: posset deus hoc facere? Clara respondit Deus non auctor peccati, et si peccatum faceret, deus non esset, hoc autem peccatum esset. Et tunc heresyarcha predictus quasi eam et eius verba dispiceret subridens ait: Permittit hoc deus? Clara respondit: Permittit. Heresyarcha dixit: Nichil fit nisi domino permittent quia secundum scripture testimonium, non cadit etiam frons arboris super terram nisi permissione divina: ergo postquam deus hoc permittit est bonum, quia deus qui bonus est, nichil permetteret nisi bonum. Clara dixit: In hiis duo sunt. Est enim in homine peccati prohibiti operatio que semper est mala, et est in deo permissio que semper est bona. Unde quod deus ibi facit est bonum scilicet ipsa permissio et bonum inde sequitur, quia fructus et nobilitas virtutis melius apparet propter vitii vilitatem. Deinde memoratus heresyarcha ad sui fulcrimentum erroris, per modum interrogationis adiunxit. Cum magdalena maioris sit meriti quam agnes, quid deo plus placuit. aut agnetis virginitas, aut corruptio magdelene? Clara responsit: Non dubio quia agnetis virginitas deo placuit, et ideo displicuit corruptio magdelene. Nec nego per hoc quin maioris meriti possit esse magdalena quam agnes, quia in magdalena post peccatum potuit esse tanta contritio, tantus devotionis et caritatis fervor, tantaque plenitudo virtutum quod potuit in merito super

Most importantly, Clare was not to be assuaged by the sophistry of Bentivenga and the quality most admired in her by her clerical visitors, that is, her privileged access to the divine revelation, allowed her to refute the arguments of the heretic. She relied on her own personal relationship to God to point out to her the limitations of this heretical friar. This was particularly valuable when one considers that it was an educated friar, Giacomo de Cocorano, who had been taken in by Bentivenga's arguments and had made the introduction. Béranger's description of Clare's dismissal of the heretic was an implicit criticism of those friars who believed and promoted the teachings of Bentivenga and his followers. It took a cloistered female to see the heretic for what he was:

Indeed, as the heresiarch was unable to overcome Clare with rational thought, he turned to scripture and the authority of the saints. And incorporating many authorities many saints and scriptures of his opinion, he asserted his errors. Clare replied: I, myself, have not read scripture, and about which I speak I do not assert I will have read in the scriptures, but the Lord has revealed the truth of what I assert to me, and I have not heard anything to the contrary from Catholic preachers.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, the straightforwardness in the presentation of Clare's success over heresy, as promulgated by Béranger, also hides the turbulent circumstances of those two interviews, which took place in 1306 and the problems in ensuring that her canonisation was successful in the years immediately after her death. In discussing in more depth the problematic nature of Clare's association with her spiritual advisors, I hope to present a more accurate reflection of Clare's position than Béranger has allowed.

First, the nature of Clare's religious affiliation must be re-examined. Recently, it has been dismissed as rather a non question. Menestò's comment is typical of this kind of attitude:

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excedere virginitatem agnetis. Non quod peccatum deo placuerit, sed bona postmodum subsequuta." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 42-43.

<sup>42</sup> "Non quod peccatum deo placuerit, sed bona postmodum subsequuta. Heresyarcha vero predictus quia rationibus claram non poterat superare, se ad scripture et sanctorum auctoritates convertit. Et plures auctoritates ailegans, plures sanctos et scripturas eius oppinionem (sic) erroneam fundavisse dicebat. Clara respondit: Ego scripturas non didici, et ea que dico non assero quod legerim in scripturis, sed quia veritatem quam assero mihi dominus revelavit, et a catholicis predicatoribus contrarium non audiui." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 43.

...this dispute has little bearing on the story of her canonisation, in the question of whether she was Franciscan in outlook or instead was ambivalent in her spiritual orientation, had no discernible effect on the delineation of a model of sanctity in her canonisation proceedings.<sup>43</sup>

His claim is disingenuous. Clare's affiliation, or more critically, the correct impression of her affiliation, is of paramount concern when set in the context of the popes' persecution of the Spiritual Franciscans and the heresy of the Free Spirit at the time of Béranger's writing of her *vita* and the initiation of the canonisation proceedings, 1309-1319. Béranger's desire for the successful canonisation of Clare forced him to make clear distinctions between these spiritual movements, which were not immediately recognisable to those participating. The preaching and the prophetic aspect of Clare's personality had to be grounded in strict orthodoxy to ensure Curial approval. However, I suspect that Clare was nominally Augustinian with strong Franciscan leanings and associations. Her Franciscanism was deliberately played down in Béranger's *vita* because the position of the Spirituels was, at that time, precarious. Finally, for Béranger the model of sanctity he presented of Clare had to adhere to current Catholic orthodoxy, and thus all of Clare's enemies were considered heretical in the *vita*, a claim not borne out in the apostolic proceedings.

Before outlining the depth of her associations with the Spiritual Franciscans and their supporters, it is worth mentioning that the central tenet of the Spirituels' doctrine, that is, their adherence to the ideal of absolute poverty, was one that Clare did not share.<sup>44</sup> She felt no anxiety about accepting generous alms and while she was abbess she sought from the bishop of Spoleto, Nicolò Alberti, permission to expand the monastery in 1303 with the building of the church of Santa Croce.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, one observes in her canonisation proceeding and *vita*, glimpses of her particular devotion to Francis. Caratenuta of Spoleto in her testimony of Clare recalled how in a dream she heard a voice saying that Clare held to the life of St Francis because he had followed the

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<sup>43</sup> Menestò, "The apostolic canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco," 104. This is in contrast to the how the question was set out in *Acta Sanctorum*, where nine columns of commentary were devoted to the discussion of her affiliation. *A.S. August*, vol. III, Venice (1752): 667-672.

<sup>44</sup> Many of the associations between Clare and the Spirituels were discussed in Menestò's chapter on Clare in *Umbria: La strada delle sante medievale*, (Torino, 1991): 122-123, 126-131.

<sup>45</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 128.

life of Christ.<sup>46</sup> In Béranger's *vita* he mentioned that she invoked Francis' name when in ecstasy, "she called upon blessed Mary and the saints...and amongst others she used to call on St Francis, saying: St Francis, how beautiful you are to me."<sup>47</sup> Even at her death she called on Francis: "The saint exclaimed: Behold, a life in the world eternal is being prepared for me, because it wants me, and St Francis and all the saints have come to take me with them."<sup>48</sup> When Clare admonished her brother, the friar minor, she expressed Franciscan ideas of anti-intellectualism. "I would be happier if you were a layman and cook for the friars in good spirit and devout fervour than if you were a teacher greater than any other."<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the community itself seemed to benefit from the daily supervision of Franciscan friars. The association seemed to have continued from the early days of Giovanna's *recluserium*.<sup>50</sup> The Franciscans were confessors and chaplains to the community even after 1290. The canonisation proceedings record fifteen belonging to the order of friars minor.<sup>51</sup> The proceedings do not mention in every case whether the friars were sympathetic to the Spirituals or the Conventuals, or even heretical. However, one might surmise from the location of the convent, in the Spoletan valley, and other more influential visitors that sought the advice of Clare, that the monastery was a centre of Spiritual Franciscanism.

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<sup>46</sup> "...quadam nocte dum diceret sua Pater noster coram crucifixo et cogitaret de factis s. Clare predictae et examinatione et inquisitione que fiebat de canonizatione sua, sompnus aliquantulum cepit eam; et in illo pauco sompno fuit sibi dictum et sonitum in auribus suis quod quedam vox dixit sibi quod s. Clara predicta tenerat vitam sancti Francisci quod ivit post vitam Yhesu Christi." Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 458. For more testimony on her interest in Francis see those of sister Thomassa and Giovanna, test. 39: 236, 238.

<sup>47</sup> "vocabat beatam Mariam et sanctos dicens... et inter alios sanctum Franciscum invocabat dicens: Sancte Francisce mi, quomodo es pulcher." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> "Sancte exclamavit: Ecce vita aeterna pro mea receptione paratur, quia me vult, et S. Franciscus et omnes Sancti veniunt ad ducendum me secum" *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 54. See also L. Oliger, *De Secta Spiritus Libertatis* (Rome, 1943): 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> "Nollem quod tu curares semper de ista scientia, et de ista extollencia semper disceptares. Et dico tibi pro parte mea quod maiorem consolationem haberem si tu esses laicus et coquinarius fratrum cum uno bono spiritu et fervore devotionis, quam si esse de quibuscumque lectoribus unus maior." As cited in Menestò, "The apostolic canonisation proceedings of Clare of Montefalco," 119.

<sup>50</sup> "quoniam lumen solitum et pacem in anima non habebat, fratribus minoribus et aliis confessoribus causam sui doloris petendo consilium indicabat." M. Falconi Pulignani, *Vita di Santa Chiara da Montefalco scritta da Berengario de Sant'Affrique*, (Foligno, 1885): 49.

<sup>51</sup> Andrea di Tignosone, Angeluccio da Montefalco, Bonaventura da Spoleto, Giacomo de Cocorano, Giovanni da Foligno, Giovannuccio da Bevagna also known as Pulcino, Giunta da Gubbio of the monastery of Colfiorito, Nicolò di Montarone da Spoleto, Paolo da Borgo San Sepolcro, Paolo di Gualterone da Spoleto, Severino da Spoleto, Simone da Foligno, Tommaso di Bono da Foligno, Tommaso di Iacopone da Montefalco, Tommasuccio "de Loco Carceris". Amongst the friars who visited frequently were Giacomo da Colfiorito, Giacomo di Gonzio da Montefalco, Masseo da Foligno, Niccolò "de Provincia Terre Laboris", Pietro da Perugia and Tommaso di Damiano. Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 130.

Of her more famous supporters there were four cardinals who were particularly sympathetic to the Spirituals. Both Giacomo and Pietro Colonna were recorded as having met with Clare, Pietro being a more frequent visitor. According to the testimony of Giovanni di Masseo da Spoleto, Pietro Colonna said that it was better to have nothing than a thousand florins of gold and not to speak to Clare, because of the preciousness of her words.<sup>52</sup> His brother, according to the depositions of the sisters, offered the community alms and even precious relics, through his chaplain Tommaso da Gubbio.<sup>53</sup> Clare also knew cardinal Napoleone Orsini who was the papal legate to central Italy and rector to the duke of Spoleto from 27<sup>th</sup> May 1300 to 6<sup>th</sup> July 1301. He was one of the strongest promoters of her cult after her death and was one of the authors of the report summarising the canonisation proceedings, *The Report of the Three Cardinals*. Another visitor who held high ecclesiastical office and indicative of how important the Clare and her monastery was, was Nicolò Alberti da Prato, a Dominican and the bishop of Spoleto in 1299, who later was promoted to cardinal under Benedict XI in 1303.

The circles which surrounded Clare were significant not only for the ecclesiastical power they represented but also for their spiritual influence. Most prominent among her supporters was the forthright spiritual Franciscan, Ubertino da Casale. He probably visited Clare as part of a delegation from his protector, Orsini, 1306-1308. Although Béranger did not name him directly he did describe, “a certain man of the order of the Friars Minor of exemplary life and fame, a famous preacher, speaker and reader of theology, an excellent chaplain and a member of the court of the said Lord Napoleone.”<sup>54</sup> Ubertino’s respect for Clare was such that, after her death, he claimed that he was suddenly cured of a hernia he had suffered from for seventeen years, while examining the passion instruments found in Clare’s heart.<sup>55</sup>

To understand why Clare’s practical and spiritual association with the Spiritual Franciscans was regarded with suspicion at the beginning of the promotion of her cult, 1309-1319, it is

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<sup>52</sup> “ab ore ipsius magni viri et prelati quod meliori equo quem numquam habuerit et mille florenis auri nolisset non fuisse locutus cum ea, cum tantum habuisset delectationem de verbis ipsius.” As cited by Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 123.

<sup>53</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 122.

<sup>54</sup> “vir quidam Ordinis fratrum Minorum vite exemplaris et fame, predicator famosus et eloquens et lector in theologia excellens cappellanus et familiaris domini Napoleonis predicti.”

<sup>55</sup> This miracle is recorded in the *articuli interrogatori* 212. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 32.

necessary to analyse the heterodox and at times heretical trends in Umbrian spirituality, and the role that the Colonna and the Orsini had in supporting them, which brought them into conflict with a succession of popes.

The distinctions between orthodox, heterodox and heretical religious movements in the late 1290s and early 1300s in Umbria were especially difficult to discern. The testimony of Thomassa points up how confused the situation was. While narrating the arrival of the Free Spirit heresiarch, Bentivenga da Eugubio, she failed to distinguish between the Fraticelli, the Flagellants and those she regarded as false Franciscans, as well as the sect of the Free Spirit, in her description of heresy. Moreover, all practised their spiritual ideals with fervour and the appearance of genuine inspiration which made their labelling next to impossible. In the end, an atmosphere of suspicion was engendered:

Clare told the sisters that those brethren and false religious would at first speak with subtlety about the spirit, so that they might easily achieve their false purpose. Asked if she recalled the appearance of some of those who came, she said she did not remember individuals, but recalled well that Clare warned them to beware some Fraticelli and Franciscans who roam about and adhere to the heresy of the Free Spirit...This warning occurred at the time when many flagellated themselves.<sup>56</sup>

The confusion surrounding the origins of the sect of the Free Spirit highlights how problematic it was to discern and label heresy. The term the heresy of the Free Spirit actually was not applied to the movement until 1308 by Arnaldo di Villanova, who also claimed there were two hundred and forty of these heretics in Umbria, of whom seven were friars minor.<sup>57</sup> Its origins in Italy were the movement led by Bentivenga who was said to have broken away from Segarelli's Pseudo-Apostles, when that sect was suppressed in 1281, and then hid himself amongst the Spiritual Franciscans. Indeed, the fluidity of the career of the Italian leader indicates how far the heretical movement sprang from the proliferation of spiritual trends of that period, both orthodox and heterodox, which emphasised the penitential, the apostolic, the mystical and the importance of poverty.<sup>58</sup> Alvarus Pelagius also mentioned the Franciscans as susceptible to the influence of Free

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<sup>56</sup> Trans. by M. Goodich, *The Other Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia, 1998) 218-219.

<sup>57</sup> R. Guarnieri, "Fratelli del libero spirito" *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, 4: col. 633; Oliger, *De secta spiritus libertatis*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Doctrinally Leff, Lea and Guarnieri all agreed that the sect could not be in any way labelled a cohesive movement. Both geographically and doctrinally the followers were inconsistent. Its geographical base



Spirit ideas in the region where St Francis had his greatest influence.<sup>59</sup> The most one could say about so diverse a movement was that it was particularly influential amongst the beguines, or as they were described in Italy, the *pinzochere*.

The persecution of the *pinzochere* movement and their connection with the heresy of the Free Spirit was made explicit by the papacy in the early 1300s. In 1311 Clement V began a wave of repression against the *pinzochere*, in the bulls *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam*. He sought specific action against them in Spoleto when he wrote to the bishop of Cremona denouncing the heresy of the Free Spirit and ordering the bishop to use all the powers available to him to crush it.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, there was some delay in the execution of this order as the bulls had only been revised for publication in March 1314 when Clement V died the following month. The election of John XXII did not occur until 1316 and only on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1317 were the bulls revised by the new incumbent and promulgated in Paris.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, the position of the Spiritual Franciscans was deeply troubled and their alleged association with the heresy of the Free Spirit became a contentious issue.<sup>62</sup> In the year of the death of Clare of Montefalco, 1309, Clement V had summoned the minister general of the Conventuals, Gonsalvo, and one of the leaders of the Spirituels, Ubertino da Casale, to an enquiry about the division between the two strands of the order. During the period, the summer of 1309 to May 1312 at Malaucène and Avignon, Raymond Gaufridi, for the Conventuals, and Ubertino, for the Spirituels, argued their opposed positions. Amongst the four questions set, the accusation that some Spirituels adhered to the heretical tenets of the Free Spirit was one of the issues discussed. This Ubertino strenuously denied and in his reply of August 1311 that while the heresy had been ignored by other prelates, by which Oliger posited he meant the Inquisition, he himself had spoken out against the heresy.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, after Clare's interview with Bentivenga, he was denounced in the first months of 1307 and Ubertino captured and tried him, probably between the months of April

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included Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. Important followers of the doctrine ranged from Marguerite Porete and the followers of Meister Eckhart.

<sup>59</sup> "Tempore, meo in Provincia beati Francisci multi seculares et fratres Minores pro isto carnali spiritu libertatis per inquisitores heretice pravitatis incarcerati fuerunt,..." Alvarus Pelagius, *De planctu ecclesiae* (1332), II, 52, Venice, (1560), as edited by Oliger, *De Secta Spiritus Libertatis*, part 2, doc. 6.

<sup>60</sup> G. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: the relation of heterodoxy to dissent*, (Manchester, 1967): 331.

<sup>61</sup> McDonnell, *Beguines*, 527-8.

<sup>62</sup> Note, too, that the position of the Spirituels were further complicated by the accusations of heresy aimed at Peter Olivi by the Conventuals. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 201.

<sup>63</sup> Oliger, *De Secta Spiritus Libertatis*, 35.

and August 1307,<sup>64</sup> when, according to the testimony of Alvarus Pelagius, Bentivenga was thrown into jail in Florence, where he died.<sup>65</sup>

John's action when he became pope was to reassert the authority of the papacy, and to subjugate all dissenting religious groups, which included the *pinzochere* and the Spiritual Franciscans. Thus, in tandem with his reissuing of the Clement V's *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam*, he made a sweeping prohibition against the establishing of new religious orders, he forbade medicancy and what he saw as the diverse heresies that arose out of such developments. *Sancta Romana* (1317) was an unequivocal statement of the new pope where heterodoxy was to be patently regarded as heretical; all were condemned whether they were, "fraticelli, fratres de paupere vita, bizzochi or beghini."<sup>66</sup>

Included in his condemnation were those who considered themselves to be the true followers of St Francis, the Spirituals. John reiterated that the concession made to them by Celestine V had already been rescinded by Boniface VIII.<sup>67</sup> This move came from his growing frustration at the intransigency of the Spirituals and their refusal to accept his authority. He wrote twice to the king of Aragon, Frederick II, insisting on the expulsion of dissident Spirituals from Sicily.<sup>68</sup> A commission was then set up presided over by a detractor and a supporter of the Spirituals, Vitale du Four and Napoleone Orsini respectively. This commission reported to Michael of Cesena that there were to be no separate convents or habits.<sup>69</sup> Then John ordered the dissidents to appear at Avignon under threat of excommunication where they were arrested on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1317. Ubertino was among those who argued fiercely against the pope. After four months of impasse the pope promulgated the bull, *Quorundam exigit*, in which they had to accept the authority of their superiors to regulate their habit and hold granaries and vineyards. Of those who refused four were burned and one imprisoned for life in May 1318.

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<sup>64</sup> Oliger, *De Secta Spiritus Libertatis*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> "Iste in carcere, fratrum mortuus fuit Florentiae." Alvarus Pelagius, *De planctu ecclesiae* (1332), II, 52, Venice, (1560), as edited by Oliger, *De Secta Spiritus Libertatis*, part 2, doc. 6.

<sup>66</sup> B.F. V, 134-5, as cited in Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (1968): 201.

<sup>67</sup> B.F. V, 134-5, as cited in Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (1968): 201.

<sup>68</sup> B.F., V, 256: 110-11, March 1317; Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, (1967): 207.

<sup>69</sup> B.F., V, 119-20; Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, (1967): 207.

Not only was the association with the Spirituals for Clare fraught with difficulty and suspicion, but the position held by the cardinals who supported her cause was also problematic. The Colonna, though not heretical themselves, supported the parties which had questioned the authority of the papacy. In the recent past they had provoked the ire of Boniface VIII and were described in his bull, *Nuper Iacobum* (9<sup>th</sup> July 1297), as schismatics and blasphemers when he ordered the Inquisition to proceed against them.<sup>70</sup> In Clare's own lifetime, the danger of such a close relationship with the Colonna was revealed when Clare was threatened by a notary from Montefalco that he would denounce her to Boniface VIII for colluding with the Colonna, when she refused to hand to him certain documents relating to the monastery.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Nicolò Alberti da Prato, the bishop of Spoleto, was described by Dino Compagni as, "of minor parentage, but of great knowledge, grace and expertise, but the progeny of Ghibellines."<sup>72</sup> Orsini himself risked the anger of the current pope, John XXII, by maintaining under his protection at his court in Avignon the outspoken Ubertino. The one concession to Ubertino was to be nominally transferred to the order of the Benedictines at Gembloux, near Liège in 1317. However, he remained in Avignon at the behest of Napoleone, who since 1294 had been made the protector of the Spirituals by Celestine V.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, during the period of the preliminary local enquiries and the writing of Béranger's *vita* we have uncovered the political and spiritual tensions that existed between Clare's close associates and the papacy. Perhaps the delay in the presentation of the *vita* and the initiation of the canonisation proceedings was not only to produce an exhaustive enquiry into her sanctity, but also to wait for the outcome of the enquiry into the position of the Spirituals. Even one of her confessors in the later canonisation proceedings believed it possible that Clare could have colluded with heretics, though he did not specify whom.<sup>74</sup> In any case, there was sufficient reason for Béranger to have made a deliberate choice to promote her Augustinian connections over those of the more dubious Franciscans.

Of the other remaining material evidence, the fourteenth-century fresco cycle in the chapel of Santa Croce echoes this ambiguity in Clare's affiliation, but is less convincing. It has been

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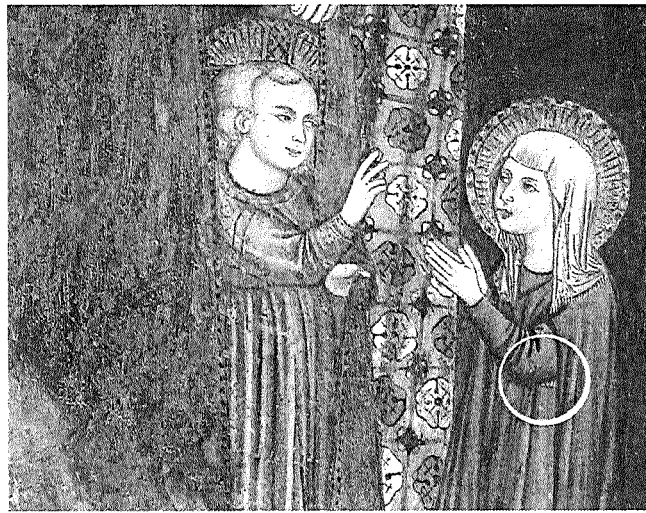
<sup>70</sup> "...Jacobum, et Petrum schismaticos iudicavimus, et blasphemos..." Boniface VIII, *Nuper Iacobum*, 9th July 1297, *B.F. IV*, 440.

<sup>71</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 126.

<sup>72</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 126.

<sup>73</sup> Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 223.

asserted by Oliger that the connection of the Spiritual Franciscans and Clare might also be seen in the earliest images of her, where she was pictured wearing a cord around her waist in the manner of the Franciscans. This cord was also mentioned in her canonisation proceedings and her *vita* as, “chorda qua [Sancta] cincta erat.”<sup>75</sup> The images to which Oliger referred were part of a fresco cycle completed c. 1333 in the chapel of Santa Croce in Montefalco. Oliger’s claim is dubious. Only one of images shows Clare possibly wearing a cord, which only just peeps out from under her elbow. The scene depicted is from the early late 1270s or early 1280s from the period when she and her sister lived in a *recluserium*, i.e. before they became affiliated to the Augustinians.

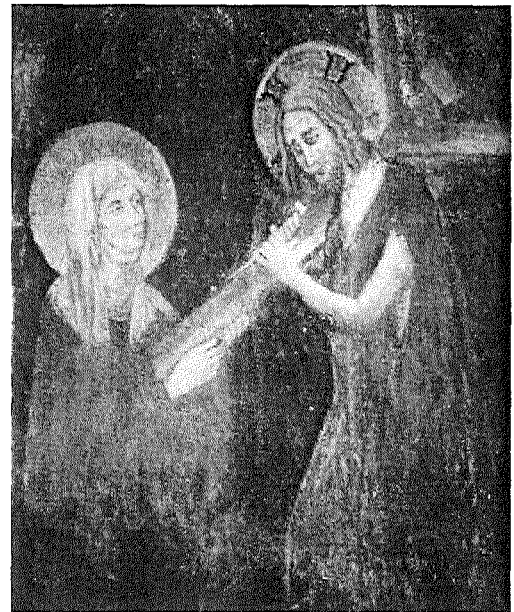


Detail from Kaftal, *Iconography of Saints in Central and South Italian Schools of Painting* (1965): fig. 334: 302

In contrast, all the later scenes in the fresco show her in the dress of Franciscan tertiaries but not with cinched drapery or any sign of a cord. Furthermore, the damage to the fresco cycle is such that an conclusive judgement on Clare’s affiliation from the picture evidence is impossible.

<sup>74</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 133.

<sup>75</sup> Oliger, *De secta spiritus libertatis*, 11.



Kaftal, *Iconography of Saints in Central and South Italian Schools of Painting* (1965): figs. 332, 334: 302

Béranger preferred, instead, to create distance between Clare and her Franciscan chaplains, confessors, and supporters. Thus, her talent for prophecy was invoked as she foresaw the downfall of Giacomo Colonna, when she had a vision of him, “in a hidden and lonely place without his ruby cape.”<sup>76</sup> Clare also prophesied the arrest of another supporter of the Colonna who was captured “upon the orders of the Lord Pope Boniface”<sup>77</sup>, Giacomo de Colfiorito.<sup>78</sup> Giacomo de Colfiorito was described as being educated in a “treacherous” monastery and the chaplain of the said monastery, by Clare’s biographer. His intention, I suspect, was to highlight her loyalty to the pope, in contrast to the rebelliousness of both the Colonnas and their supporter, Giacomo.<sup>79</sup> Surely, this was an attempt to impress a pope, John XXII, jaded by the stubbornness of what he must have regarded as rebellious religious dissidents.

<sup>76</sup> “Ipsum enim in quadam revelatione previderat per loca occulta et solitaria sine capello rubeo quasi hominem profugum incedentem.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*; Semenza, 32.

<sup>77</sup> As cited by Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 130

<sup>78</sup> “Qui manus inicientes in eum proper cancellum predicti monasterii collis fioriti capiebant eundem et carceri manicabant, post visionem predictam circa modici temporis lapsum dictus frater iacobus fuit captus loco et modo quibus clare fuerat revelatum.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 32.

<sup>79</sup> “Et in quadam alia visione fuit clare ostensum quod quidam viri iniqui proditorialiter educebant de monasterio collis fiorito fratrem iacobum eiusdem monasterii cappellanum, et per locum alium educendum complices veniebant.” *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 32.

Napoleone Orsini and Ubertino da Casale were depicted only slightly more favourably in Clare's *vita* in relation to the heresy of the Free Spirit. Rather the credit for the discovery and the condemnation of the sect Béranger placed firmly in the hands of Clare:

The virgin Clare, zealous supporter of the Catholic faith, used to labour with such loyalty in the persecution of the said heretical sect, that she denounced them and their believers many times to their superiors in the order, and at other times to certain prelates in command of the province and also at other times to cardinals in the holy Roman church who had been staying at that time in those parts, until upon the aforesaid's charge, an inquisition was formed against them and they were found guilty and were condemned to perpetual imprisonment.<sup>80</sup>

Béranger, by not naming Ubertino and his role in beginning proceedings against Bentivenga, sought to place much of the credit upon his saintly candidate.

Similarly, Thomassa's testimony hinted at some of the zeal that Clare embodied when she sought action against Bentivenga and his followers from her superiors. Moreover, she criticised the Franciscan inquisitor Andrea for not pursuing heresy within his own order. Thomassa described vividly the frustration Clare expressed at the slowness of their response:

Clare had spoken to the inquisitor friar Andrew of Perugia with great fervour and excitement, saying to him, "Since you are an inquisitor, why don't you punish the heretics and Paterenes among you, and particularly brother Bentivenga?" Friar Andrea said, "How can I? I cannot catch him in his sermons since he is so full of raillery and I don't have a witness against him." Clare spoke to Bernard of Pesauero with many tears, saying to him, "What can you do with Cardinal Master Napoleone Orsini in order to capture and punish friar Bentivenga, so that the heresy he follows can be destroyed? For this friar can cause many evil things unless some man opposes him, since this heresy is so evil, and he is so subtle. Unless, there is one heart which possesses the spirit of God, no man can guard himself from his deception."<sup>81</sup>

Clare's role, as promulgated by Béranger, was as a timely antidote to the inaction of her superiors.

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<sup>80</sup> "Et ex tunc post disputationem predictam inhitam (sic) cum prefatis hereticis, virgo clara çelatrix catholice fidei in persecutionem dicte secte hereseos sic fideliter laboravit, quod eos et credentes eisdem quamplures denunciavit ordinis supredicti, et aliis quibusdam provincie ducatus prelati necnon et aliquibus sancte romane ecclesie cardinalibus qui in illis partibus tunc temporis morabantur, donec super predicto crimine fuit formata inquisitio contra illos et reperti culpabiles condempnati (sic) fuerunt perpetuo carceri mancipati." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> Translated by Goodich, *The Other Middle Ages*, 220.

One final example might help guard one from Béranger's tendency to side with Clare and rely only upon her judgement. Before Clare encountered Giacomo da Capitone and Pietro da Salamone she had a vision of them, which revealed that they were really a wolf and a swine, with the appearance and the habit of Franciscans. When on the same day, or soon after, Giacomo and Paolo arrived at the grille of the monastery she refused to speak with them and neither did she wish for them to converse with her sisters.<sup>82</sup> This curious episode showed that Clare had a tendency to label all opponents to her community as immoral if not heretical. Her strongest accusation against them was that the one whom she described as a swine had led an untrue life and the other was false and full of evil. There seemed to be no doctrinal evidence of even heterodoxy in the attitude of the two friars. However, we do have their opinion of the monastery, when, "they use to put forward, with evil intention and with bad spirit, many evil and injurious words about Clare and the sisters of the monastery." Their negative assessment may well have been prompted from Santa Croce's association with the Spirituals and the number of times Bentivenga and his followers visited Clare.<sup>83</sup> In the confused and suspicious times, accusations of immorality and heresy were rife in the Spoletan valley and Clare in her condemnation of all her opponents, and the subsequent recomposing of her associations by Béranger ensured that she herself was no longer susceptible to such accusations.

#### IV

Turning to Béranger's presentation of Clare's preaching in his *vita*, one can observe how he contextualised her transgressive behaviour within the confines of clerical expectation. He used conventional hagiographic motifs of exceptional women preaching, and realised that Clare's preaching was acceptable when it did not encroach on the office, the uniform, the vocabulary, and the mode of speaking of the male preacher. His writing acknowledged the audience of male clerics to whom he wished to promote Clare's sanctity. Clare's mode of speaking was also confined to the acceptable manifestations of female saintliness, such as testimony, rebuke and prophecy. However,

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<sup>82</sup> "clara die quadam loquens sororibus suis dixit: Duos tales religiosos quos nominatim expressit in sue religionis habitu vidi ad monasterium hoc venire, ab eorum conversatione quolibet vestrum absteineat, nulla vestrum eorum alicui loqui quomodocumque presumat. Unus enim eorum in lupi rapacis specie veniebat. Alter vero in forma porci, et quasi porcus effectus caudam maximam et revolutam ferebat. Lupus rapax animas deo subtrahere nititur, porcus autem propter caudam retinens odium ad immunda opera machinatur. Et ecce fratres predicti eadem die vel in proximo simul ad monasterium accesserunt. Quibus Clara ad gratem veniens post aliquale colloquium dixit: Nolo fratres quod in isto monasterio conversationem aliquam habeatis, nec est vestrum officium familiaritas dominarum." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 37.

within certain episodes one can observe that the audience listening to Clare's speech-making classified some moments as preaching, though these moments were not understood as such by male clerics.

Before examining the *vita* and the canonisation proceedings, it is essential to outline what clerical definitions of preaching existed. Alain of Lille's *Summa de arte predicatoria* defined preaching as "the public and open instruction in faith and morals and good conduct".<sup>84</sup> Alain distinguished between preaching, prophesying, teaching and speech-making. He regarded the differences as dependent on the size and the nature of the audience and topics rather than the office. For Alain, only preaching consisted of a public office and concerned the reform of morals.

For specific reference to the role of women in preaching, Aquinas contextualised preaching as an trained office and doubted whether women had the holy gift of wisdom in speech and knowledge which men possessed:

Speech can be used in two ways. In one way privately, to one or a few, in familiar conversation. In this way the grace of speech becomes a woman. The other way publicly, addressing oneself to the whole Church. This is not conceded to women. First and principally, because of the condition of the female sex, which must be subject to man, according to Genesis. But to teach and persuade publicly in Church is not the task of subjects but of prelates. Men, when commissioned, can far better do this work, because their subjection is not from nature and sex as with women, but from something supervening from accident. Secondly, lest men's minds be enticed to lust. Thus *Ecclesiasticus* 9:11: *Many have been misled by a woman's beauty. By it passion is kindled like a fire.* Thirdly, because generally speaking women are not perfected in wisdom so as to be fit to be entrusted with public teaching.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> As cited by Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 133.

<sup>84</sup> *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, Migné, P.L., 210: col: 111. As cited in Pryds, "Proclaiming sanctity through proscribed acts: the case of Rosa of Viterbo." In *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, eds. Beverly M. Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, (Berkeley, 1998) 161.

<sup>85</sup> Roland Potter, trans. and ed., "Prophecy and other Charisms", 2a2ae, 171-178, *St Thomas Aquinas, Summae Theologiae*, (1964-1981), vol. 45: 133. As cited in Meussig, "Prophecy and song: teaching and preaching by medieval women" In *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, eds. Kienzle and Walker, 154 f. 5.



However, there also existed a hagiographic tradition of women preachers, such as Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria. In a thirteenth century collection of anonymous sermons in a Parisian manuscript, Mary's preaching role was justified as an exceptional trait, "And though it is prohibited for other women to preach, this women had dispensation from the highest pope, therefore she is called the apostle of apostles, for she taught not only the simple but also the doctors,"<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, this did not necessarily counter Aquinas' expectation that women were not fit for the office as Mary's privilege to preach was seen as a Christ-given trait. Meussig has highlighted that women preaching was often regarded as a result of their being blessed with the holy gift of prophecy, rather than wisdom. In this way women did not challenge the belief that they were intellectually incapable of taking up the office of preacher, and did not have to possess the education and rational thinking expected of male preachers.<sup>87</sup>

Béranger's portrayal of Clare's preaching episodes conformed to the image that was presented in theological writings. In the only episode that explicitly refers to Clare making *sermones*, albeit only to the private audience of her sisters, Béranger's makes great play of the divine origin of the words which she speaks. Her ability to preach was based upon "miraculous virtue" rather than her own intellectual perspicacity.<sup>88</sup> He stressed that preceding many of her outbursts a transformation from her usual state occurred: "Often, when she spoke to her sisters and other persons, she was caught in a trance, suddenly losing power over her body, she remained like a statue, sitting upright, ...and thus she continued speaking absorbed in her fervour."<sup>89</sup> Her ability to convince others was born from the something which came from outwith herself, which she was equally moved by, "In the fire of divine words she ignited others, and even she herself was ignited by the fire in her spirit."<sup>90</sup> That he did not regard Clare as actually possessing the office of preaching might be indicated by the absence of any specific application of the word *predicare* to her speech acts. Even under pressure from the heresiarch, Bentivenga, surely a perfect opportunity to "preach", Béranger preferred to use phrases such as, "she spoke modestly"; "she responded and

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<sup>86</sup> "Et cum aliis mulieribus sit prohibitum predicare, ista dispensationem habuit super hoc a summo pontifice, unde ipsa dicitur apostolorum apostola, docuit enim non solum simplices sed etiam doctores" Paris, B.N.F. Lat 15963, f. 23ra-23rb. As cited in Meussig, "Prophecy and song," 147.

<sup>87</sup> Meussig, "Prophecy and song," 147.

<sup>88</sup> "Habuit etiam ipsa Clara in doctrina eloquentia virtuosam quadam mirabilem impressavam." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 18-19.

<sup>89</sup> "Frequenter quando dominabus vel personis aliis loquebatur, raptum habebat, subito perdebat potentias corporis, remanebat ut statua recta sedens, ..., et sic loquendo remanebat in illo fervore absorta." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 18-19.

<sup>90</sup> "In fervore divinorum verborum alios accendebat, et ipsa etiam in spiritus accedebatur fervore." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 18-19.

defended the truth of the Catholic faith with the greatest fervour of spirit"; and "defending truth, she combatted errors".<sup>91</sup>

However, when one moves outside of strict canonical definitions of preaching, and refer to the canonisation proceedings, moments of speech-making as preaching can be discerned. Here definitions of space and audience and subject matter are paramount. In the two days before her death the *articuli interrogatorii* refer to Clare giving a sermon to the sisters, "advising, instructing and comforting them in the love of God. And amongst the many other good words which she said, she spoke these words or similar: 'My dearest daughters and sisters, I commend my spirit to you all in death of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ...And wish you to live together in humility, peace, obedience and in love on the nature of the crucifixion and the passion of Christ' ...And she blessed them".<sup>92</sup> This sermon could be approved by Augustine in that it occurred within the privacy of her cell, and the only audience party to it were the sisters at the convent, and thus was given, "privately, to one or a few, in familiar conversation. In this conversation there was the grace of speech becoming a woman." The brief assertions, confirming the enquirer's question, made by three of the sisters in their testimonies, could lead one to the view of this as the one of the last exhortations of a leader of a small community to her sisters, and something to be expected of a dying abbess.<sup>93</sup> However, the fuller testimony of Giovanna reveals more than a final benediction.

Giovanna's narrative, presented in the canonisation proceedings, contextualised this speech within the last few days before her death. In that period, Clare was keen to inform many members of the community that she possessed the cross within her heart. In the week preceding she mentioned this and spoke on the subject of Christ's passion three times.<sup>94</sup> In other words, she was keen to preach to the community primarily on the subject of the passion and the crucifixion of Christ. For example, realising the importance of the cross to Clare, one of the sisters, Agnes, carried a crucifix into Clare's cell and placed it opposite her bed. On seeing it, Clare asked Giovanna why Agnes had done this "Because I have [it] within my heart, I have it within my

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<sup>91</sup> "loquebatur modeste"; respondebat et veritatem catholicam cum quodam maximo fervore spiritus defendebat"; "veritatem defendens impugnabat errores" *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 42.

<sup>92</sup> Art 146. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> See testimonies of Marina Thomassa and Francescha. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 150, 240, 337.

<sup>94</sup> She speaks to Giovanna, Thomassa, Lucia and Agnes as well as other unnamed members in the week between the eve of the feast of St Lawrence and the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 70-71, 72, 73.

heart.” She then proceeded to tell Giovanna about the cross and about her contemplation about the crucifixion and the passion of Christ.<sup>95</sup> The authority from which she had drawn this subject matter was from her own experiential understanding, not the holy gift of prophecy which Aquinas might have preferred. Her personal testimony could be regarded as a form of preaching.

Clare’s pastoral function was not merely a private matter nor confined to her own community. Her confrontation with a Franciscan confessor, Giacomo Gonzio, whom she suspected of secret corruption, could be viewed as an episode of preaching, confession, and absolution.<sup>96</sup> After finishing a conversation with Clare on spiritual matters, the friar rose to take his leave when he was accosted by Clare, who said to him:

Have you something else to tell me? To which he said: No. Clare said: It is clear that you have something else to tell me. And the said brother denied her assertion saying: In truth I say to you that I have nothing more to say to you. Clare said: Sit down for a while. And the said friar sat. And Clare with a fervid spirit said to him: Miserable man, you have for a very long time concealed your death-inducing thoughts in your mind, and in this way, you wish hide them from me, as if I didn’t know? And then Clare began to relate the thoughts of the friar about his order and about her, so much so when she recalled all his thoughts completely, that the friar could not deny anymore what she related. And the aforesaid friar was greatly stunned by this and was stupefied by shame about it that he denied the truth of what Clare said. And then Clare said: You nevertheless sin more when you still deny what I have related even more so than when you denied it before I related it. Do you suppose that God will deceive me? And then the said brother humbly recognised with shame the fault of his lying and the obvious truth of what had been said, and sought to be freed from the said temptation of corruption by the advice and the prayers of Clare.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Et tunc Clara dixit ipsi testi: Soror, non oportet, quia ego habeo intus in corde, intus in corde habeo. Et ista verba quasi sub silentio frequenter iteravit...Interrogata quare Clara dicebat illa verba, dixit quod tunc ipsa credebat quod ipsa loqueretur de cruce, idest de consideratione crucis et passionis Christi, et quod Clara illud dicebat pro contentatione illius testis, ut ipsa non turbaretur de morte ipsius Clare.” Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, 73.

<sup>96</sup> Giacomo Gonzio was the most likely protagonist in this encounter with Clare. Having been through the canonisation proceedings, I’ve based my assumption on the frequency of Gonzio’s visits to the monastery which would fit the role of confessor as mentioned in the episode from Béranger’s *vita*. Menestò, *Il Processo di Santa Chiara da Montefalco*, art. 60, test. 46: 276; aet. 87 t. 1: 44-45.

<sup>97</sup> “Cum autem quadam die dictus frater clare virgini loqueretur ad gratem, et spirituali colloquio verbis tamen communibus contulisset, surrexit frater predictus se a clara licentians ut abiret. Clara vero interrogavit cum dicens: Habes mihi aliud dicere? Qui ait: Non. Clara dixit: Vide bene quia aliud habebas mihi dicere. Et tunc frater predictus cum assertionem negavit dicens: Vere dico tibi quia nichil amplius habeo tibi dicere. Clara dixit: Sede parum adhuc. Et dictus frater sedit. Clara autem cum quodam fervore spiritus dixit: Miser homo tu cogitatum tuum quoddam mortiferum in tua mente diutius occultasti, et modo vis a me illud abscondere quasi ego nescirem? Et tunc Clara cogitationem fratris illius referre cepit per ordinem et eam totam sic integraliter retulit, quod frater ille plenius nequivisset referre. Ex quibus frater predictus nimium admiratus et pre verecundia stupefactus ea quae clara dixerat vera esse

Having revealed to him her knowledge of his failings, the brother “humbly recognised with shame the fault of his lying and the obvious truth of what had been said, and sought to be freed from the said temptation of corruption by the advice and the prayers of Clare.”<sup>98</sup> This preaching episode is significant as it took place partially in the public domain; not only within the privacy of the *parlatio*, but also in the body of the church where Giacomo sat. This moment becomes more significant as the episode was witnessed by her brother, Francesco, and some of the sisters in the community. Moreover, Clare is observed manipulating the sacrality of the space from within the cloister. Even though she was not assigned either the office or the position as confessor she successfully turned the tables; her confession became his confession.

In explaining such episodes we should acknowledge a more flexible interpretation for preaching than contained in the theological constructs of the preaching, so as to include the speeches of Clare. In these instances her speeches took place before a partially public audience and entailed “the open instruction in faith and morals and good conduct.” Furthermore, to reveal the extent of Clare’s transgressive behaviour, one must also analyse the reaction of her audience and the physical space in which these speeches took place. Here, one observes in the canonisation proceedings, Clare’s desire to speak out was borne from a strongly experiential understanding of her relationship to Christ which she wished to articulate to her sisters. What is interesting is that, though not conventional in its form, her sisters classified this as a moment of preaching from their abbess. Moreover, Clare’s position as a cloistered nun denied her the privilege of speaking in public. But in her addresses to male visitors one can observe that she did more than simply rebuke her learned visitors. Their recognition of the divine authority she possessed allowed her the freedom to criticize, instruct, and even absolve her spiritual superiors.

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negavit. Et tunc Clara dixit: Et si ante relationem a me tibi factam ista negaveras, modo tamen post meam relationem taliter mentiendo plus peccas. Putasne me deus deceperit? Et tunc frater predictus cum verecundia culpam sui mendacii et claram veritatem dixisse humiliter recongnovit et clare consilio et orationibus ex tunc a predicta temptatione dampnabili extitit liberatus.” In the Montefalco and Paris manuscripts Giacomo was said to be affiliated to the Augustinians. However, the evidence from the Vatican and Casatense manuscripts and that from the canonisation proceedings show he was in fact Franciscan and that his affiliation to the Augustinians was an interpolation. *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*; Semenza, 33.

## Conclusion

In examining the development of the ideal of the cloister within hagiographic literature, a distinction has to be made between the sources which present the life of a female saint. Béranger in his selection of material focused on liminal moments which demonstrated a specific virtue. His choice of episodes ultimately defined Clare as cloistered and introspective. In his narration of her youth he stressed her early spirituality as that of a contemplative nun. When describing moments of mendicancy, he delineated the behavioural strictures of the cloister which she applied in her trips outside. In his desire to ensure Clare's canonisation, Béranger set her behaviour within the context of miracle working. The examples of Clare demonstrating public virtues, such as healing and assisting the poor, were described as unique moments.

In contrast, the proceedings recover how ordinary and unexceptional were violations of the cloister. The witness testimonies reveal the diversity, fluidity and transformation in Clare's spirituality which Béranger considered inappropriate. Clare's life at the *recluserium* and the first few years of the community of Santa Croce resemble more the *pinzochere* communities than the order to which they were later affiliated. Her connections with and visits from Franciscans showed her interest in the spiritual trends that occupied the Spoletan valley, whether orthodox or heterodox. In this turbulent period Clare was visited by many differing religious groups and her approval was sought.

Finally, her speech-acts, as revealed in the proceedings, did not follow typical patterns of hagiography or theological understandings of women preaching. She was moved to speak not just from the holy gift of divine prophecy, as Béranger preferred. The authority from which she drew her speeches was her experiential knowledge of Christ. That she was believed by her community is evident in their action after her death. Her sisters responded to her claim of possession of Christ's crucifixion, "Because I have [it] within my heart, I have it within my heart", by opening up

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<sup>98</sup> "Et tunc frater predictus cum verecundia culpam sui mendacii et claram veritatem dixisse humiliter recognovit et clare consilio et orationibus ex tunc a predicta temptatione dampnabili extitit liberatus." *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce*, 33.

her body. What they found there drew an obscure monastery to the attention of lay, clerical and papal authorities.

By turning to the writings of the final study, Angela of Foligno, it is possible to read a religious women's own articulation of her experiential knowledge of Christ. Her writings are *vita*; as one of the few extant substantive sources, where a Franciscan woman has had the opportunity to outline her understanding of contemplation which, at best, has only been hinted at in the canonisation proceedings of both Clares. Nevertheless, clerical mechanisms that sought to present an image of religious women as cloistered and contemplative monastics still influenced the treatment of Angela as spokesperson for the contemplative experience. As her oral testimony was mediated through her Franciscan confessor, Brother Arnaldo, he attempted to create a framework for her mystic progression that reflected his own learned conceptualisation of mystic union. The subsequent disjuncture produced, as Angela resisted his attempts to "confine" her thought, acts as a significant reminder that claustration was as much a mental preoccupation as physical one.

## Chapter Six. Mapping interiorities: Angela of Foligno's recollection of mystic union as mediated by Brother Arnaldo in her *Memoriale* (c.1290)

This final chapter considers how the impact of cloister ideals affected religious women's self-image and contemplative practice. Angela of Foligno's *Memoriale* is a precious source as it is one of the few extant testimonies which attempted to articulate the introspective contemplative experience, that is, the "mental landscape" of a woman influenced by Franciscan spiritual values. Like other aspects of the cloister, this woman's experience of the contemplative life was mediated through a male cleric's eyes. The *Memoriale* was promoted as the *verbatim* transcript of Angela's words as taken down by her Franciscan confessor, Arnaldo. In it, she attempted to describe her journey towards mystic union with Christ. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern her confessor's hand in structuring and ordering the narrative within expected theological boundaries. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the extent to which the *Memoriale* should be treated as a mediated text, where Angela's model for contemplation was challenged by Arnaldo's expectation of mystic union. In examining this, Angela's experience can be seen, less as a unique record of one woman's life, but as reflective of changing Franciscan spiritual values. Although Angela remained in Foligno for the majority of her life, her internal journey influenced a broader audience. The audience for her writings drew meaning from the *Memoriale* and the *Istruzione* about concerns as diverse as the state of Franciscan learning, the centrality of poverty, and the importance of maintaining Francis' vision. The *Memoriale* was put together in a period of spiritual and political upheaval and anxiety in the Spoletan valley. The Spiritual Franciscans, with whom she was associated, were ready to listen to alternative voices. The survival and promotion of the *Memoriale* is a testament to the success of the work in articulating these problematic issues.

### I

Before embarking on a detailed discussion of the production of *Memoriale* as a negotiated text, it is necessary to explain how Angela's work and spiritual choices were shaped by the unique context of Foligno at the end of the thirteenth century. It will be argued that the political, climatic, and spiritual upheaval of the Spoletan valley combined to allow unusual voices, such as Angela's, to develop. First, political instability in the region militated against the popes managing to curb effectively new religious enthusiasm, without engendering hostility from political allies. Second, the wars in the period were also accompanied by exceptionally violent weather that seemed to express divine disapproval for the status quo, which changing religious movements sought to

correct. Finally, Angela's vision of how to address the anxiety of the age was born from a strong adherence to the values of the Spiritual Franciscans in terms of the penitential life; her attachment to absolute poverty, and understanding St. Francis as a central figure in her conversion. Nevertheless, a comparison with the theology of Ubertino da Casale points up how far her ideas diverged from the Spirituals, in terms of its scale, the avoidance of creating more religious conflict, and the value of social action as an immediately palliative solution to injustice.

Angela was born around 1248 and married sometime after the age of twenty. At the age of 37 in 1285 she went through a spiritual crisis and embarked on a religious life to seek forgiveness for past sins, whose nature Angela does not specify. What follows seems to be six years of Angela seeking a suitable form to her religious vocation. She went on pilgrimage to Rome in 1291, but it was only when, in that same year, she visited the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, where she had a vision of the saint, that she found a firm spiritual purpose. At this point, in the early summer of 1291, Angela gave away all her property and possessions and entered the Third Order of St Francis. The pattern of her religious lifestyle after her conversion appeared to be that of a lay penitent. Her acts of charity extended to visits to the poor and infirm, such as lepers at a hospital in Foligno in 1292. The remainder of her time was spent in prayer at her home, near the church of San Francesco in Foligno, or in the church itself to receive confession and consolation from her confessor Brother Arnaldo. She continued her life of penitence up to her death in 1309.

Why Angela chose this particular form of religious vocation and had the freedom to express it in an active form reflected the wider natural, political and spiritual turbulence of the Spoletan valley at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries. The primary factor that allowed innovative religious movements to be recognised was the search by the papacy for political stability in the region. The popes had to juggle competing pressures in its own territories: these included combating heresy and lax clerics; managing Umbrian communes' infringements of ecclesiastical liberties, and retaining the political stability of newly absorbed territories into the papal state.

The persistent conflict between Angela's home, Foligno, and its neighbour, Perugia, demonstrates the contentious issues the papacy faced and why the acceptance of religious



movements, such as Angela's, was crucial to the maintenance of peace in the region. In the 1280s, during her period of conversion, Perugia and Foligno were at war. Foligno sought a return to autonomous rule after its defeat by Perugia in 1254. The strategic position of Foligno explains Perugia's ambition to control the smaller commune. As the communication hub of Umbria, Foligno stood on the Via Flaminia, and controlled the roads that branched out to all the other major communes in the region. Moreover, it lay in the middle of the most fertile plain in the Umbrian valley, the Chiasco river valley and its tributaries, allowing the communes plentiful resources to feed its population. As Grundmann put it, "Among all the cities in Umbria, ... Foligno and only Foligno had the potential of becoming another Florence"<sup>1</sup>. An uprising against Perugian control of Foligno became possible with the departure of the Trinci family, who were loyal to Perugia, and had been ensconced in Foligno by the Perugians after a war in 1253-54. They were replaced with the Ghibelline Anastasi in 1264.<sup>2</sup>

In the first period of the war, 1282-1283, Foligno built a series of four castles in the Apennines to gain control of a network of trade routes and rivers (the Topino and Menotre) within the Spoletan valley. Perugia threatened again to go to war against Foligno because by building these fortifications the citizens of Foligno had defaulted on the treaty made with Perugia, after Foligno's defeat in 1254. The papacy intervened as a diplomatic arbitrator in the six months between 17th January 1282, when Perugia declared war, and 1st June 1282 when Foligno was besieged. Foligno's expectation from the negotiations was that an interdict and papal excommunication would be imposed on Perugia, as the latter was acting as though she was an autonomous power, despite being a part of the same Papal State. Perugia ignored the threats from Pope Martin IV and she, and her other Guelf allies (Assisi, Spoleto, Nocera, Spello, Visso, Cascia, Gualdo and Bevagna), attacked Ghibelline Foligno in June of that year. Martin IV, though strongly Guelf, excommunicated Perugia as he regarded her action as unnecessarily creating instability in the region.<sup>3</sup> Divine retribution seemed fortunately aligned with papal disapproval when in October 1283, after a temporary cessation, Perugia attacked again and was defeated, when Foligno's army was led by the clergy, carrying a banner of a local saint.<sup>4</sup> Perugia submitted to the pope and paid

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<sup>1</sup> J. Grundmann, *The Popolo at Perugia*, (Perugia, 1992) 156.

<sup>2</sup> Sensi, "Foligno sul calare del secolo XIII," *Sante e beate ombre tra il XIII e il XIV secolo: Mostra iconografica*, edited by C. Schmitt, (Foligno, 1986) 44.

<sup>3</sup> *B.F.*, III, 24: 468-8; *Les registres de Martin IV*, Paris (1913): 117-120; 227-229. The strength of feeling on the rightness of Perugia's case caused the inhabitants of the commune to burn an effigy of the pope. For further discussion of the conflict see Sensi, "Foligno sul calare del secolo XIII", 35-42.

<sup>4</sup> "Et aliqui capti dixerunt quod statim cum viderunt vessillum in quo erat ymago beati Feliciani apportatum per presbiteros, apparuit eis maxima carbonaria inter eos et Fulignates, et sic terga verterunt, credentes in carbonarium precipitare" Muratori, *R.I.S.*, 26/2: 16.

40,000 florins into papal coffers. Crucial to the restoration of peace were local religious figures from both communes. In a meeting of representatives at Bevagna, Brother Bevignate defended the interests of Perugia and a Franciscan, Andrea, represented Foligno. The crisis was temporarily resolved when Foligno agreed to dismantle its newly built fortifications.

Despite defeat Perugia was loath to give up its ambition to subjugate Foligno completely and initiated the second phase of the war, 1288-89. This period demonstrated the limitations of papal influence, as Nicholas IV attempted to make Perugia desist from its political ambitions. At first, Nicholas sent an embassy from Rome offering to arbitrate the differences between Perugia and Foligno. When this was turned down, Nicholas ordered Perugia to stop inciting war and sent two cardinals to arbitrate. The threat of papal excommunication did at least make Perugia's allies more circumspect in continuing the conflict, as they at this point remained neutral. Nevertheless, Perugia went to war against Foligno on 24th June 1288, but with a smaller coalition of supporters. Infuriated, Nicholas imposed interdict and excommunication on Perugia. He invalidated contracts and put up legal barriers against Perugian officials, denied offices to Perugian citizens and fined the commune.<sup>5</sup> After over a year of fighting, Foligno finally capitulated on 22nd August 1289, but it was only in the subsequent year that Perugia finally received papal absolution, in exchange for a extensive penalty of 100,000 florins.

From this conflict a couple of implications can be drawn on the nature of spiritual authority within the papal state. First, the pope was limited by the fragmented nature of the territory and could only use his powers of interdict and obstruction on a few cities at a time. His will would only be heard with the cooperation of communes who rivalled the belligerent city. Loyalty to the pope was dependent on whether a commune's political interests coincided with maintaining peace in the region. One way of engendering a spiritual source for this loyalty was through the promotion and canonisation of spiritual figures close to a commune's heart: "Since saints, with their miracle-working powers and their exemplary values, normally represent an element of equilibrium in society, they can become the means by which the existing authorities create consensus by displaying devotion for the saints."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Grundmann, *The Popolo at Perugia*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> G. Zarri, "Living saints: a typology of female sanctity in the early sixteenth century," in *Women and Religion*, eds. Bornstein & Rusconi, 232.

However, the authority of the papacy was restricted in its choice of potential saintly candidates popular to the commune. The example of the lay penitent and Angela's contemporary, Pietro Crisci, highlights the balancing act the papacy had to manage, between gaining the support of a commune, and removing the threat of heterodox or heretical thought. Crisci came from a noble Foligno family who came to notice when he gave up all his possessions, took up the role of a Franciscan tertiary and preached the peace of God in the belligerent atmosphere of feuding communes. Yet in 1297 he was brought before the Inquisition in Assisi.<sup>7</sup> At that time, Boniface VIII sought to curb the enthusiasm for the beguine movement in the Marche and wanted to expel them from the area. Beguine communities, though thriving in communes such as Spoleto, Bettona, Gualdo Tadino, Gubbio and Città di Castello, were not a form of religious life popular in Foligno.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Foligno preferred hermits and recluses, which was Crisci's form of religious vocation. It is possible to speculate that it was a combination of his eremitical status and the reluctance of Boniface to alienate Foligno that contributed to the acceptance of his orthodoxy by the Inquisition, when he was again brought before the Inquisition in Spoleto.<sup>9</sup> His subsequent reputation remained intact, and at his death, in 1323, he had assumed the role of patron saint of Foligno and was referred to as *beato* even though he was not officially beatified.<sup>10</sup> Forty years later, the Dominican, Giovanni Gorini, compiled his *vita* when Giovanni Angeletti was elected bishop of Foligno in 1364.<sup>11</sup> Angela's recognition of Crisci's sanctity and her own aspirations to follow his penitent lifestyle can be seen when she referred to him in the eighteenth step of her *Memoriale*: "Before I used to make fun of a certain Petruccio, but now I could not do otherwise than follow his example."<sup>12</sup>

The most powerful influence on Angela's choice of religious lifestyle seemed to be that of the Spiritual Franciscan movement. Angela joined a community of the third order of penance attached to the church of San Francesco in Foligno in 1290. From archive records, it is known that

<sup>7</sup> The documentary evidence is vague on the specific charges brought against him, and his life states that from the accusations of false men he was suspected of being a heretic. See his *vita* in *AASS*, July, IV, Ch. 9, 668-669.

<sup>8</sup> Sensi, "La beata Angela nel contesto religioso folignate," *Vita e spiritualità della beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. C. Schmitt, (Perugia, 1987) 68-71.

<sup>9</sup> "...et in Spoleto iterum de fide de qua erat plenissimus examinatus et perfecte catholica ita est inventus, ab Inquisitore est cum honore dimissus" M. Faloci-Pulignani ed., "Beati Petri Crisci de Fulgineo confessoris legenda, auctore fr. Ioanne Gorini," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 8 (1889), Ch. 9: 365.

<sup>10</sup> Crisci was only officially beatified in 1391 by Boniface IX, in recognition of the popular cult that had developed in Foligno. Faloci-Pulignani, "Beati Petri Crisci de Fulgineo," 363-64.

<sup>11</sup> Faloci-Pulignani, "Beati Petri Crisci de Fulgineo," 358-369; *AASS*, July, IV, 663-668

<sup>12</sup> P. Lachance, trans., *Angela of Foligno: Complete Works*, (New York, 1993): 131.

the community was established in 1270, although little other information survives. It was only in the previous year that the tertiaries had received official papal sanction by Nicholas IV. This could well indicate a concession made to the communes on the part of the papacy to recognise their popular expressions of religious sentiment. She herself frequented the church of San Francesco in Foligno and her confessor, Brother Arnaldo was a member of the friary based at the church.

Apart from day to day contact with the Franciscans, Angela was also privileged in her connections with prominent members of the Spiritual movement. Ubertino da Casale recalled his encounter with Angela as his conversion to a stricter form of religious life, in 1298:

In the twenty-fifth year of my religious life, it came about—I will not go into detail—that I encountered the reverend and most holy mother, Angela of Foligno, a veritable angel, to whom Jesus revealed my heart's defects and his secret kindness in such a manner that I was convinced he spoke through her. She restored a thousand fold all those spiritual gifts I had lost through my sins; so that from that moment I have not been the same man as I was before. The splendour of her radiant virtue changed the whole tenor of my life. It drove out the weakness and the languor from my soul and body and healed my mind torn with distractions. No one who knew me before could doubt that the spirit of Christ was newly begotten in me through her.<sup>13</sup>

Ubertino's own patron, Giacomo Colonna, met Angela on three occasions, while he was papal legate in the region, and it was he who signed the approbation of her *Memoriale* in 1297.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it was as Colonna's representative returning the *Memoriale* that Ubertino met Angela.

Up to a certain extent Angela's doctrinal education was influenced by the writings of other influential Spiritual Franciscans. Although, it cannot be proved that Angela met Angelo da Clareno, the structure of her *Memoriale*, in the form of thirty steps, reflects knowledge of John Climacus' *Ladder of Paradise*, which had been translated from Greek into Latin by Clareno. Indeed, the connection between Clareno's writing and Angela's work becomes more convincing as

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<sup>13</sup> *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, trans. Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 110.

<sup>14</sup> Menestò, *Umbria: La strada*, 83.

a disciple of Clareno, Gentile of Foligno, was active within the commune.<sup>15</sup> It was Gentile who produced a vernacular version of Clareno's translation, which was more than likely circulated around the wider Spiritual community that Angela inhabited. In a letter from Angelo da Clareno to Gentile, it is made clear that the latter was the head of a group composed of Spirituals and lay adherents in Foligno, though Angela herself was not specifically mentioned.<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of Angela's work, *Memoriale*, confirms that Francis of Assisi was a central figure in her conversion, but often in the role as a mediator for Christ, rather than the main protagonist.

Francis' role in her conversion is obvious from the very beginning of her spiritual journey. It was to him she prayed when she sought a worthy priest to make a full confession of her sins. Thus, he appeared to her one night in a vision in the guise of an elderly friar, promising that he would grant her prayer.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the *Istruzioni* recalled that during a prolonged illness, she was visited by Christ, who, after consoling her, introduced her to St. Francis, saying:

“Here is the one whom, after me, you have loved so much. I want him to serve you.”  
Then the blessed Francis showed me the kinship and intimate love that was his for me, and it was great in every way. Great was my delight in the kinship and love which the blessed Francis demonstrated toward me. Afterward, he spoke most secret and most high words to me. Finally, he said: “You are the only one born of me.”<sup>18</sup>

Here, through the words of Christ, Angela claimed to give Him primacy over Francis; “Here is the one whom, *after me*, you have loved so much.” So, although Angela mentioned many mystic encounters and conversations that she had with Francis<sup>19</sup>, the apex of her spiritual journey was

<sup>15</sup> Sensi, “La beata Angela,” 63-68.

<sup>16</sup> L. Von Auw, *Angeli Clareni opera*, I, Epistolae, (Rome, 1980): 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> step, eds. L. Thier & A. Calufetti, *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*: Edizione critica. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome, 1985) 132. I also have included references to Lachance's translation of the relevant passages from the *Memoriale* and the *Istruzioni*.

<sup>18</sup> *Istruzioni*, 21, eds. Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 598. Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 276-277.

<sup>19</sup> Francis appeared in a dream to her at the beginning of her conversion (*Memoriale*, ch. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> step). She had vision of him when looking at the stained window in the basilica of San Francesco in Assisi (*Memoriale*, ch. 3, 1<sup>st</sup> supplementary step). He appeared at the end of the *Memoriale* to name her as a guardian of poverty (*Memoriale*, ch. 9, 7<sup>th</sup> supplementary step). He appeared to affirm that she was “the only one born of me.” (*Istruzione*, 4).

Christ. Francis was her guide in as far as he was the closest human imitation of Christ's perfection: "Everything that Jesus, God and man, despised, he despised most perfectly. Everything that Jesus, God and man loved, he loved most intensely and supremely. With inexpressible perfection he followed in the footsteps of Jesus in order to become conformed to him as much as he could in all things."<sup>20</sup> When Arnaldo detailed more carefully her spiritual ascent from the twentieth step onwards, Angela regarded praying to Francis as an initiation of her relationship to God. She prayed to Francis, so that he might ask for her the experience of Christ's presence.<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with her emphasis of Francis as mediator, Angela's conversion to the Franciscan life of penance and absolute poverty was prompted by a vision of Christ's crucifixion, when he asked her what could she do to assuage his suffering. While in contemplation on the passion of Christ, she heard a voice say to her, "What can you do that will suffice?" Christ again showed the wounds from his crucifixion and repeated, "What can you do for me that will suffice?"<sup>22</sup> While meditating on Christ's passion, she came to recognise that the only form of penance that would redeem his crucifixion was absolute poverty. This inspiration came from God, rather than Francis' example:

I determined to leave everything altogether, that I might be able to do penance and come to the cross, as God had inspired me. Now the aforesaid determination was given to me by God, wonderfully in this way. When I was passionately desiring to be poor, and was often thinking that perhaps I might die before I could be so, and when on the other hand, I was being attacked by many temptations, for instance that my begging for bread might be a danger and a cause of shame...At length by the mercy of God, there came to me a certain great illumination in my heart, and together with this came a certain firmness in me, which at the time I believed, and still believe I should never lose and I resolved and determined, that if I had to die of hunger and nakedness or shame, because it was pleasing to God, I would in no way avoid it.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Instruzioni*, 3, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 470-482. Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 241.

<sup>21</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 3, 20<sup>th</sup> step in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 180. Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 140. It could be argued that this approach is actually Franciscan as he insisted on the *imitatio Christi*. But the current debate amongst male Franciscan movement concentrated on their identification with Francis, rather than with Christ. The later discussion of Ubertino da Casale, who focused on Francis as the signifier for a new apocalyptic age indicates their contrasting emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 1, 10<sup>th</sup> step in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, lines 102-103: 140; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.1, 15<sup>th</sup> step in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 140-142; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 129.

Her resolve on the issue of absolute poverty was such that she adhered to it despite several attempts to dissuade her by family, friends, and spiritual advisors, including Arnaldo himself.<sup>24</sup> Finally, her interpretation of absolute poverty ensured that it was one of the central elements of her religious life, and in keeping with that of the Spiritual Franciscans. At her death, she was surrounded by her supporters from this movement and confirmed their shared values, when they recorded her saying: “I do not make any other testament except that I wish for you to have love for one another, and I leave you all that I have inherited: the life of Christ, that is, his poverty, suffering and contempt.”<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, contrasting Angela’s and Ubertino da Casale’s visions on how to address the anxiety of the age, clear differences in their approaches are discernable.

Ubertino’s conversion and spiritual career was strongly influenced by the exceptional personalities with whom he associated. In particular, Peter John Olivi (1248-98), the leader of the Spirituels, whom he knew as a visionary who received a revelation on the meaning of the Bible during his student days in Paris.<sup>26</sup> Olivi’s apocalyptic commentary, *Lectura super Apocalypsim*, saw Francis of Assisi as the Angel of the Sixth Seal, with whom the era of perfect contemplation had begun. Ubertino was at the same Franciscan *studium* with Olivi in Florence (1285-89) before also going to Paris from 1285-98. His own commentary on the book of the Apocalypse developed Olivi’s vision, but he was much more specific about whom he thought were represented in the work. The fifth book of his *Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus* (1304) also named Francis as the Angel of the Sixth Seal. However, more controversially, he analysed the current situation of the church in a more negative light. Though Francis had come to earth to renew the life of Christ, he and his followers would be persecuted. He identified the Spiritual Franciscans as Francis’ legitimate sons, who constituted the true Church, but also identified the Roman Curia as the carnal Church, who opposed the Spirituels. More specifically, he recognised Boniface VIII and Benedict XI as the Antichrist, for supporting the illegitimate abdication of Celestine V. Ubertino encouraged

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<sup>24</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 1, 9th 10th & 15th steps in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 142, 146; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 126, 129.

<sup>25</sup> *Istruzioni*, 36 in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 728; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 314.

<sup>26</sup> This vision is repeated in several sources, such as, *De obitu dicti fratris Petri* ed. Albanus Heyse, “Descriptio codicis Bibliothecae Laurentianae Florentinae S. Crucis, Plut. 31, sin., Cod. 3” *A.F.H.*, 11 (1918): 267. However, Moorman (*The Growth of Mysticism*, Crossroad: New York, 1995) comments that most modern scholars believe the revelation to be invented: 337-338

the Spirituals to preach against the Antichrist, and presage an era of peace; the dawn of the Seventh Age.<sup>27</sup>

Ubertino's vision of addressing the anxiety of the period was influenced not only by his theological masters, but also by his experience of religious conversion. Ubertino recognised that his personal spiritual conversion took place in 1273 when he joined the Franciscans, which he described as that "sacratissimo ordine".<sup>28</sup> When he stated the history of spiritual career in the prologue of the *Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus*, he recalled it only from the point of his joining the Franciscans, his preaching in Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche, to his exile in Alverna in 1304.<sup>29</sup> This strong attachment to the Spirituals added to his conviction that Francis' example of absolute poverty was the sole ideal worth following, and he sought to renew that same spirit in his own lifetime. Ubertino refused to contextualise the conflict between the Spirituals and the Curia as the history of the order's necessary evolution, but rather prophesied a desperate confrontation between good and evil.

Angela, though indicating her allegiance to the Spirituals, preferred to emphasise the virtues of humility and suffering rather than conflict. In 1300, during Mass, Angela had a vision of Francis, who praised and exhorted those of his sons who had chosen to pursue the ideal of absolute poverty:

He then highly praised the intentions of those of his sons who burned with zeal to observe the poverty prescribed by the Rule, and he exhorted them to grow in deeds. Then he said: "May the eternal, full, and abundant blessing which I received from the eternal God descend upon the heads of these most beloved sons, yours and mine. Tell them that they are to help me by following the way of Christ and making it manifest in word and deed. And they should have no fears, for I am with them and the eternal God is there to help them." Francis praised these sons very affectionately for their good intentions and encouraged them to proceed

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<sup>27</sup> Brufani (1992): 101. See also McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (1994): 157-66 and Douie, *The Nature and the Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli* (1935): ch. 5

<sup>28</sup> The date of his entry into the Franciscan order can be dated from his comment at the completion of the *L'Arbor vitae crucifixae* in 1305 which stated: "in vigilia Michaelis archangeli anni presentis MCCCXV a felicissimo ortu veri solis Iesu. A mea vero vili conversione anno XXXII": 6b

<sup>29</sup> *L'Arbor vitae crucifixae*: 3a



with confidence, for he himself would assist in their resolve.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Ubertino, Angela did not proceed to outline the spiritual ills of the day but called for moderation. She argued that the Spirituals should, as far as possible, follow the rule of Francis, but in the spirit of humility, rather than seeking controversy and recrimination:

As a result you will no longer be prone to disputes and quarrels. Instead, like the suffering God-man, you will be like the deaf who do not hear, the mutes who do not speak and you will become a true member of the body of Jesus Christ, who, according to the word of the apostle, was not in the habit of getting involved in quarrels. How much God is accomplished by humility! It renders peaceful and quiet the souls of those who are filled with it. The exterior peace, which they have as a result of their inner peace is so great that if they hear harsh words addressed to them or perhaps against some truth, they do not seek to justify themselves with excuse; their only response is a brief and submissive one. If a false charge is laid against them, they prefer to confess their ignorance of it and claim that they do not understand what they have been told rather than respond contentiously.<sup>31</sup>

Her exhortation called for a more considered, realistic and reflective response to the changing status of the Franciscan order. Ubertino dwelt on the past achievement of Francis and sought to renew this spirit in his own lifetime, by setting the Spirituals in a central role in an immediate eschatological future. Conversely, Angela's writings contained no Joachimite apocalyptic speculation, but encouraged her followers to small-scale social action to aid their own personal spiritual development. For example, Angela, meditating on the role of tribulation, argued that such experiences became sweet when motivated by love and grace, citing Christ's comment: "For to this table, I was also called, and the chalice I drank tasted bitter; but because I was motivated by love it was sweet to me."<sup>32</sup> More importantly, Angela also cited her own attempt to experience the meaning of his passage by seeking to find Christ among the poor and the suffering.

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<sup>30</sup> *Istruzioni*, 4 in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 502; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 250. See d'Alatri (1987): 149-150

<sup>31</sup> *Istruzioni*, 5 in Thier & Calufetti (1985); Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 254. For further exhortations to humility see *Istruzioni* 12, 13, 15 & 17.

<sup>32</sup> Mt 22:1-14; Mk 10:30; Lk 22: 30. See *Memoriale*, ch. 5 in Thier & Calufetti (1985); Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 161.

Her experience of such was at its most visceral when she and her companion washed the wounds of a leper and drank the water she had bathed the sores in, claiming that it tasted sweet to them.<sup>33</sup>

## II

[Angela's *Memoriale*] does not seem-a rare case indeed- to be marred in any way by the sometimes deceptive, perhaps often unconscious, hagiographical concerns of the usual "secretaries" in these cases. Such concerns are very noticeable in the redaction of the "writings" of Catherine of Siena, which are far less fresh and spontaneous. These too were collected by dictation, but then they were partly reconstructed by her learned Dominican "secretaries", to force the image of the saint from Siena into a preconceived mould. Thus I would be tempted to define the *Book*-at least in its initial part, the so called *Memorial*, the only one written by Arnaldo-even if it does not come directly from Angela's hand, as a true and authentic "author's text", no more or less than the writings of a Hadewijch or a Porete, who did not make use of any secretaries: sole authors of their own writings, and such authors! What more can I say?

(Romana Guarnieri's preface to Lachance's English translations of *The Complete Works of Angela of Foligno*, (1993): 7)

Guarnieri's complacent assessment of the value of Angela's work as straightforward autobiography has dismissed a potentially important area of debate on ideas of medieval authorship, namely, the collaborative nature of speaker and scribe relationships; and the implications of textual authority over oral forms of transmission. The form and transmission of Angela's *Memoriale* makes it impossible to assign intellectual ownership of the work to Angela alone. To understand the text fully, it is essential to acknowledge the manner in which the work was, in part, initiated, created and edited by her male scribe and confessor, Brother Arnaldo. By making some general comments on the implication of the collaborative process in producing the *Memoriale*, it can be seen how much the work was a negotiated text.

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<sup>33</sup> Her experience of Christ was so intimate that when the scale of the leper stuck in her throat, she refused to spit it out believing it to be, "just as if I had received Holy Communion." *Memoriale*, ch. 5 in Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 163.

Angela's dictated writings can be divided into three types of sources: a mystic biography describing her spiritual experiences, the *Memoriale*; salutary exhortations: letters, meditations, thoughts and other revelations of divine experience; and the story of her final teaching and the testament of Angela. The last two sections are taken together as the *Instruzioni*. The *Instruzioni* appeared to have been composed separately and completed by a number of anonymous writers up to Angela's death in 1309.<sup>34</sup> This chapter is concerned primarily with the *Memoriale* because this is the only one of Angela's writings with a discernable chronology and transcribed wholly by Arnaldo.

Without Arnaldo's instigation it seems unlikely that her spiritual experiences would have been recorded in the first place. We know little about his background, except what he chose to tell us in his account of Angela.<sup>35</sup> He informs us that he was a fellow native of Foligno and a relative of Angela, as well as being her scribe and confessor. At the time of his encounter with Angela in Assisi, he was attached to the friary of San Francesco in the same commune. From his description of his encounter he was clearly acquainted with her, but whether previous to this meeting he was her confessor is not obvious.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, it was as a result Arnaldo's interest, as he explicitly mentioned, that her experience was recorded:

The true motive and reason why I began to write is, for my part, the following. On one occasion, Christ's faithful one had come to the church of Saint Francis in Assisi where I was dwelling in the convent. While she was sitting in the entrance of the doors to the church, she began to scream. It was for this reason that I, who was her confessor, relative and still her

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<sup>34</sup> While editors differ on which of the *Instruzione* can be assigned to Arnaldo, most agree that because of the lack of knowledge of the later authors of the *Instruzione*, it is a significantly less reliable portrait of Angela's teachings and spiritual experience. For example, ins. 27 (written c. 1305) schematised her spiritual ascent in a manner inconsistent with the rest of her writings. See C. Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A. in the composition of Angela of Foligno's *Memoriale*, *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, eds. E.A. Matter & J. Coakley, (Philadelphia, 1994) 36; Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel *Liber* della beata Angela," ed., *Angela da Foligno: Terziaria Francescana*, (Spoleto, 1992) 167; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Even his name, Arnaldo, is disputed. The scribe's name was never mentioned explicitly in the text and the approbation that accompanied the work only referred to "as a certain trustworthy friar minor who wrote with utmost care and devotion, what was dictated to him by a certain follower of Christ." In two fifteenth century manuscripts he was referred to as Adamo, while an Avignon manuscript called him Arnaldus, which was repeated by Boccolini, *B. Angela Fulginatis vita et opuscula, cum duplici prologo, V. F. Arnaldi Ord. Minorum*, (Foligno, 1714). Later writers and editors suggest other names: Lavaud posited Aimè in *La vie spirituelle*, 32 (1927): 508; Bordoni suggested Arnaldo and Arnolfo in, *Angela da Foligno, Magistra Theologorum* (Foligno 1902): 8; R. Pieau thought Armand in, *Vie de sainte Angèle de Foligno* (Paris, 1863); and G. Joergensen as Arnolfo, *In excelsis* (2nd edition, Florence, 1925): 94. Recently, Sensi has linked him with a certain Andrea, a Franciscan who played key diplomatic role in the wars between Foligno and Perugia during Angela's lifetime, "La beata Angela," 43.

principal and only advisor, was greatly ashamed, especially since many brothers, who knew both me and her, had come to that place to see her screaming and shrieking...So great was my pride and my arrogant shame that out of embarrassment I did not go up to her; rather with shame and indignation I waited a little for her screaming to cease and I remained at a distance. Even after she ceased from her noisy crying, arose from that door, and came over to me, I could scarcely speak calmly to her. I told her that never again was she to dare to return to Assisi, the place where this evil had befallen her, and I told her companions that they should never bring her there.<sup>37</sup>

It was Arnaldo who pressed her for an explanation of her unseemly behaviour, as he was troubled, fearing she might have been under the influence of an evil spirit. Angela did not seek out Arnaldo; rather, it was to satisfy his curiosity, that she related her experiences.

When I, brother, had returned from Assisi to our land, the homeland of Christ's faithful one, I began to question and to force her [*cogere*] with all by powers and by means of all the ways in which I knew she was obliged to me, that she recount to me thoroughly the reason and motive for her screaming and shrieking in the church of St. Francis. And thus constrained by me ...she began to relate [what had happened].<sup>38</sup>

Arnaldo, then returned to Foligno, probably after the provincial chapter on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1292, and began writing the *Memoriale* that was completed in 1296. He started with the screaming episode in Assisi, which was labelled as the 20<sup>th</sup> step of her spiritual journey. The earlier steps, 1st to 19<sup>th</sup>, were recorded later when Arnaldo became curious about her spiritual progress before then, and eventually formed Chapter 1 of the completed work. Chapter 2 summarised chapters 3 to 9, which concentrated on the last seven steps of her mystical ascent, i.e. steps 20 to 26, and mentioned the reasons why he began to write her *Memoriale*. Chapter 3 is a record of the 20<sup>th</sup> step and contains the earliest notes about her conversion in Assisi and the time immediately afterward. Chapters 4 to 9 were forged as they continued their writing relationship, and they would meet while Angela experienced each of the stages, so writing and spiritual progress occurred simultaneously. These steps he re-labelled as seven supplementary steps, and form the majority of the completed work.

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<sup>36</sup> Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.2, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 168-170; as cited in Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 3, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 176.

Not only was the project initiated by Arnaldo, but the process of recording her experience situated the work within Arnaldo's own framework of reference. Despite his protestations that authorship belonged solely to Angela, the work was not copied simply *verbatim*, nor entirely in her presence. It was translated from her emotive Umbrian dialect to more formal Latin, and Arnaldo's interruptions, elisions, and amplifications reflected his own concerns for her spiritual progress. With an eye for her future reputation, it is highly plausible that he developed a second major redaction from his initial transcription to promote Angela's spiritual achievement.<sup>39</sup>

Arnaldo claimed that he wrote only when seated near her, so that she was available for consultation, thus giving the impression that he had produced an accurate contemporaneous narrative of her experiences:

Since at that time I experienced in myself a special and new grace from God one I had never before experienced, I wrote with great reverence and fear so as to add nothing of my own, not a single word unless I had heard it straight from the mouth of the one telling me, nor did I want to write anything after I left her. Rather, when I wrote seated near her, I would make her repeat again and again the words which I should write.<sup>40</sup>

Again, in the epilogue of the *Memoriale*, Arnaldo defended carefully the manner in which he recorded the work, emphasising his faithfulness to Angela's words and the text's overall accuracy:

I took the greatest care to note accurately her very own words, as well as I could grasp them, not wanting to write anything more after I had left her. I did not know how to go about writing anything afterward, for I was very careful and fearful lest I might perhaps add something, even a single word, that she had not really said. Furthermore, I always reread to her what I wrote, repeating it many times, so that I would be sure to take down only her very own words.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Many of these themes were highlighted in Mooney's influential article, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 34-63.

<sup>40</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 2, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 170-172; Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 39.

<sup>41</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 9, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 398-400; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 217.

However, it is worth noting the variations in the process of recording Angela's spiritual experience. During the period of transcription, 1292-1296, Angela's contemporaneous experiences were recorded in extensive detail, so that one might suppose that the rendering of the last seven supplementary steps was particularly accurate. However, the manner in which the earlier steps were recorded reflected a change in how her experiences were communicated. In the first twenty steps, Arnaldo had to rely on Angela's memory to describe her previous progression. As a result, these steps were significantly briefer, at most summarised in a paragraph when compared to the pages devoted to her later spiritual progression. As Angela relied on a less immediate recall of events, the completed work gives the impression that the earlier steps were less spiritually significant, and upsets the overall work's autobiographical cohesiveness.

Even when recording her contemporaneous experience within her presence, Arnaldo, at points, articulated his lack of understanding of her experience and a subsequent failure to render accurately her spoken words into written form:

In truth, I could grasp so little which I could then write regarding [Angela's divine secrets] that I considered and perceived myself to be like a sieve or sifter which does not retain the fine and precious flour, but only the most coarse...

And this will show the extent to which I was incapable of grasping her divine words except in the roughest manner: once, when I was writing the words just as I understood them straight from her own mouth, and I was reading back to her the words that I had written so that she could continue her dictation, she told me in amazement that she did not recognise them. And another time she put it this way: "Your words remind me of what I said to you, but the writing is quite obscure because the words you read to me do not convey the intended meaning; for that reason, your writing is obscure." Similarly, another time she said: "What is inconsequential and meaningless you have written, while concerning the precious experience of my soul, you have written nothing."<sup>42</sup>

Having admitted that his transcription failed, at certain points, to fit her experience, Arnaldo had difficulty in his desire to represent her experience in as complete a form as possible. For this reason, at the beginning of the fifth supplementary step, he entrusted a boy with transcribing her words in the vernacular, when the provincial minister forbade Arnaldo to have

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<sup>42</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 2 & ch. 4, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 170-72; 222.

contact with Angela in 1294. With even less skill than Arnaldo, the boy's effort was judged as inadequate:

As a consequence, it was very incompetent and badly written, so much so that when I read it to Christ's faithful one once, I heard her say that I should destroy it rather than transcribe it in that state.<sup>43</sup>

However, Arnaldo ignored Angela's explicit instruction, translated and included the section, even though she clearly believed that the transcription had not reflected accurately her experience.<sup>44</sup>

In part, the variation in the quality of Arnaldo's record of Angela's speech can be explained by the pressures of immediate translation from her Umbrian dialect to stiff and formal Latin. Angela spoke in her Umbrian dialect and Arnaldo translated her words into simple rough Latin. When Arnaldo did not properly understand a concept, she had to repeat it taking care to eliminate all that might distort the meaning of her idea, or otherwise Arnaldo reproduced it in as equivocal and inexact form. Often Angela's description of her thoughts was tentative, as supernatural experiences were difficult to express in human language. The abundance of Umbrian words through the text indicated that Arnaldo hurriedly transcribed such expressions he could not translate immediately into Latin.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the rigid style of Arnaldo's Latin seemed to have lessened the emotional impact and, as a consequence, the overall meaning of her Umbrian speech:

Christ's faithful one told me the above stated things in other words, certainly more copious, efficacious, and illuminating...For that reason, when I read [what I had written] back to her, she said that I had written it not fully, but on the contrary drily and incompletely, although she would later confirm that what I had written was true.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 7, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 288.

<sup>44</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 7, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 288.

<sup>45</sup> Other evidence in favour of Arnaldo's immediate translation from Italian to Latin was that the languages' word order were so similar that the process of translation would not have been excessively problematic. See Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words and the portrayal of holy women and men in fourteenth-century Italian hagiography," Ph.D. diss., (Yale, 1991) 73; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 35; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 49; Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel *Liber*," 168-70.

<sup>46</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 4, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 222.

Mooney has also argued that Arnaldo lessened the immediacy of Angela's experience in translation by writing about her in the third person. At end of the major redaction, after having composed and revised the majority of the work, he commented:

She spoke concerning herself in the first person, but it sometimes happened that I would write in the third person on account of my haste, and I still have not corrected it.<sup>47</sup>

Mooney inferred from this that Arnaldo himself emphasised his role as a supportive, but outside listener, and was conscious that he was receiving another person's report of events. She concluded that the comments made in the first person may not all be straightforward simultaneous transcription, but later revisions by Arnaldo; and that he recognised his role as a third party in the production of the text. I suspect the reason Arnaldo transcribed into the third person was more straightforward and less self-conscious. It would have been much easier to conjugate in the third person when writing at speed rather than in the first as it limited the number of Latin endings he needed to remember. This interpretation is borne out in chapter 2 when he again mentioned the process of transcription:

I wrote in the third person, although she always spoke to me concerning herself in the first person. But, *in order to go faster, I sometimes left my text in the third person*, and I have not yet corrected it.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, it is possible to regard Arnaldo's transcriptions in the third person as generally reliable and accurate descriptions of Angela's narrative.

Crucially, the process of producing an accurate record of Angela's experience can be examined not only in the negative light of Arnaldo's failings, but also in the positive contribution he made to shape the finished work. His consistent questioning resulted in a series of interruptions, elisions, deviations and amplifications of Angela's spoken narrative.

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<sup>47</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 9, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 400, as cited by Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 42.



First, a framework of reference was formulated in the choice of questions he posed her, which reflected his own interests and concerns. Many editors and writers on Angela failed to account for the influence his persistent questioning may have had on mediating her experience. Guarnieri's assessment of the work, as a "true and authentic 'author's text'", reflects many typical assumptions of the insignificance of Arnaldo's contribution.<sup>49</sup> At best historians, such as McGinn, while acknowledging that Arnaldo had a minor role to play in the production of the work, consider discerning precisely what this role was as unachievable:

The best avenue of approach to the text is to recognise the fact that the main 'author', Angela, and Brother A., (whoever he may have been), the 'co-protagonist' of her communications from God, were both struggling, through different ways, with the impossible but necessary task of finding words to express the Unknown Nothing" (*nihil incognitum*) she had encountered. Therefore, we should not wonder that trying to sort out the exact contribution of each to the text has proven to be a fascinating but perhaps an inconclusive task.<sup>50</sup>

McGinn pays lip-service to the dynamic of production but does not really address the task set. I think we can be more concrete in our conclusions about Angela and Arnaldo's contributions. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Summerfield's awareness of discomposure in oral sources outlines just how influential the framing of questions were. Fortunately, Arnaldo did ask her specific questions on her experience and from them we see less of an impartial recorder and more of the framework of reference he himself constructed, and how this influenced the transmission of her spiritual experience. By exploring an example of how he framed his questions, we can see clearly how he moulded her ideas.

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<sup>48</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 2, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 172: "Et illud quod ego scripsi in tertia persona, ipsa dicebat semper, loquendo de se, in prima persone, sed accidebat mihi quod ego scribebam in tertia persona propter festinationem et adhuc non correxi illud"; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 137

<sup>49</sup> This stance was echoed in Lachance's earlier study, who wrote that the *Memoriale* "has the advantage of adhering to the living testimony of Angela herself and, as far as can be determined, is free from the reverent and corrupting emendations of medieval hagiography." Lachance, *The Spiritual Journey of Blessed Angela of Foligno according to the Memorial of Frater A.*, (Rome, 1984) 9. Or Coakley, "Arnold had had early doubts about her genuineness but over came these to display an almost grovelling adulation, and although he heard her confession and gave her the Eucharist, he served her rather as obedient scribe than as spiritual director." Coakley, "Gender and the authority of friars," 458. Interestingly, an opposing view has been developed by, for example, Jacques Dalarun who claimed the representation of Angela was so idealised as no longer to be recognised as validly historical. "Angèle de Foligno a-t-elle existé," *Alla Signoria: Mélanges offerts à Nöelle de la Blanchardière*, (Rome, 1995) 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> B. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: men and women in the new mysticism, 1200-1300*. Presence of God: a history of Western Christian Mysticism, Vol. 3, (New York, 1998) 143.

In particular, Arnaldo seemed concerned that Angela's experience remained within theologically orthodox boundaries. For example, Arnaldo questioned her theological soundness on the Holy Trinity. During her conversion experience at Assisi she mentioned that on her journey there from Assisi she was in constant colloquy with the Holy Spirit. But Arnaldo digressed, spotting what he feared might be Angela's inability to distinguish between the Spirit and Christ:

I, brother, who, unworthy, wrote these divine words, interrogated her asking how she had been told in the preceding revelation "I am the Holy Spirit," and then shortly afterward been told "I am the one who was crucified for you."<sup>51</sup>

Having suggested her inaccuracy, she was left to ponder it and when returning to Arnaldo, it seems that she was guided by God to seek an explanation of the Trinity from her confessor. In this manner, Arnaldo's anxiety that she might fall into error was addressed, but only by Angela accepting his conceptualisation of the Trinity. Whether Angela actually agreed with his formula was not important, as she had been instructed by God to follow her confessor's doctrine:

After this interrogation, she returned home. Later she came back to me and responded thus: "After I went home and began to think because I had a doubt about what you asked me. Since I know that I am entirely unworthy, whenever a doubt is suggested I doubt. And while I was thus doubting, I heard this answer: 'Ask him, Brother A, to explain why you were told: "The Trinity has come into you." Repeat to him that it has indeed already come and ask him to explain how this is possible.'"<sup>52</sup>

That Arnaldo should be so concerned with her orthodoxy does seem to indicate that he had one eye open for her posthumous reputation. After completion of the work in 1296, Arnaldo presented the work for external assessment. He referred it to two friars who checked the authenticity of the work, by reading the manuscript and discussing its contents with Angela herself.<sup>53</sup> Only after this examination, was the work presented to Giacomo Colonna, who approved it sometime between 1296 and 1298, as a later approbation indicated his approval was gained

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<sup>51</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.3, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 190; as cited in Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 48-50.

<sup>52</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.3, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 190.

<sup>53</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9, "The Lord saw to it that two other trustworthy friars, acquainted with Christ's faithful one, read the text and heard directly from her everything which I had written. They examined everything and even engaged in frequent discussions with her. And what is more, God granted them the grace to be certain of its validity, and, by word and deed, they bear faithful witness to it": Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 218

before his excommunication by Boniface VIII in 1298.<sup>54</sup> His acceptance of the authenticity of the text was supported by eight Franciscan lectors, two of whom were inquisitors, along with other unnamed friars. It seems plausible that after the initial submission of the work to Giacomo Colonna, the work went through a second expanded version, the major redaction.

Thier and Calufetti have carried out the most exhaustive analysis of the transmission of manuscripts of the *Memoriale* for the critical edition. They examined seven groups of manuscripts, and argued that the *Memoriale* was produced as two redactions: the initial minor redaction they drew from a family of fifteenth-century Belgian manuscripts<sup>55</sup>; and the subsequent major redaction from a second family made up of the oldest manuscripts that also included a fifteenth-century Italian manuscript, which appeared to be an Italian translation of a lost Latin manuscript.<sup>56</sup> All previous editions and translations had relied on either a single manuscript version from the older collection, which made up Thier and Calufetti's major redaction<sup>57</sup>; or were based on the unreliable *Acta Sanctorum* edition, where the older manuscripts had been later reordered according to spiritual themes.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> The first redaction is drawn from five codices from Belgium. The dates were explicitly written in the manuscripts. Others, undated, have accompanying explanations. B1: cod. Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale 2864-71 (1409); B2: cod. Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale 11851-53 (end 15thc.); B3: cod. Bruxelles, Museum Bollandianum, Lat. 398 (first years of 15c. The work follows that of a biography of Sta. Margarita, where it was said to had been written on the feast of S. Peter in Vincoli, 1413); B4: cod. Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, Lat. 1741 (1485); B5: cod. Liège, Biblioteca del Seminario Maggiore 6.g.4. (c. 1420-1430, a couple references to 1424 appear in the accompanying mss.) Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 51-59.

<sup>56</sup> Subiaco ms. is the most complete, while Assisi was not finished by the copyist. Roma, S. Isidoro, has lost some of the folios. The most important is Biblioteca Trivulziano di Milano (M) as it is the Italian translation of a lost Latin ms., and is now edited for the first time. That the Trivulziano ms came from a lost Latin version is made explicit in two passages. Before the text begins there were two passages in the model of a vernacular prologue:

"...Priego, fratelli, i quali amate el Signore, che diligentemente atendiate quello che io, frate, el quale traslati de volgare in latino le dite cose..." "Io frate, che abbo preso a traslatare questo libro di latino in volgare, confidandomi dell'aiutorio divino per soddisfare alle petizioni de' servi di Cristo, gli quali non intendono lo parlare litterato, in prima dichiareremo lo mio intendimento a voi leggenti..."

The manuscripts were labelled as: A: cod. Assisi, Biblioteca Comunale 342 (14th c.);

I: cod. Roma, Biblioteca S. Isidoro, Convento dei Francescani Irlandesi 1/141 (end 14th c.); S: cod. Subiaco, Biblioteca Monastero S. Scolastica 112 (1496); M: cod. Milano, Biblioteca Trivulziana 150 (end 14th c./beg. 15th c.); R: cod. Rieti, Biblioteca Paroniana, Fondo di Fontecolombo 9 (15th c.); C: cod. Roma, Biblioteca Casatense 5100 (end 15th c.); H: cod. edito Girolamo di Praga (1425). See Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 59-60.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Paul Doncoeur, *Le livre de la Bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno*. (Paris, 1925); M. Faloci-Pulignani, *L'autobiografia e gli scritti della Beata Angela da Foligno*, trans. Maria Castiglione Humani, (Città da Castello, 1932); & M.J. Ferré, *Le livre de l'expérience des vrais fidèles*. trans. with L. Baudry, (Paris, 1927).

<sup>58</sup> The *Acta Sanctorum* edition is not worth examining as it was drawn from a third group of manuscripts, which though drawn from the second redaction have been completely reordered according to themes. The resulting work is a treatise on spiritual doctrine and the practice of it. Further, the editors also elaborated the more obscure points in the work. This version is too far removed from Angela's original work to be of much

Thier posited that a second redaction was produced for the following reasons. The text was amplified with biographical and historical detail (the addition of the notices). In the expanded version, Arnaldo ensured that all that was recorded had specific worth, and he added other testimonies to support the validity of Angela's experience (typically in the second redaction of the *Memoriale* there is the addition of the role of the handmaiden, Mazuola.). Structurally, he attempted to place the text into a independent thematic scheme with relative subdivisions (the re-elaboration of certain steps of the *Memoriale*, and assigning them specific spiritual meaning. In the 5th step the introduction of a passage on pilgrimage; in the seventh the introduction of a passage on darkness). And finally, Arnaldo tinkered with the vocabulary to improve the linguistic meaning of the text, so that one could better understand what Angela was describing.

The final section of this chapter will be a comparison of the Arnaldo's minor and major redactions, considering how he attempted to construct, with only partial success, a model of mystical ascent for Angela in keeping with Franciscan ideals.

### III

Angela's experience of mystic ascent presented a particularly difficult challenge to her male scribe and her clerical audience on several levels. Primarily, the *Memoriale* represented the collision of two strands of thinking, the written and the oral. The moments of discomposure in the collation and editing of the work reflect precisely this conflict of ideas. Arnaldo's own understanding of contemplative practice was predicated on an expectation of Scripture-bound meditation, and was typical of many educated clerics. Amongst Franciscan circles, the most influential development in contemplative practice was the new Dionysianism, promoted by Thomas Gallus. This strand outlined a hierarchical, text-based systematised reading of mystical ascent that excluded corporeal experience in the latter stages of contemplation. Bonaventura's *The Mind's Journey into the Soul* represented the culmination of this form of contemplation, and most probably provided the schema

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value. See, for example, G. Chaudière, *Angela de Fulginio, in quo ostenditur nobis vera via, qua possumus sequi vestigia nostri Redemptoris*, (Paris, 1598).

for Arnaldo's summary of Angela's spiritual development in chapter five of the *Memoriale*. However, such a model was unsuited to Angela's own spiritual development, which is noticeable precisely because of her non-literate background. Indeed, Angela's portrayal of mystic development centred on corporeal experience. Its direction was non linear and akin to an ascending spiral centred around the humanity of Christ and her own bodily suffering up to the sixth and penultimate step.

Two further strands in contemporary understanding of the mystic's experience complicated the composition of the work, affecting wider issues of learning and gendered readings of the *Memoriale*. First, Arnaldo's background as a Spiritual Franciscan made him aware of the increasing scepticism of acquired knowledge of God, in certain Spiritual circles, and forcefully articulated by Angela. Certain Spirituals, discomfited by the acquisition of "intellectual property" against their original leader's expectations, questioned the validity of knowledge-based understandings of God. Moreover, Angela's position as a woman, the flawed vessel of divine experience sent to challenge the complacency of their more educated supervisors, fed into this anxiety. Perhaps what has limited other historical representations of Angela's experience is the concentration of gendered readings of the work, without its full contextualisation within wider issues of learning and modes of transmission. Revealed in the *Memoriale* was, not only a conflict of masculine and feminine portrayals of mystical ascent, but also one between oral and written expression.

A constant throughout the *Memoriale* was the expression of the ineffable, a closer examination of how Angela struggled to articulate this experience and Arnaldo's attempts to render it in written form is crucial to any full understanding of the importance of modes of transmission. By concentrating on this topic, the extent of Arnaldo's contribution to the finished piece will become evident, and more importantly, by contrasting the model assumed by Arnaldo with Angela's own speeches, the moments of disjuncture reveal the innovative aspects of her vision.

The construction of the *Memoriale* can be described as the juxtaposition between the narration of contemplative practice, as communicated orally by Angela to her confessor, and his translation and transmission of her experience into a written form. During this transformation, the

strictures and assumptions of scriptural expression came to dominate the completed work. First, Arnaldo categorised Angela's experience within a tradition of meditative practice that was text-based. Arnaldo's model that he imposed on Angela's experience can be traced to the development in contemplative practice of the new Dionysianism, popularised by Thomas Gallus.<sup>59</sup> This thread of mystic theology assumed that spiritual development was linear and hierarchical, where corporeal experience of God was confined to the lower stages, and the intellect and rational mind a better aid to understanding; and that divine union was ineffable, thereby impossible to express in human words.

Thomas' association with the Franciscans was through his friend Antony of Padua (1193-1231) who had been placed in charge of the theological education of the friars by Francis himself. Thomas himself was a Victorine canon before becoming a friar in 1220. He had developed systematic Dionysianism, centred on the role of love and knowledge in mystical understanding. He claimed that affectivity excluded human knowledge from the highest stages of mystical contemplation.<sup>60</sup> He argued his case by comparing the Song of Songs with pseudo-Dionysius's writings, revealing that both asserted there were negative and positive forms of contemplation, and that affectivity was the superior form of knowing God:

There are two forms of knowledge of God. The one is intellectual and works through the consideration of the creature, as in the book of Ecclesiasticus according to the worthy doctor Master Hugh's exposition...The other knowledge of God, incomparably better, is described by Dionysius in the *Divine Names* 7...This superior wisdom is by way of the human heart.<sup>61</sup>

In describing contemplative practice and arguing that affective experience was a stage that went beyond the usual intellectual cognition of God, Thomas followed the tradition of Victorine spirituality:

“The voice of my beloved beating.” While I am thus engaged in spiritual practices, the voice, that is, the influx of the Beloved beating (I cannot express it any other way) sounds in a

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<sup>59</sup> B. McGinn. *The Flowering of Mysticism: men and women in the new mysticism, 1200-1350*. Presence of God: a history of Western Christian Mysticism, Vol. 3, (New York, 1998) 78-87.

<sup>60</sup> B. McGinn. *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 78-79.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Gallus, *Commentary II on the Song of Songs*, prologue, ed. Jeanne Barbet, *Thomas Gallus: Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques*, (Paris: 1967): 65-66. See also *Commentary III*: 107, 114, 122 & 128.

supraintellectual manner in the ears of my experience. It does not say that he is speaking, or persuading, because by the fire of his ray he beats upon the higher door, not of the intelligence, but of the affection.”<sup>62</sup>

However, Thomas, unlike other Victorine mystics, who saw intellectual knowledge transformed into affective experience<sup>63</sup>, stressed the separateness of the two approaches and defined a moment of cut off between intellectual and affective cognition.<sup>64</sup> Intellectual knowledge was not a preparatory step, a lower form of loving God, which subsumed, transformed into affective experience. Rather the affective cognition was a rejection of earlier forms of loving God.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, at this apex of affective union, Thomas departed from his predecessors, Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St Thierry, on the nature of this union, recognising that, as a consequence of the separation of the intellect from the soul, divine union could not be comprehended. In this, he favoured the idea of Dionysian ineffability, interpreting the line from the Song of Songs, “I am black but beautiful” as a representation of this ineffable union, “She herself speaks to these inferior powers in her inability to grasp herself, ‘I am black, that is, enveloped in a superlucous cloud of divine incomprehensibility’.”<sup>66</sup>

The success of Thomas’ vision of mystical contemplative progress, amongst the Franciscans, was reflected in the assiduous acquisition of his ideas by Bonaventura. His widely circulated treatises on contemplative practice, *The Three-fold Way* and *The Mind’s Journey into the Soul*,<sup>67</sup> draw heavily from Gallus’ theological schema, but as their purpose was as manuals for contemplative practice, he relied on the conceptualising spiritual development as linear progression.

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Gallus, *Commentary II*: 102.

<sup>63</sup> Such as William of St Thierry’s *Exposition of the Song of Song*: 92 “In the contemplation of God where love is chiefly operative, reason passes into love and is transformed into a certain spiritual and divine understand which transcends and absorbs all reason.” Ed. J.-M. Déchanet, *Guillaume de Saint-Thierry. Exposé sur la Cantiques des Cantiques*, (Paris, 1962): 212.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Gallus, *Comm III*: 111 “Scintilla siquidem, apicis affectualis, ... ab omni inferioritate ineffabiliter separata.”

<sup>65</sup> See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 92.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Gallus, *Comm III*: 129.

<sup>67</sup> 138 manuscript copies of *The Three-fold Way* survived. The popularity of *The Mind’s Journey into the Soul* was even greater with 299 copies in circulation. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 102.

The *Three-fold Way* emphasised how the practices of meditation, prayer and contemplation effected union with God. The explanation of the process was along Dionysian lines as purgative, illuminative and perfective. For example, when describing the role of meditation, he linked it with the monastic practice of reading (*lectio*), arguing that it was the first step that purified, illuminated and perfected the soul. Note that Bonaventura incidentally presumed that literacy was an expectation of initial spiritual development. In his analysis of the process of meditative reading he applied the tripartite process; the conscience purged the soul, the “ray of understanding” illuminated what was read, and the “little fire of wisdom” gathered the soul and lifted it up in union with God.<sup>68</sup> The role he saw for some form of literacy as an aid to meditation perhaps informed his assumption that intellectual knowledge of God was an essential stage in mystic ascent, unlike Gallus himself. While commenting on affective love he still insisted, although it was the “most noble form of elevation”, intellectual understanding enhanced the value of the consequent experience:

But in order to be perfect, it demands that the other precede it, just as perfection needs illumination and negation needs affirmation. The more intimate the ascending force, the more powerful the mode of ascent; the closer affection is to it, the more fruitful it becomes.<sup>69</sup>

The probable source for Arnaldo’s reworking of the *Memoriale* was Bonaventura’s *The Mind’s Journey into the Soul*. First, the number and pattern of steps that Arnaldo had mapped for Angela in the *Memoriale* mirrored that of Bonaventura’s earlier work:

It should be noted at this point that I, brother writer, with the help of God diligently tried to make the content of this narration continuous from the first step to the twenty first step...

From that point, however, I did not know how to organise the material, because thereafter I was only rarely and sporadically able to speak with her to write anything down. Moreover, since I was not certain how to number and distinguish any of the steps after the nineteenth step, I have tried my best to organise the rest that follows under seven steps or revelations. I have enumerated these steps according to the states of grace I saw Christ’s faithful one in or my knowledge of her growth in the gifts and charisms of grace, and also according to what seemed most appropriate and convenient to my thinking.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bonaventura, *De triplici Via*, 1.18, in Quaracchi, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 8: 3-18.

<sup>69</sup> Bonaventura, *De triplici Via*, 3.13, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 8: 17b.

<sup>70</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 158-160, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 133.



Crucially, Arnaldo admitted that he had not followed the spiritual progression that Angela suggested, and created his own model according to his own assessment of her spiritual development. At the point when Arnaldo began to record her experience, after the nineteenth step, he divided her narration into seven steps. He stated clearly that the framework of reference for his editing of Angela's experience was based on his own narrow conceptualisation of what she attempted to express.

Second, the choice of this source is understandable; not only was it disseminated widely, but some of what Angela expressed seemed to concur with Bonaventura's treatise. For both, the apex of spiritual union was essentially affective, ineffable, and available only to a select few. Bonaventura claimed:

In this passing beyond, if it is perfect, it is necessary that all intellectual operations be totally transferred and transformed into God. This is mystical and most secret; "No one who knows it who has not been given it (Apoc. 2:7)"<sup>71</sup>

Angela had similarly insisted to Arnaldo that her experience was inexpressible to any person who had not personally experienced union with God:

This awareness is of such clarity, certitude, and abysmal profundity that there is no heart in the world that can ever in any way understand or even conceive it... This state occurs only when God, as a gift, elevates the soul to himself, for no heart by itself can in any way expand itself to attain it. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing that can be said about this experience, for no words can be found or invented to express or explain it; no expansion of thought or mind can possibly reach to those things which are so far beyond everything-for there is nothing which can explain God. I repeat there is absolutely nothing which can explain God."<sup>72</sup>

Third, Bonaventura included Gallus' theme of dying of love in his description of the *apex affectionis*; "ecstatic anointings and totally enflamed affections", along with the Dionysian abyss,

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<sup>71</sup> Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 7.3, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 5: 312b.

<sup>72</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9, 1st redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 386, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 213.

“Let us die and enter into the darkness...; with Christ crucified let us pass out of this world to the Father.”<sup>73</sup> These themes were repeated in Angela’s narrative, and the connection of the two approaches seemed consistent. At the sixth supplementary step, she described being immersed simultaneously in the love of God and Jesus Christ. In this moment she claimed that she was “in that darkness” which she could not express, and when asked for further clarification from Arnaldo she claimed that she lay upon the bed, “namely, the cross where Christ suffered in his body and much more in his soul, and on it I have placed myself and I have found my rest. On this bed I believe I die...”<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the term that Angela used to describe Christ at this point reveals a final similarity between her and Bonaventura. She called Christ, the “God-man”, and seems to recognise that this was a central vision; “When I am in the God-man my soul is alive. And I am in the God-man much more than any other vision of seeing God with darkness. The soul is alive in that vision concerning the God-man”.<sup>75</sup> In this, Angela assumed that transcendence can be only reached through contemplating Christ as incarnate of both God and human beings. Bonaventura also described the point of transcendence in these terms:

...when finally in the sixth step it [the soul] reaches the point where it beholds in the First and Supreme Principle and in Jesus Christ, the mediator of God and humanity those things whose likenesses cannot be found among creatures,...it remains for it to surmount and pass beyond not only the sense world but itself in beholding these things...<sup>76</sup>

Despite some clear correlations between Angela’s experience and Bonaventura’s description of the *apex affectionis*, Arnaldo, by using Bonaventura’s *The Mind’s Journey into the Soul*, inevitably situated the earlier steps of Angela’s experience within a tradition that was literate, linear and hierarchical.

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<sup>73</sup> Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 7.6, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 5: 313b.

<sup>74</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9, 2nd redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 362-64, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 205.

<sup>75</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9, 2nd redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 362-64, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 205.

<sup>76</sup> Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 7.1, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 5: 312ab.

Arnaldo's arrangement of Angela's spiritual progression shifted the theological significance of her experiences to the last seven steps, that is, the point at which he took up the narrative of her experience. In this way, her conversion at Assisi was regarded as the watershed in her spiritual journey, while the earlier states, although they might be regarded as spiritually rewarding as the later states, were relegated. For example, at step 17, she had a number of visions, at step 18 she screamed at the mention of God's name, and as early as step 10 God appeared to her many times.<sup>77</sup> I suspect that the convenience of Bonaventura's stages of ascent appealed to the confessor's desire to clarify the apparently confused recollections of Angela, and may inform some of the questions he posed Angela.

When Bonaventura summed up the modes of perception necessary to experience God on earth he emphasised the mechanism of linear progression with the following analogy:

The universe is a ladder for ascending into God. Some created things are vestiges; some images....In order to come to an investigation of the First Principle...we must pass through (*transire*) the vestige which is corporal, temporal and outside us...We must enter into (*intrare*) our mind which is the image of God, everlasting and spiritual and within us...And we must go beyond (*transcendere*) to the eternal and most spiritual above us by gazing upon the First Principle.<sup>78</sup>

For him, spiritual progress could be categorised into three processes: knowing God through the senses (*sensualitas*), the spirit (knowledge of self), and *mens* (directing ourselves to knowledge of God). McGinn tabulated the *Mind's Journey* thus (summarised):

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<sup>77</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 2, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 136, 148-150; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 126, 130-31. As Mooney put it: "He inadvertently casts the day he intruded into her inner thoughts as a central turning point in her experience, and he correlates the beginning of their writing relationship with what he represents as the genesis of her most significant religious experience." Mooney, "The authorial role of Brother A.," 57.

Chapter	Gradus	Mode of perception	Object	Action
7	Apex mentis	Mens	Above ourselves	transcendere
5-6	Intelligentia	Mens	Above ourselves	transcendere
4	Intellectus	Spiritus	About ourselves	intrare
3	Ratio	Spiritus	About ourselves	intrare
2	Imaginatio	Sensualitas	Corporeality	transire
1	Sensus	Sensualitas	Corporeality (outside ourselves)	transire

Fig. 11. McGinn's table of Bonaventura's, *Mind's Journey into the Soul*

Certain clarifications that Arnaldo sought and comments he made throughout the *Memoriale* seem to confirm that he wished to locate Angela with this pattern of ascent. In chapter four, the 2<sup>nd</sup> supplementary step he seems to be trying to discern whether she saw God through her senses or in her imagination:

Christ's faithful one then told me that she saw God, and when I, brother scribe, asked her how or what she saw, and if she saw something with a bodily form she responded as follows: I saw a fullness, a brightness with which I felt myself so filled that words fail me, nor can I find anything to compare it with. I cannot tell you that I saw something with a bodily form, but he was as he is in heaven, namely, of such an indescribable beauty that I do not know how to describe it to you except as the Beauty and the All Good.<sup>79</sup>

Angela failed to respond or identify the implication behind Arnaldo's question and seemed unaware of its significance. Instead, she chose her own term to describe this experience, the "All Good."

<sup>78</sup> Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 1.2, *Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 5: 297°.

<sup>79</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 4, 1st redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 151-152.

Arnaldo also assumed the centrality of textual understanding in informing spiritual progress. He seemed, at first, reluctant to believe her visions without some scriptural authority. Thus, when she began to speak of her visions to a neighbour, she received this hostile response: “Sister, go back to Holy Scripture, for it says nothing about these revelations, and we do not understand you.” In one of his initial encounters with Angela, she asked him if it was possible that the soul could feel the presence of God in this life and began to relate her experience. But Arnaldo also rebuked Angela for her presumption and, most importantly, referred her to the Scriptures to seek her answer.<sup>80</sup>

The assumptions behind Arnaldo’s questions influenced Angela’s other Spiritual Franciscan followers. They also sought to clarify the stages of her ascent, as was evident in a summary found in the later *Istruzioni*.<sup>81</sup> Istruzione 2 regarded Angela’s mystic experience as a series of transformations:<sup>82</sup>

The first transformation is when the soul attempts to imitate the works of the suffering God-man because in them God’s will is and was manifested. The second transformation is when the soul is united to God and has great feelings and great delights from God which can still be conceived or expressed in words. The third transformation is when the soul is transformed within God and God within the soul by a most perfect union. It feels and tastes the highest matters of God to such an extent that they cannot be conceived or expressed in words.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 7, 2nd redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 318, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 189. The incident referred to occurred in 1292.

<sup>81</sup> The authorship and compilation of the *Istruzioni* (c.1298-1309) is even more complex and controversial than that of the *Memoriale*. There is wide variation in the number and ordering of letters or instructions amongst the surviving manuscripts. Although the critical edition ordered the instructions according to the M manuscript, a later fourteenth century Italian manuscript, and closest to the second redaction of the *Memoriale*, the B group of manuscripts contain the order in which the Instructions were originally written. Most commentators believe Arnaldo was responsible for only the first ten instructions (labelled as 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 22, 26 in the critical edition) as he died (c. 1300) during the production of the work. Further, the thematic and textual similarities with the *Memoriale* also indicate his authorship. Therefore, I have avoided the use of the instructions written after 1300 in any discussion of the authorial relationship between Angela and Arnaldo. But Istruzione 2, which was written anonymously in 1306, does cast light on the expectations of her later followers. For a discussion of the authorship and dissemination of the *Istruzioni* see Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 110-115; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 81-84; Menestò, “Problemi critico-testuali nel Liber,” 167-168.

<sup>82</sup> Lachance points out that the term “transformation” was only used twice in the *Memoriale* but is repeated throughout the *Istruzioni* (Ins. 5, 6, 7, 22, 32, 34, 36): 82.

<sup>83</sup> *Istruzioni*, 2; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 412-414; as cited in McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 144

Citing this extract, McGinn saw this as confirming Bonaventura's conceptualisation of mystic ascent, "This suggests a pattern somewhat different from the three stages of purgation, illumination, and perfection, but still one roughly amenable to that traditional distinction", and that process of others simplifying her complex itinerary was embarked upon during her lifetime.<sup>84</sup> As part of this, her later followers repeated and amplified the role of Christ as God-man amongst the later *Istruzioni*,<sup>85</sup> incidentally reinforcing the connection between the *Memoriale* and Bonaventura's pattern of ascent. In this, we can observe the anonymous textual community that surrounded Angela lending significance to certain themes from the *Memoriale*, aware of other written traditions on mystic ascent, and developing their interpretation of her experience on this scriptural base.

Nevertheless, a closer examination of Angela's *Memoriale*, as set against Bonaventura's pattern of ascent, calls into question, not only the idea that her experience mirrored the traditional distinctions of purgation, illumination and perfection, but also the whole scriptural foundation on which Arnaldo's interpretation was based. In the first place, Angela's own ambiguous attitude to literacy and her denigration of the value of scripture undermined Arnaldo's written mode of transmission. It was highly probable that Angela could neither read nor write. Her reliance on Brother Arnaldo as her amanuensis probably indicated that she was unable to write in Latin. Even if his motive was to lend her experience some level of formal validity with Arnaldo's priestly approbation, his insistence that a boy wrote for her in the vernacular during his absence supports the idea that Angela did not have the expertise to record her own experience in writing.

Whether she could read either in the vernacular or Latin is more controversial<sup>86</sup>, and even if the case could be made for some form of basic literacy, it is still evident that she consciously renounced knowledge in the written form. Ferré argued Angela knew some Latin from an episode, in the seventeenth step, where Angela was tempted to look at a missal "to see the word of God" upon which she was meditating.<sup>87</sup> He thought it was unlikely that she would have kept a

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<sup>84</sup> McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 144.

<sup>85</sup> Angela's references to Christ as God-man can be found in ch. 6 & 9 of the *Memoriale*. See Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 176; 205. In the *Istruzioni* this description of Christ appeared in Ins. 4, 5, 13, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23 & 34.

<sup>86</sup> One of the obstacles to confirming her literacy is that the *Memoriale* has no solid biographical structure. We know little of her background before her conversion, and as part of that her previous education is not mentioned.

<sup>87</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 1: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 150; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 130

missal if she was illiterate.<sup>88</sup> Mooney has countered robustly that his interpretation of the passage was not conclusive. The passage stated that Angela, “thirsted to see the written word- *et sitirem videre illud verbum saltem tantummodo scriptum*”.<sup>89</sup> Mooney argued that the substitution of the verb *legere* with *videre* was crucial. It implied instances where “seeing the word” was more appropriate a description of the process, such as the way in which an illiterate lay parishioner could follow the creed in Latin in a missal without necessarily being able to translate it. Indeed, a missal was the most appropriate book for an illiterate lay woman as it contains many prayers and phrases, which she would already know by rote. Furthermore, within the *Istruzioni*, there were references to *videre* used in a metaphorical sense, such as Angela reading from the Book of Life, or reading from life the life of God and Jesus Christ.<sup>90</sup> In any case, a book was often valued for other reasons that did not necessitate it being read, as a treasured source of material she was used to hearing, or as a symbol of religious piety; a spiritual ornament in itself.<sup>91</sup>

However, when the passage is cited fully, it reveals unequivocally that Angela was able to read and understand Latin, if only on a rudimentary level:

I was enjoying meditating on a certain saying in the gospel, a saying which I found of great value and extremely delightful. I had by my side a book, a missal, and I thirsted to see that saying again in writing. With great difficulty I contained myself and resisted opening this book in my hands...<sup>92</sup>

The problem of interpreting this passage from the *Memoriale* relates to historians’ misapprehension of Angela’s experience to support or refute the wider issue of female literacy. A more convincing interpretation is to locate the passage within Angela’s relationship to more specifically scriptural modes of understanding mystical development. In meditating she, at first, followed conventional forms of scripture-based contemplation. However, as she was caught up in a divinely inspired experiential understanding of the passage she had mentioned, she afterward denied the efficacy of scripture-based meditation:

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<sup>88</sup> M.-J. Ferré, “Les oeuvres d’Angèle de Foligno: histoire du manuscrit d’Assise”, *R.H.F.* 2 (1925): 480-481; as cited in Mooney, “Women’s visions, men’s words,” 70.

<sup>89</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 1: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 150; as quoted by Mooney (1992): 70-71

<sup>90</sup> *Istruzione*, ins. 3, pt.2.

<sup>91</sup> Mooney, “Women’s visions, men’s words,” 70-72.

<sup>92</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.1: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 150; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 130. The mention of an unspecified but definite passage from the gospel clearly refutes Mooney’s other contention that *verbum* could be translated as merely “words” such as, “God”, or, “Christ”, which an illiterate Angela could still pick out. Mooney, “Women’s visions, men’s words,” 72.

Immediately, I was led into a vision and was told that the understanding of the Epistle is something so delightful that if one grasped it properly one would completely forget everything belonging to the world. And he who was leading me asked me: "Do you want to have this experience?" As I agreed and ardently desired it, he immediately led me into this experience. From it I understood how sweet it is to experience the riches of God and I immediately and completely forgot the world. He who was leading me added that understanding of the gospel is even more delightful, so much more so that if one totally understood it one would not only forget the world but even oneself, totally. He led me still further and enabled me to directly experience this.<sup>93</sup>

In this passage she related a passionately charged encounter described literally through the senses. Angela did not seek to develop an understanding of the unstated gospel passage in a metaphorical sense, as analogy, rather she emphasised its experiential affective aspect. Whether she had access to learning was not what was at stake. Angela, through her own affective understanding of God, consciously rejected the accepted world-based understanding of scripture. Her conviction that her experiential understanding was truth was reinforced by her unequivocal conclusion that the scripture trained preachers were mistaken:

From then on, I was filled with such certitude, such light, and such ardent love of God that I went on to affirm, with the utmost certainty, that nothing of these delights of God is being preached. Preachers cannot preach it; they do not understand what they preach. He who was leading me into this vision told me so.<sup>94</sup>

It is within this context that Angela's uninterest in scripture ought to be discussed. There are only four points in the *Memoriale* where scripture was cited. One of these was an indirect allusion and in response to a comment by Arnaldo.<sup>95</sup> Of the other three citations two were made by Arnaldo and the only one which can be positively assigned to Angela was a stock phrase: "Behold

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<sup>93</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.1: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 150; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 130.

<sup>94</sup> Mooney "Women's visions, men's words," 72.

<sup>95</sup> "God gives according to measure..." *Memoriale*, ch. 9, 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 360; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 366. The citation was probably either Jn 3. 34, Rom 12.3, or Eph 4.7, though a case can be for more direct Franciscan sources, such as Jacopone da Todi's, *Lauds*, 87: 82. See Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 366, n. 138.



the Handmaid of the Lord.”<sup>96</sup> The lack of scriptural citations revealed a denigration of intellectualised understandings of God’s word by Angela. In one instance Arnaldo was puzzling over a conundrum that he had read in Augustine, on whether the saints stood in heaven.<sup>97</sup> When Arnaldo asked Angela about it she ignored him, so he repeated the question:

And then a wonderful grace came to her. After a little while, as I pressed her about the aforementioned question, she did not answer the question, but instead began to tell me, “Just now my soul was suddenly rapt, and I experienced so much joy that it is entirely unexpressible and about it nothing can be said.”<sup>98</sup>

Arnaldo’s question was put aside as he pressed her about this new development, and so Angela prioritised her affective experience over Arnaldo’s concern on a written source, trivialising Arnaldo’s concern for such an obscure point of doctrine.

In other instances, Angela articulated a more pronounced mistrust of the validity of scripturally-based experience. She saw scriptural understanding as divinely-given grace as opposed to a knowledge developed through the monastic practices of reading and reflecting:

Holy Scripture, she added, is so sublime that there is no one in the world wise enough, not even anyone with learning and spirit, who would not find totally beyond their capacity to understand Scripture fully; still they babble something about it...Because my soul is often elevated into the secret levels of God and see the divine secrets, I am able to understand how the Scriptures were written; how they are made easy and difficult; how they say something and contradict it; how some derive no profit from them; how those who do not observe them are damned and Scripture is fulfilled in them; and how others who observe them are saved by them. I see all this from above.<sup>99</sup>

Having dismissed the importance of scripture as an aid to contemplative practice Angela’s affectivity also has some implicit criticisms of Bonaventura’s hierarchical model of purgation,

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<sup>96</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.7: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 334; (Lk 1.38). See Betori, “La scrittura nell’esperienza spirituale della B. Angela da Foligno” *Vita e spiritualità della beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. C. Schmitt, (Perugia, 1987) 176.

<sup>97</sup> Augustine, sermon 213, ch.4 in *P.L.* 38, col 1062.

<sup>98</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9: 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 356; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 203.

illumination, and perfection. As her affective understanding of the unstated gospel passage in the seventeenth step illustrated, Angela, when considering the gospel, did not proceed through Bonaventura's set itinerary of *sensualitas*, *spiritus* and *mens*; climbing step by step along the mystical path whereby the intellect was progressively illuminated by the divine light and finally transcended itself. Rather her illumination was instantaneous; her proximity to God, even in the early stages of her spiritual development, short-circuited this process.

Rather, to comprehend fully the mystic development of Angela, it is essential to discard expectations of linear progression. At best, her journey can be expressed diagrammatically as an ascending spiral, centred on corporeal experience of Christ (see fig. 2). In this model Angela can be located within two spaces, conventional chronological time, and within her own cosmological spiritual interiority. The latter describes the lower and higher states of being in relation to God and her increasing self-awareness of these states, *liturgical space time*.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 9, 2nd redaction, Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 386; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 213-214.

<sup>100</sup> This term, along with the basis of this diagrammatic patterning of contemplative experience, is taken from Drid William's article, "The brides of Christ" in Ardener, *Perceiving Women*, 105-125. See also Roberta Gilchrist, "Community and self: perceptions and the use of space in medieval monasteries". *Scottish Archaeological Review*, 6 (1989): 55-64.

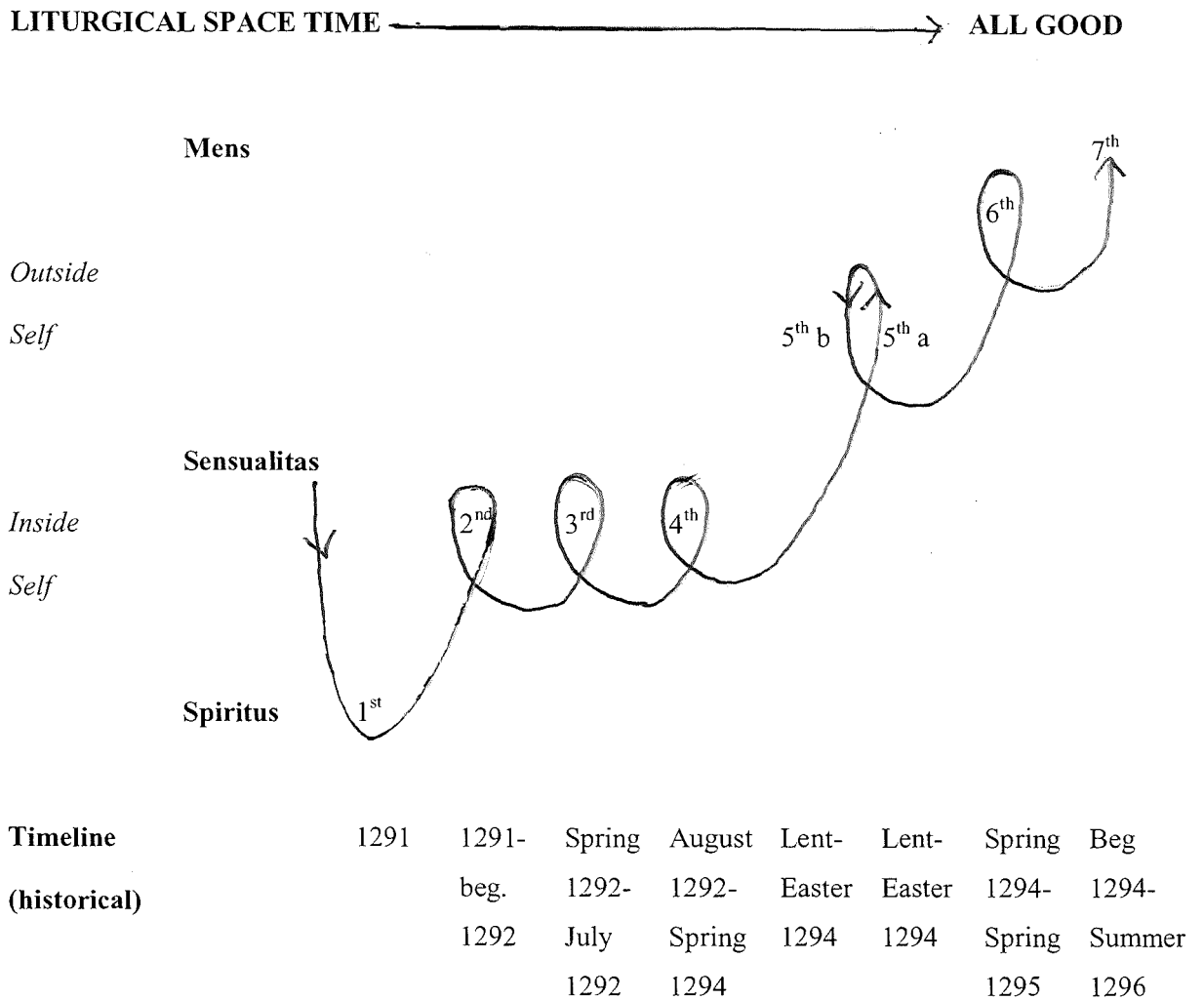


Fig. 12. A figurative map of Angela's progress in the seven supplementary steps of the *Memoriale*

What should be noted first is the difference in Angela's ordering of the stages of contemplative ascent. Purgation was not only the initiation into mystical understanding, but its central feature. Steps 1 to 19 (not shown) were concerned with her increasing knowledge of her sins, and the role of Christ's crucifixion in assuaging them, as would be expected. However, in the final seven supplementary steps, purgation remained a constant practice, up to and simultaneous with the first year of her experiencing her closest proximity to God, the seventh step.

The dynamic of her experience seems to progress in a spiral. In the first supplementary step, Angela, while meditating on the crucifixion, claimed that her "soul saw this vision" of the

divinity and humanity of Christ. When asked by Arnaldo to give a description of it she claimed that she did not know “how to compare the clarity and brightness of her vision with anything or any colour in the world except, perhaps the clarity and brightness of Christ’s body, which I sometimes see at the elevation of the host.”<sup>101</sup> When she went on to describe a vision of the Christ Child in the host, she argued that rather than seeing the host through the eyes of her spirit, she saw this with her “bodily eyes, as I did everything I ever saw of the host.”<sup>102</sup> At this stage then, Angela appeared to have vision both corporeally and within herself.

The second and third supplementary steps similarly reveal revelations she received through her senses and her soul. For example at the end of the second step, she recalled during the Mass she experienced the body of Christ within her soul that induced a “fire of sweet and gentle love”. Simultaneously, the presence of God within her soul had bodily repercussions, “all the members feel a disjoining...Furthermore, I hear the bones cracking when they are thus disjoined. I hear this disjoining more when the body of Christ is elevated. It is especially then that my hands suffer this disjoining and are opened.”<sup>103</sup>

In the fourth supplementary step, while relating experience through the soul and the senses, Angela becomes aware of an increasing intensity in the relationship of her soul to God, and a temporary falling away of the capacity of corporeal understanding:

For example, once my soul was lifted up in God and my joy was so great that if it lasted I believe that my body would immediately lose the use of all its senses and all its members. God often plays like this with and in the soul...The soul nonetheless remains in a state of great joy...I can provide no comparison nor give a name to what I see or feel in this experience. In the past this experience was usually different from what it is now, but at all times it is totally indescribable.<sup>104</sup>

However, by the fifth supplementary step she described God’s embrace claiming that it produced, “such a super abundance of joy” in the soul, and that this joy “has an effect which can

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<sup>101</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 3: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 146.

<sup>102</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 3: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 147.

<sup>103</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 4: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 158.

be observed in every part of the body. Everything that is bitter or injurious becomes sweet. Moreover, I could not conceal this from my companion.”<sup>105</sup> [5<sup>th</sup> a] Nevertheless, clarifying the role of the body at this stage, it was made clear that the effects on the soul were more profound and without it the body would be bereft of such experience [5<sup>th</sup> b]:

...that when the soul is made secure of God’s presences, the body is likewise made secure, and is ennobled, and restored along with it, although to a much lesser degree. The body, then, also shares in the benefits which the soul feels. The soul speaks to the body, bestows gifts on it and gently tells it “You see now what are the benefits that you experience through me, and how these are infinitely greater than you could receive if you were on your own”... Then the body, ashamed of itself, submits to the soul, and says it will henceforth obey it in every way, and admits how obligated it is to the soul for the great benefits it has received through it, benefits which the body feels and are superior to anything it could know, desire, or even imagine on its own. The body also makes its complaint known to the soul: “My delights were bodily and vile, but you who were of such nobility and favoured with such divine delights should not have cooperated with me nor allowed me to lose your immense benefits.”<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, at the sixth and seventh steps the experiences of the body and soul ran concurrently as Arnaldo admitted. The sixth step was devoted to the bodily torments that Angela suffered before her final transcendence.

I, brother scribe, observed [Angela] suffer more horribly in this sixth step than can be described. This sixth step, however, lasted but a short while, that is, about two years. It concurs with the seventh, the most wonderful step of all, which began shortly before it and which follows in my account. I also observed that what took place in this sixth step faded in a brief space of time but not totally or completely, especially in regard to her numerous bodily ailments. I further observed that while Christ’s Faithful One was in the seventh step, divine life grew in her behind my capacity to describe it. Though she was always very ill and could eat only very little, she was quite plump and rosy-cheeked. But she was also so full of pain, and all the limbs and joints of her body were so swollen that it was only with great difficulty that she could move, walk, or even sit. Notwithstanding, she believed that the punishments her

<sup>104</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 6: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 146.

<sup>105</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 7: 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 190.

<sup>106</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 7: 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 192.

body suffered were very light.<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, Arnaldo had been forced to include the sixth step and re-edited the section. Significantly, this was because he had not at first grasped its import when it was first related by Angela, perhaps indicating the lack of value he attached to her corporeal experiences at the latter stages of her mystical ascent:

As useful and noteworthy as I thought they were, I, brother scribe, did not take great care, nor could I, to write down, in this sixth step, the full account of the many sufferings which Angela endured, and which were caused as much by bodily ailments as by countless torments of soul and body which many demons horribly stirred up in her. But I did manage...to write some small part of her testimony of the sufferings she endured, as well as I could grasp them while she was speaking, sketching them rapidly because I could not understand them sufficiently to write a more complex account.<sup>108</sup>

Angela's experience of mystic progression was at odds with Arnaldo's expectations. She presented an alternative model prioritising her own bodily suffering over scriptural meditation as reflective of the humanity of Christ. Her mysticism was noticeable for its interruptions, deviations, non-linear progression and absence of intellectual and scriptural modes of interpretation. However, to discuss Angela's representation along solely gendered terms fails to incorporate the modes of transmission in the development of the *Memoriale*. Historians who have discussed Angela's writing have tended to view it as either typically a gendered or a genre-based work. Reconciling these two historiographic approaches to Angela's writings clarifies the extent to which her gender influenced the construction and circulation of the text. Precisely because of her contrasting experience, Angela's *Memoriale* had a particular didactic value for the Franciscans in questioning the increasingly intellectualising bias of the order. By contextualising the production of the work within Franciscan debates on the validity of acquired knowledge, the significance of Angela's innovative vision is revealed. First, she repeated concerns that Francis himself had on the place of education within the order. Second, the *Memoriale* influenced other writings by Spiritual Franciscans as an alternative way of envisioning God that challenged the intellectualising of the Conventual movement. Thirdly, Arnaldo, an educated friar who had to promote her experience to learned inquisitors, while maintaining the integrity of her vision, indicated how complex

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<sup>107</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 8: 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 199-200.

<sup>108</sup> *Memoriale*, ch 8: 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 199-200. Thier & Calufetti guessed that Arnaldo rewrote this section after having completed the seventh step: 336, n. 2.

canonisation proceedings had become. Arnaldo saw Angela as a chosen mediator for God to confound the complacency of male clerics. Angela, as the representative of God's message, was given the forum to rebuke both her confessor and other friars, while also acting as an alternative source of divine knowledge for her followers.

Coakley and Mooney have both represented Angela's writings along gendered lines. Mooney saw women mystics as challenging male forms of learning with an alternative truth:

These developments converged with the long-established philosophical, theological, exegetical and biblical traditions which tended to associate men more with mind, word and reason, and women more with body, intuition, and unreason or, perhaps more accurately, a state beyond reason...They tend to denigrate forms of knowledge conventionally defined as male-theological insight, scriptural exegesis, preaching and other word-related activities-and to exalt forms of knowledge conventionally defined as female-infused wisdom, ecstatic revelations and visions.<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, Coakley saw women as marginalized contributors, unless their male supporters recognised their visions as unique. By believing in women's mystic experience friars privileged such women by lending authority to the mystic's insights. Friars found devout women particularly attractive because they possessed spiritual talents they assumed they themselves could not attain:

...the fascination and sense of difference were focused on the women's relationship to the divine, which the friars saw as privileged, unique, and remote from their own experience.. Thus these friars' strong sense of difference from the admired yet submissive women could give them occasion to articulate their doubts about themselves and confront the limits of their powers; at the same time, the services which the women provided by virtue of their supernatural contacts could help the friars make up for those limits.<sup>110</sup>

In contrast, Greenspan and others have been critical of the divergent and generalising feminist interpretations that proposed that religious women were either internalising the misogynist

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<sup>109</sup> Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words", 11.

<sup>110</sup> Coakley, "Gender and the authority of friars," 449-50.

dominant cultural view or were consciously rebelling against its strictures. Instead, women's mystic writing should be understood within the context of genre as opposed to gender. Greenspan refuted the assumption that writings, such as Angela's, were unique. Rather they recall a tradition of hagiography that promoted the sanctity of a candidate, whatever their gender, because the primary reason behind the production of the work was didactic. In that hagiographic works were a model to both male and female audiences then they were successful in their didactic purpose:

Their autohagiographies offered imitable models for all humankind, inspiring their contemporaries, male and female to strive for transcendence. No doubt women writers employed certain conventions more frequently than their male counterparts (and vice versa); perhaps some spoke more effectively to female audiences. Nevertheless, in autohagiography as in other medieval religious literature, the sex of the author was ultimately beside the point

Instead, a woman's revelations were valuable in as far as they acknowledged and entered into a preconceived collective understanding of sanctity. Locating mystic women as rhetorical models of sainthood, Greenspan denied that their individual alleged experiences were relevant to the original intention of the text.<sup>111</sup> Humility was better explained as a rhetorical device supported by an expected saintly trait than arising out of a self-conscious desire to confound male complacency:

By acknowledging their weakness, women disarmed their critics, both because such acknowledgements had authoritative precedents in the learned tradition, and because that which women acknowledged was regarded as objectively true. For women, the convention was not an empty one, nor was it necessarily a reflection of feminine anger (expressed in irony), or self-hatred (internalisation of patriarchal attitudes). It was a particularly useful rhetorical tool.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> "Many women's autohagiographies began as oral recitations: confessions to a priest, revelations to an abbess or a friend, sermons to fellow nuns, words uttered in ecstasy. These were taken down by others, copied, translated, retranslated, and finally incorporated into holy biographies. In such cases, autohagiography serves the purpose of the vita-public, mythic purpose, not an individual one." K. Greenspan, "Autohagiography and medieval women's spiritual autobiography," *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. J. Chance, (Florida, 1992) 232. See also p.218, where Greenspan claimed searching for feminine selfhood in these works failed "to locate the many forms of women's autobiography within the medieval traditions of religious writing, they either give too little credit to its importance or exaggerate its ability and its intention to represent 'female selfhood.'"

<sup>112</sup> Greenspan, "Autohagiography and medieval women's spiritual autobiography," 221.



Humility was a sentiment proper to hagiographic writing as it avoided the perception of pride through self-promotion; it was not a quality that can be self-assigned. Moreover, the humility motif appeared in male works of the same genre.<sup>113</sup> In any case, the intention behind a proclamation of humility was to give women the space in the reader's mind to listen to her experience without prejudice. In conclusion, she contended that a gendered approach,

ignores one of the essential features of medieval religious literature: that an individual's experience was always ancillary, valuable insofar as it could teach, inspire or provide a model...Even first-person narratives...tell didactic stories in conventional patterns that conceal an author's personal *cri de coeur*- if a *cri* be there at all. The perceptions of individual feminine selves we hope to find in them may be completely submerged, or may not even exist.<sup>114</sup>

Greenspan exaggerated the importance of the conventions of genre to support her argument. Maintaining Angela's reputation as saintly archetype was not the only motive behind the production of her writings. Angela's *Memoriale* and the ideas developed further in the *Instruzioni* also contributed to the debate on role of learning within the order. Nor is Angela's gender an irrelevance: the writings articulated hostility towards her precisely because of her sex; her non-cloistered status made her, as a woman, a problematic figure; and her claim to typically male instantaneous conversion was unusual. In addressing these issues, Arnaldo acknowledged the gender difference between her and her audience, and it was he who consciously assigned her the unique position of questioning the limitations of her more learned followers, and offering them an alternative path to spiritual truth.

Angela's scepticism of the value of scripture in articulating her experience of God also reflected the thoughts and teachings of her model, Francis of Assisi. The legends of Francis

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<sup>113</sup> Greenspan, "Autohagiography and medieval women's spiritual autobiography," 224. Interestingly, Mooney seemed to contradict her position on the unique contribution of women mystics when she analysed the humility motif in male saints' lives. At this point, she argued against analysing the implications of role reversal along gendered lines, by presuming hostility to male culture. Rather, she pointed up the biblical analogy of David and Goliath; the weak teaching the strong humility, when male hagiographers criticised other male clerics, as educated and privileged persons. See Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 156

<sup>114</sup> Greenspan, "Autohagiography and medieval women's spiritual autobiography," 232. In an extreme position, Dalarun has argued that the construction of religious women as cultural icons negates any attempt at historical analysis. Jacques Dalarun has claimed that the representation of Angela is so idealised as no longer to be recognised as validly historical. "Angèle de Foligno a-t-elle existé," *Alla Signoria: Mélanges offerts à Nöelle de la Blanchardière* (Rome, 1995) 94-95.

demonstrated a similar rejection of human learning. For example, in his speeches and writings, he argued that unlettered brothers should not study, that holy simplicity confounded all worldly knowledge, and insisted that his gospel-based rule be followed to the letter and under no circumstances be glossed.<sup>115</sup> Celano's portrayal of Francis mentioned that although he welcomed the educated into the order,<sup>116</sup> and encouraged the friars to venerate Franciscan doctors of learning,<sup>117</sup> he also warned against excess:

Francis once said that a great cleric must in some way give up even his learning when he comes to the order..."Learning takes from many people their docility" he said, "and does not permit them to bend to humble practices."<sup>118</sup>

Angela's values acted as a reminder of the founding saint's intentions in the increasingly bitter row between Spirituals and Conventuals on poverty and its implications for the intellectual development of the order. The books and the buildings required to assist learning went against the Franciscan vow of absolute poverty. Furthermore, the recruitment of students from university towns made the order even more intellectually biased, resulting in their domination, along with the Dominicans, of Oxford and Paris in the late thirteenth century.<sup>119</sup> By 1260, the order accepted novices only if they were instructed in grammar and logic, and Bonaventura's justification for the evolution of the order mirrored this transformation:

Do not be disturbed by the fact that the brothers were at the beginning simple and unlettered men; indeed, this ought rather to strengthen our faith in the Order. Before God I confess that it is this that made me most love the life of blessed Francis—that it resembles the beginning and the perfection of the Church, which first began with simple fishermen and afterwards advanced to most illustrious and learned doctors.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Francis of Assisi, *Admonitiones, Écrits* ed. Kajetan Esser, *Sources chrétiennes*, 285 Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1981: 100; *Regulata bullata*, ch 10: 196; *Salutatio virtutum*: 270; *Testamentum*: 206; as cited in Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 102.

<sup>116</sup> Celano, *Vita prima* bk.1, ch 20, sec. 57; Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 102.

<sup>117</sup> Celano, *Vita prima* bk 2, ch 122 sec. 163; Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 102.

<sup>118</sup> Celano, *Vita secunda*, bk 2, ch 146, sec. 194; in Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, 517-518.

<sup>119</sup> A.G. Little, "The Franciscan School at Oxford in the thirteenth century" *A.F.H.* (19): 803-74.

<sup>120</sup> "Nec te moveat, quod Fratres fuerunt in principio simplices et illitterati, immo magis debet hoc in te fidem Ordinis confirmare. Fateor coram Deo, quod hoc est, quod me fecit vitam beati Francisci maxime diligere, quia similis est initio et perfectioni Ecclesiae, quae primo incepit a piscatoribus simplicibus et postmodum, profecit ad doctores clarissimos et peritissimos". Bonventura, *Epistola de tribus quaestionibus in Opera Omnia* 8: 336

Despite Bonaventura's optimism the Spiritual Franciscans questioned the continued acquisition of knowledge. The newly intellectualised order's justification did not sit well with the Spirituals who saw it as a clear betrayal of the order's early ideals and spoke vociferously against it. The *Memoriale* then was produced in a bitter and controversial climate where the role of human learning seemed at least wayward, if not destructive. If the *Memoriale* failed to fit Bonaventura's model of mystical ascent, then contemporaneous Spiritual writings may better reflect the values and sentiment behind her vision.

The *Lauds* (c.1297-1303), a collection of vernacular poetry by Jacopone da Todi (ca. 1236-1306), contained a similar uninterest in structures and explanations. He was an educated layman who became a Franciscan friar in 1278. His poems were written in Umbrian dialect, and written whilst he was imprisoned by Boniface VIII, 1297-1303, for refusing to recognise the latter's legitimacy as pope.<sup>121</sup> The *Lauds* were probably not circulated until his release in 1303. Jacopone's work demonstrated the Spirituals' hostility to learning which he regarded as a worldly occupation, and his condemnation of the way the Franciscans had developed was forthright:

That's the way it is  
not a shred left of the rule!  
In sorrow and grief I see Paris demolish Assisi,  
stone by stone  
With all their theology  
they've led the order down the crooked path<sup>122</sup>

Another work which reflected an alternative non-intellectual understanding of the mystic experience was the pseudo-Bonaventuran treatise, *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (c.1300). Again, it was published later than the *Memoriale*; the latter had been re-edited by the time this work was circulated. However, its geographical provenance, subject matter and audience articulated ideas similar to Angela's. The work was written as a meditative guide by an anonymous Tuscan friar for a Poor Clare, and was widely disseminated, with 217 surviving

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<sup>121</sup> See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 125-132.

<sup>122</sup> Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 31: 123.

manuscripts of which 51 were Italian.<sup>123</sup> The author's anti-intellectual bias was revealed in how this meditative work stressed the continuation of carnal meditation on the humanity of Christ, although he regarded it as the lower echelons of the contemplative experience:

You see how this meditation is carnal with respect to spiritual meditation. You take it up not to decrease devotion, but that fervour might grow greater things to which you ought to come, nevertheless, by passing through these modes...Let meditating be your whole and only intent, your rest, your food, your study...Even those who ascend to greater contemplation ought not to renounce it, at the right place and time...Remember, what you have read above, in the treatise on this kind of contemplation, that is on the humanity of Christ, that the Blessed Bernard, the highest contemplator, never renounced it.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover references to Spirituals within the *Memoriale* explicitly claimed that they were the true followers of Francis; the "legitimate sons". Crucially, the references to the Spirituals within the *Memoriale* appear only in the second redaction.. The first occurred in the second of two parables God told Angela of the importance of love for salvation. In this parable, an innocent father was put to death because of the sins of his sons, and that the sons grieved for him knowing the sacrifice he had made for them. God concluded:

How much greater then, O soul, should your grief over the death of Christ who is so much more than an earthly father, and who died because of your sins...What you must do is place yourself before [the cross] to find your rest, for the cross is your salvation and your bed. It is amazing how anyone can pass by the cross quickly and without stopping. And he added that if the soul fixed its attention on the cross, it would always find fresh blood flowing from it. *From this example, I understood who are the legitimate sons of God.*<sup>125</sup>

The term "legitimate sons" was widely circulated before it appeared in the *Memoriale*. It was first mentioned in the *Legend of the Three Companions* (1246), when God told Francis a parable where a king married a poor woman and reassured her sons when they matured: "Fear nothing, for you are my sons. If strangers are fed at my table, how much more you who are my

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<sup>123</sup> See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 119.

<sup>124</sup> Anonymous, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 99, ed. Peltier, *Opera Omnia Sancti Bonaventurae*, (1868): 12, 628, as cited in McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 119.

<sup>125</sup> *Memoriale*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> redactions (2<sup>nd</sup> red in italics) chap 5, 3rd supplementary step; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 161-162.

legitimate sons”.<sup>126</sup> The Spirituals took up the label as “legitimate sons” to privilege themselves as the protectors of Francis’ and God’s message of absolute poverty. Ubertino da Casale argued that those who observed Francis’ strictures on poverty were his legitimate sons.<sup>127</sup> More forcefully Jacopone railed at the Conventuals for their abandonment of Francis’ poverty ideal:

Bastard sons, cowardly in battle,  
Surround me on every side-  
How utterly unlike my true [legitimi] sons,  
Undaunted by sword or arrow!  
...Their [bastard sons] one concern is for ecclesiastical office;  
They have sent Poverty into exile.  
How utterly unlike my true [legitimi] sons,  
Who armed with austerity scorned the world!<sup>128</sup>

The appearance of the term in the *Memoriale* and the *Instruzione* not only confirmed the close association of Angela with the Spirituals, but hinted at her alignment within the debate on the keeping of intellectual property within the order. She is a powerful mouthpiece for the Spirituals, whether unconsciously or consciously illiterate, uneducated, a woman, and yet unfettered in her relationship to God. The most significant references to the Spirituals as the legitimate sons were in three letters written to her followers, which appeared in the *Instruzioni*, 22, 7 and 34.

The first circular addressed to Angela’s followers, ins. 22, was written towards the end of 1298.<sup>129</sup> This letter appeared to be based on second redaction of chapter 5, as this passage and the instruction were textually interdependent.<sup>130</sup> Thier and Calufetti believed that the letter was

<sup>126</sup> Anonymous, *Legenda trium sociorum*, ed. T. Desbonnets, *A.F.H.* 67 (1974): 127; trans. Habig, *Francis of Assisi*, ch. 12, n. 50: 934. The term was repeated in Celano’s *Second Life of Francis*, although he referred to privileged rather than legitimate sons, ch. 11, n.16: 376

<sup>127</sup> Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, ed. & trans. C.T. Davis, (Torino, 1961) bk 5, ch. 4: 435; ch. 7: 449-50; ch. 9: 471. Cited in full by Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 239, n.11.

<sup>128</sup> Jacopone da Todi, Laud 53, “The Tears of the Church on Seeing Itself Reduced to a Shambles,” trans. Serge & Elisabeth Hughes, *Jacopone da Todi*, (New York, 1982), 171.

<sup>129</sup> Angela made an explicit reference to her correspondence with her followers here. The instruction was written by Angela as a response to letters sent to her by Spiritual followers, c. 1298 “I find no pleasure in writing to you now. I am compelled to do so because of the many letters you have written to me.” *Instruzione*, 22; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 259; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 533, n.1.

<sup>130</sup> Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 600, n. 1. The reference to legitimate sons in the second redaction of Ch, 5 recognised the Spirituals’ true understanding of Christ’s crucifixion. In the same way, ins. 22 developed the theme of the crucifixion, as a meditative aid to recognising the import of Christ’s crucifixion.

circulated amongst the Spirituals to show Angela's support of them as the legitimate sons, encouraging them to transform themselves through a proper understanding of the passion of Christ:

O sons of God, transform yourselves totally into the suffering God-man who loved you so much that he deigned to die a most ignominious and altogether unspeakably painful and bitter death for you. And all this, O man, only because of his love for you.

Hence the true sign of the legitimate sons of God is their perfect love of God and neighbour...Consider, O sons of God, how the most pure and faithful was the suffering God-man's love for you, how he did not spare himself, but spent himself completely, solely out of his love for you. In return, O man, he absolutely wants his legitimate sons in the measure possible for a created being, to respond with something of the same purity of love and the same most humble fidelity.<sup>131</sup>

"Transformation" was a term of theological significance to Angela. It was only used twice in the *Memoriale* but in both places she also referred to the passion of Christ.<sup>132</sup>

More specifically, instruction 7 and instruction 34, both directed to the Spirituals, discussed the relationship between divinely inspired, humanly acquired and experiential meditative knowledge. These instructions prioritised experiential meditation and divinely inspired insight over acquired human knowledge. For example, instruction 7 concerned preaching and the use of scripture. In an oblique criticism of the Conventual movement, she argued that the source for divine revelation lay in Christ, and that books and learning should not be valued in themselves:

There are many preachers of falsehoods whose preaching is full of greed, and out of greed they preach for honours, money and fame. My beloved sons, I wish with all my heart

<sup>131</sup> *Istruzione*, 22; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 277-78.

<sup>132</sup> "I saw such deep pain in the soul of the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary that my own soul was deeply afflicted and transformed in such pain as I had never known before..." *Memoriale*, 1st redaction, ch. 7, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 181; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 287. "...my soul understands why in the soul of Christ, there was unmitigated pain, for when my soul is transformed into the passion of Christ it discovers such pain in Christ's passion that it too suffers unmitigated pain." *Memoriale*, Ch. 9, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 208; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 370. The theme of transformation was developed in the following chronological letter, ins. 7. (Instruction. III in the B mss tradition, although it was labelled as ins. VII in Lachance and in Thier & Calufetti's edition.) Speaking on the qualities necessary for the soul to understand God, she mentioned one which she attached specifically to the Spirituals; "The third quality is the one God grants to his legitimate sons, namely immutability. For the closer the soul is to God, the more immutable does it become." Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 261. Angela made an explicit reference to her correspondence with her followers here.

that you preach the holy truth and that the book you rely on be the God-man. I do not tell you to give up your books, but that you should always be willing to do this, whether you keep them or abandon them. I do not want you to be like those who preach only with words of learning and dryly report the deeds of saints, but rather speak about them with the same divine savour as they who had performed these deeds.<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, instruction 34, dated c. 1308, echoed ideas in the anonymous, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. In the boldest attempt to synthesise Angela's spirituality, the instruction assumed that divine grace and both the spiritual and carnal mediation on the life of Christ were preconditions to divine knowledge:

The soul cannot have true knowledge of God through its own efforts or by means of any created thing, but only by divine light and by a special gift of divine grace. I believe there is no quicker or easier way for the soul to obtain this divine grace from God, supreme Good and supreme Love, than by a devout, pure, humble, continual and violent prayer.

By prayer I mean not merely prayer from the mouth, but of the mind and the heart, of all the powers of the soul and senses of the body. This is the prayer prayed by the soul who wills and desires to find this divine light, studying meditating, and reading without cease in the Book and the *superlibro* of Life. This Book of Life is the entire life of Christ while he lived as a mortal on earth.

Hence, God, the Father most high, shows and teaches the form, the manner, and the way by which the soul can have knowledge of him, and can come to him through love.<sup>134</sup>

Of broader significance, the treatment of the forms of knowledge discussed between the Spiritual and the Conventual movements could be set against the changes in the perception of the value of learning at the end of thirteenth century within the hagiographic genre. Mooney, examining representations of human learning in the *vitae* of male saints, recognised a tension between the need for the care of soul, and world renunciation that was articulated in the new religious movements of the thirteenth century. This was expressed by the erudite men who produced *vitae* for men. Acquired learning, though neutral at first, became a stumbling block to further spiritual development. Male saints had to renounce, hide or transcend their learning to

<sup>133</sup> *Instruzione*, ins. 7, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 261-262. Written c. 1298

<sup>134</sup> *Instruzione*, ins. 34, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 301-302. It is difficult to ascertain how far Angela was the author of this particular instruction as it was written most probably a year before her death, and after the death of Arnaldo. It would be seductive to assume that the work was directly influenced by the *Meditations*,

advance. Even humility, a keynote in *vitae*, was transformed in the context of the value of learning. Male saints who now despised their privileged educated backgrounds were reported to engage in cooking and cleaning. Finally, the *vitae* themselves recognised that acquired learning could not express religious truth.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, nominalism also queried the value of humanly-acquired knowledge. Ockham argued that theology could investigate only the world that God had created and ordained; *potentia ordinata*. But as human beings were part of that creation it would be impossible to speculate on God's free will to create alternate worlds; *potentia absoluta*. Thus, all that was outside the *potentia ordinata* remained beyond the intellectual grasp of men.<sup>136</sup> The limitation of human knowledge to express divine truth probably informed the hagiographer's ambivalence in expressing the truths that came down to them in saintly testimony, anxious that the "divine savour" to which Angela referred was absent in the transformation of testimony to hagiography.

Arnaldo's own position recognised the Spirituals' ambivalence towards intellectually acquired knowledge and the trends in contemporary philosophy and theology that denigrated the capability of human language and knowledge to express religious truth. Nevertheless, in representing Angela's experience he had to resolve the disjuncture created in trying to express the ineffable in the written form. The significance of Angela's contribution was as a lay woman, who was chosen by God, she confounded the complacency of learned male clerics. Not only did she confirm the limitations of human knowledge, she was able to rebuke them, and provide an alternative source of spiritual truth.

Angela's writings do reveal a sense of her own agency and self-consciousness in her relationship to God. However, her position as a laywoman fully participant within the wider community, through her acts of charity, had to be justified in Arnaldo's portrayal of her actions.

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but as the dating of both works is at best speculative, it is probably best to suppose that the works reflected, at the very least, a circle of thinking that was sceptical about the value of humanly-acquired knowledge.

<sup>135</sup> Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 93. See chapter 4 for her treatment of Franciscan and Augustinian male saints. Although Augustinian saints, such as Augustine Novello, saw human learning as important the *vitae* revealed an ambivalence similar to that of the Franciscans on its ultimate value: 110-116.

<sup>136</sup> G. Leff, *The dissolution of the medieval outlook, an essay on intellectual and spiritual change in the fourteenth century*, (New York, 1976) 32-92; as cited in Mooney, "Women's visions, men's words," 99-100.



Angela provided the justification in that she had received direct approval from God for her, and her companion Mazuola's, work. Moreover, Angela deflected criticism of the possible impropriety of her remaining within the world by criticising preachers who only speak of gospel values but fail to act upon them:

“He takes great delight in you and is fully satisfied with you and your companion. Try to see that your lives are a light for all those who wish to look upon them. Those who look at you and do not act accordingly will be harshly judged.” My soul understood that this fierce judgement was directed more to the lettered than to lay people because the lettered have learned through the Scriptures the things of God which they despise.<sup>137</sup>

Also, in the relationship between her and her followers Angela, on occasion, was seen to exercise choice. For example, she refused the request from one friar to pray for an explanation to a question which they had discussed because his request was stupid and prideful:

She also told me, brother scribe, the following: Once I was asked to pray to God for something brother E. of the Marches wanted to know from God and about which he had questioned me. But I did not dare pray to God for what he was asking. I simply could not pray for such a request. For even though I, myself, would have liked to know those things, it seemed to me to be an act of pride and stupidity to pray to God about them.<sup>138</sup>

Crucially, this example was not included in the first version of the *Memoriale*. Arnaldo seems to have expanded the section of the *Memoriale* citing now four encounters Angela had with friars from an original two episodes.<sup>139</sup> The implications of expanding this section may be that Arnaldo may have wanted to reinforce Angela's potential usefulness to her followers as prophet and oracle, while responding to early criticism of her unusual status<sup>140</sup>. In her explanation to

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<sup>137</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 4, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 148; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 202. Arnaldo reinforced her position on the importance of action when he recalled her telling him that great teachers of Scripture were not to be commended but rather those who acted upon Scripture. *Memoriale*, ch. 9, Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 209-210; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 374.

<sup>138</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 167; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 252.

<sup>139</sup> Arnaldo added a question he asked Angela concerning a friar who claimed to know God through his creatures, and the example of Brother E. (the precise identity of Brother E. is unknown). Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 248-254.

<sup>140</sup> Such forthrightness did indeed lead to criticism against her. Angela mentions in passing incidents where she was persecuted by friars and Franciscan tertiaries. See *Memoriale*, ch 5, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 162.

Arnaldo for her refusal to Brother E's question she insisted that she had been graced with a revelation of divine wisdom, which allowed her to judge spiritual matters with the same wisdom:

While I was in such thoughts, my soul was suddenly taken out of itself and in this state of ecstasy I was first placed before a table, which had neither a beginning nor end... What I perceived on the table was divine wisdom in all its fullness, and from it I realised that it was not permissible and was indeed presumptuous to seek or want to enquire into the plans of divine wisdom, because that would be anticipating what it intends to do. In that fullness of divine wisdom I really became aware of how one cannot inquire or want to know the plans of divine wisdom, for it would be presumptuous to do so.

From then on, when I come across, anyone with similar questions, it seems to me that I have to tell them that they are in error. Henceforth, from what I saw on that table, namely the divine wisdom, I can judge with intelligence all spiritual persons and other spiritual matters when I hear about them or when someone tells me about them. And I no longer judge with the same sin-laden judgement which use to be mine, but with a different true judgement. This is why I do not nor can I have awareness of sinning with this type of judgement.<sup>141</sup>

Arnaldo may have feared that his peers disapproved of the subservience in his relationship to Angela and again brought impediments and prohibitions against his seeing her. Including more examples of other friars considering her personal experience in the *Memoriale* could only help her cause as an important complementary source to Scripture. Thus, it is significant that Arnaldo cited a discussion he had had with another friar and the latter's interest in Angela's opinion on the unnamed question they discussed.<sup>142</sup> He also mentioned that Angela received a spontaneous revelation concerning another friar's promotion.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Memoriale*, ch. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 167; Thier & Calufetti, *Il Libro*, 252

<sup>142</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.6, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 176.

<sup>143</sup> *Memoriale*, ch.6, 1<sup>st</sup> redaction; Lachance, *Angela of Foligno*, 264.

## IV

Angela's *Memoriale* served two purposes: to record her contemplative experiences and her relationship to God, and to promote her sanctity to a wider audience. The process of transcribing, translating and interpreting her mystic progression within the strictures of hagiography, highlighted complex tensions between her and her amanuensis' conceptualisations of the contemplative life. This transformation of the *Memoriale* stresses the extent to which hagiography is not a static genre based on preconceived archetypes but fluid, collaborative and relevant to contemporary concerns. Arnaldo's training as a learned cleric meant that he anticipated a Scripture-bound, linear, progressive ascension to mystic union. His expectations were confounded by Angela's anti-Scripture, affective, ineffable outpourings. For Angela's experience to be taken seriously, Arnaldo had to suppress his own initial scepticism and reframe his cultural expectations in a manner that was true to Angela's individual testimony but accessible to those who could approve her cult. Fortunately, Angela's revelations reflected a growing concern within the Franciscan movement on the limits of human learning and knowledge. By incorporating this concern, Arnaldo promoted her visions and testimony as evidence that the higher echelons of the contemplative experience were accessible only to those who received divine inspiration; learning was an irrelevance. In the long term, Arnaldo's approach succeeded; the *Memoriale* was approved by two friars examining the work who confirmed its veracity. The legacy of their collaborative work was the subsequent approval of her *Memoriale* by Colonna and the Spiritual movement, the completion of *Istruzione* where other friars recorded her revelations while she served as an oracle to other friars, and the cult established after her death.

## Conclusion

Male expectations and representations of contemplative spirituality often drowned out women's own perceptions of their religious experience. Clerics, in their monastic writing and legislation, reinforced long-held prejudices that the only possible role for women in spiritual life was as cloistered professed nuns. The formulation of a monastic rule for the female followers of St. Francis was founded on papal supervision, imposed physical and behavioural boundaries to ensure strict active and passive enclosure, and insisted on the financial security of all houses affiliated. The moulding of the Poor Clares, according to papal expectations, involved the whittling away of their early aspirations towards active charity, participation within the wider urban community, and their own founder's attachment to absolute poverty.

And yet, despite the prohibition on women leaving the cloister as stated unequivocally in Boniface's *Periculoso*, episodes in the *vitae* and witness testimonies in canonisation proceedings reveal that enclosure was not accepted unquestioningly nor was it universal in application. Other factors influenced how far claustration was viable. Although clerics attempted to confine them to private spaces, holy women attracted the attention of both lay and clerical audiences. Their saintly reputations meant that people clamoured for access to them, whether it was to effect a cure for the sick, to ask for hospitality from the convent, in search of divinely-inspired prophesy, or to find answers to controversial theological questions. Numerous episodes from the lives of minor saints, such as Giovanna da Signa, confirm the frequency to which women were subject to outside influence. Even in death, the relics of saintly women were still subject to great attention; as the *locus* of divine power, commune members celebrated their good fortune in having the divine patronage of a local saint. The transferral of the Poor Clares from the relatively secluded site at San Damiano to the basilica of Santa Chiara, and the inspection of Clare of Montefalco's corpse after her death, represent the treatment of saintly candidates as public bodies, to the detriment of the cloister's integrity.

Individual women's relationships to enclosure and contemplation are best understood in the context of the religious order to which they belonged. During their lifetimes, saintly women often defied the strictures of the cloister if it was not in keeping with how they had envisioned their spiritual priorities. Clare of Assisi's insistence on the Franciscan values of absolute poverty and the importance of involvement within the local community, resulted in her resisting Gregory's

demands on the separation of the Poor Clare from the Franciscans, refusing his offer of the financial security of San Damiano, and maintaining the esteem she held for her *serviziali*, as the representatives of the order to the outside world.

The idealisation of enclosure, as represented in *vitae*, had to be re-formulated in the light of holy women's actual behaviour, as witnessed in the canonisation proceedings. The proceedings of Clare of Montefalco demonstrated the discomfort of nuns' recollecting the early mendicancy of the community, where a lack of resources had forced Clare to exit from her religious house. The fluidity of women's religious affiliation can be seen, as although she recognised the Rule of Augustine, she maintained close associations with the Spiritual Franciscans and their supporters. Finally, Clare's transgressive lifestyle contradicted Béranger's contemplative cloistered image in the frequency and innovative elements of her preaching, which went beyond earlier models of women preachers as divinely inspired prophetic speakers. Instead, Clare drew her authority to speak out from her own experiential understanding of Christ's crucifixion.

The innovative quality of women's spiritual experience is best demonstrated in the challenges they presented to clerics on the nature of contemplation. If women were expected to pray and retreat to only mental reflection on their relationship to Christ, then they did so ignoring the direction of their clerical superiors. Arnaldo's training as a learned cleric meant that he anticipated Angela's mystic union as a Scripture-bound, linear, progressive ascent. His expectations were confronted by Angela's anti-Scripture, affective, ineffable outpourings. It was Arnaldo whom Angela expected to reframe his cultural expectations in a manner that was true to her testimony. Her denigration of clerical learning forced him to reconsider his monastic conceptualisation of contemplation.

These three case studies reflected the Franciscan understanding of women's contemplative spirituality. The image of the cloister, as presented in the *vitae*, hid a complex pattern of negotiation between clerical superiors and religious women and lay supporters on the significance of enclosure to mendicant spirituality. In the long run, enclosure transformed Franciscan women's understanding of the *vita apostolica*, but did not dampen their commitment to expressing their spirituality in their own terms.

ID	Name	B.S. citation	Other citation	Source type	Canonical status	Order	Cleric	Education	Wed
1	Agnes of Assisi	I 369	5: 173-182	A	SAINT	FRAN	CLR	NO	SNGL
2	Agnes Peranda	I 412	AS: 17. Sep	I	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
3	Amata Martini	I 936	3: I 50	C	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	NO	ANTI
4	Angela of Foligno	I 1185	AS: 4. Jan	A	BEATA	FRAN	LAY	NO	VOL
5	Balbina Martini	II 712	1: 188-189	G	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
6	Balbina the Younger	II 712	1.: 310	G	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
7	Benedetta of Assisi	II 1089	1.: 324	C	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
8	Clare of Assisi	III 1201	4: passim	A	SAINT	FRAN	CLR	NO	SNGL
9	Clare of Montefalco	III 1217	AS: 18. Aug	A	SAINT	AUG	CLR	UK	SNGL
10	Clare of lanua	I 412	1.: 291-93	I	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
11	Francesca da Coldimezzo	VI 1007	AS: 26. Mar	C	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	UK	UK
12	Giovanna di Orvieto	VI 556	BHL: 4289	A	BEATA	DOM	LAY	UK	ANTI
13	Gennaia or Gennara or Januaria	NONE	3: I 338	G	BEATA	BEN	CLR	UK	SEP
14	Margherita of Città di Castello	VIII 756	BHL: 5313	A	BEATA	DOM	LAY	NO	SNGL
15	Marina Villarina of Spoleto	VIII 1170	AS: 18. Jun	F	BEATA	AUG	CLR	UK	UK
16	Ortolana of Assisi	NONE	LTK VII 792	C	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	NO	VOL
17	Pacifica of Guelfuccio	NONE	AS: 24. Mar	C	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	NO	VOL
18	Mazuola	NONE	AS: 4. Feb	I	NONE	FRAN	LAY	UK	UK
19	Phillipa Mareri	VIII 754	2.: 16. Feb	D	BEATA	FRAN	CLR	YES	ANTI
20	Santuccia	NONE	AS: 21. Mar	C	BEATA	BEN	CLR	UK	SEP
21	Sperandea	XI 1345	BHL: 7825	I	SAINT	BEN	CLR	UK	UK

## Appendix 1. Database of female Umbrian saints in the thirteenth century

ID	Class	Family	Birth date	Death date	Birth place	Veneration place	Movement	Miracle working	Christ's teaching
1	U.NOB	OPP	1197	1253	Assisi	Assisi Florence	MONS 3	VIS	POV
2	UK	UK	UK	1281	Umbria	Spain	MONS 2	UK	UK
3	U.NOB	OPP	L.13	1254	Assisi	Assisi	MON	UK	POV
4	U.NOB	UK	1248	1309	Foligno	Foligno	HOME	MYS VIS	POV SICK WRIT CHAR
5	U.NOB	UK	UK	1240	Assisi	Spello	MONS 2	UK	UK
6	U.NOB	UK	1215	1254	Assisi	Arezzo	MONS 2	UK	UK
7	UK	UK	UK	1260	UK	Assisi	MONS 3	MIR	UK
8	U.NOB	OPP	1193	1253	Assisi	Umbria	MONS 3	FOOD HEAL VIS RELC	POV SICK WRIT
9	UK	PRO	1268	1308	Montefalco	Montefalco	REC to MON	VIS MYS	CHAR SICK BEG
10	UK	UK	UK	1319	Umbria	Barcelona	MONS 2	UK	UK
11	U.NOB	UK	UK	1253	Assisi	Assisi	MON	VIS	POV
12	UK	UK	1264	1306	Carnaida	Orvieto	BEG	MYS	UK
13	U.NOB	PRO	E.13	1293	UK	Gubbio	MON	UK	UK
14	UK	UK	1287	1320	Metola	Citta di Castello	MON to HOME	MYS	PREACH CHAR SICK
15	UK	UK	E.13	1300	Spoletto	Spoletto	MONS 2	UK	UK
16	U.NOB	UK	L.12	1238	UK	Assisi	MON	UK	UK
17	U.NOB	UK	UK	1258	UK	Assisi	MONS 2	MIR	POV
18	UK	UK	L. 13	1313	UK	Foligno	UK	MIR	CHAR SICK
19	RICH	OPP	L.12	1236	Cicoli, Rieti	Mareri	REC to MON	FOOD RELC	POV PEN
20	U.NOB	PRO	L.13	1305	Gubbio	Gubbio	MON	VIS	UK
21	UK	UK	1216	1276	Gubbio	Cingoli	PILG to MON	VIS	PREACH

ID	Christ's passion	Supplementary
1	UK	Founded monastery at Monticelli. Sister of St. Clare
2	UK	Left San Damiano with Clare of Ianua to establish Clarissan convents in Spain. Niece of St. Clare
3	ILL	Niece of St. Clare
4	PRAY	Visions recorded by friar, Arnaldo of Foligno. See AS
5	UK	First abbess of Clarissan monastery of Spello. Niece of St. Clare
6	UK	Founded Clarissan monastery in Arezzo
7	UK	Abbess of Clarissan monasteries in Siena (1227) and Vallegloria (1240-1248)
8	FAST ILL HUM REC	
9	REC FAST PRAY	Also known as Clare of the Cross
10	UK	Set up Clarissan monastery in Spain with help from friars
11	UK	Witnessed vision of Christ child which appeared to Clare at San Damiano
12	ILL	Seamstress. Contemplated the passion of Christ
13	UK	Husband was B. Sperandio, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of S. Pietro, Gubbio
14	FAST FLAG ILL PRAY	Despite illiteracy and blindness, she was able to interpret the psalms.
15	PEN PRAY	Entered 1st monastery of canonesses, S. Maria della Stella. 1265 est. new Aug. monastery, S. Matteo
16	UK	St. Clare's mother
17	UK	St. Clare's aunt. First abbess of the Clarissan monastery of Spello
18	UK	Companion of Angela of Foligno
19	ILL	Precocious learning in childhood. Established Clarissan monastery, under the supervision of B. Roger of Todi
20	UK	Husband became monk at S. Pietro, Gubbio. She was abbess of Serve della Madonna, and founded several others
21	UK	Before entering the monastery of S. Michele, she visited and preached at pilgrimage sites across Umbria and the Marche



## Appendix 2 . Key for Database on Umbrian saints

1. **Name** First name, then surname, or place associated with *beata*.
2. **Citation** Where to be found in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (BS), roman numerals for volume, then column number.
3. **Other citation** Alternative sources. Such as *Bibliographica Hagiographica Latina* (BHL), *Acta Sanctorum* (AS), L. Jacobilli, *Vite dei Santi e beati dell'Umbria*, (1), Butler's, *Lives of the Saints* (2), A.C. Dunbar, *Dictionary of Women Saints* (3), R.J. Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (4), *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ord. Min.* (5)
4. **Source type**. Period in which source the source is written:
  - A surviving biographies by contemporaries
  - B surviving notices by contemporaries
  - C contemporary documents or other information
  - D biography or other information from c.25 years after the beata's death
  - E information c.1 century after their death
  - F information c.2 centuries after their death
  - G information c.3 centuries after their death
  - H information very weak, even legendary
  - I contemporary notices and later biography
  - J information forged
  - UK unknown. Note this abbreviation for other fields
5. **Canonical Status** Whether *beata*, saint or venerable (VEN).
6. **Order**. Religious order to which the saint was affiliated:
  - AUG Augustinian nuns
  - BEN Benedictine nuns and tertiaries
  - CIST Cistercian nuns and beguines
  - DOM Dominican nuns and tertiaries
  - FRAN Franciscans, Poor Clares and tertiaries
  - HERM Hermits (unaffiliated)
  - HUM Humiliati
  - PRAM Premonstratensian nun
  - SERV Servites

**7. Lay:**

- LAY Non clerical *conversi* and tertiaries  
CLR All other religious, who have taken orders.

**8. Position.** Highest position achieved, while in the Church:

- FOUN founder of major order  
PAT patroness, founder of abbey or minor order  
ABB abbess  
PRIOR prioress  
MAR martyr  
LAY miscellaneous laity, including tertiaries  
REL member of religious order

**9. Education**

- Y Yes  
N No  
UK Unknown.

**10. Wed** Marital status

- ANTI opposed marital offer  
INVL married involuntarily  
SEP separated from husband and wife, while latter still alive  
SNGL single  
VOL married voluntarily

**11 Class.** Social class:

- NOBLE nobility  
PEAS peasantry  
POOR poor, unspecified occupation or class  
RICH rich, unspecified occupation or class  
U.MID urban middle class, merchant, innkeeper etc.  
U.NOB urban dwelling nobility  
WORK working class, labourer, artisan etc.

**12. Family.** Whether they supported or opposed their conversion:

- PRO support conversion  
OPP opposed to conversion

13. **Birth date.** Date by year. If approximate:

- L.12 late twelfth century
- 13. thirteenth century
- E.13 early thirteenth century
- L.13 late thirteenth century
- 14. fourteenth century
- E.14 early fourteenth century
- L.14 late fourteenth century

14. **Death date.** As for birth date.

15. **Birth place.** In full.

16. **Veneration place.** Where venerated, as for birth place.

17. **Movement**

- MON remained in one monastery during whole lifetime
- MONS moved between monasteries. The number of monasteries resident at appears in brackets
- REC in anchorhold or hermitage
- BEG in beguinage
- PILG went on pilgrimage

18. **Miracle working.** Supernatural powers:

- |      |                             |      |                                    |
|------|-----------------------------|------|------------------------------------|
| MIR  | unspecified miracle working | MYS  | mystical contemplation             |
| FOOD | food miracles               | VIS  | visionary experience               |
| HEAL | miracle healing             | PROP | prophecies                         |
| RELC | wonder working<br>relics    | SIGN | supernatural signs, eg<br>stigmata |
|      |                             | DEM  | struggle with demons               |

19. **Christ's teachings.** Followed the teaching of Christ, including evangelical activity.

- |        |                              |        |                                     |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|
| POV    | life of poverty              | SCHOL  | support scholarship                 |
| CHAR   | give money to poor           | JES    | support veneration of Jesus         |
| SICK   | aid the infirm               | MARY   | veneration of the Virgin            |
| PREACH | preach the gospel            | SAINTS | support the veneration of<br>saints |
| WRIT   | important religious writings |        |                                     |

20. **Passion of Christ.** Attempts to relive the suffering of Christ

FAST	excessive fasting	PEN	unspecified penitential behaviour
FLAG	flagellation	PRAY	excessive praying
HUM	extreme humility	REC	extended periods of reclusion
ILL	fortitude in illness	SIL	extended periods in silence
DEAD	killed while performing above		

21. **Supplementary.** Additional information thought useful.

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