

The Painted Panel Crucifixes of the Early Franciscans
as a Response to the Cathar Heresy

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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MAY 2016

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The Painted Panel Crucifixes of the Early Franciscans

as a Response to the Cathar Heresy

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Professor Marcus Rautman

Professor Jill Raitt

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude is given to

Dr. Jill Raitt, whose brilliant guidance through the Mystics
helped me discover the Cathars and my thesis

Dr. Marcus Rautman, whose enthusiasm introduced me to the joys of
looking further back and turning my attention to the East

Dr. Anne Rudloff Stanton, whose rich knowledge challenged my thinking and
guided my writing with pinpoint accuracy, and whose kind spirit provided unfailing
support

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Strange it might appear that the Arts, the highest luxuries, if we may so speak, of religion, should be fostered, cultivated, cherished, and distributed throughout Italy and even beyond the Alps, by those who professed to reduce Christianity to more than its primitive simplicity, its nakedness of all adornment, its poverty...Strange! that these should become the most munificent patrons of art, the most consummate artists; that their cloistered palaces should be the most sumptuous in architecture, and the most richly decorated by sculpture and painting; at once the workshops and the abodes of those who executed most admirably, and might seem to adore with the most intense devotion, these splendors and extravagances of religious wealth...Assisi becomes the capital, the young, gorgeous capital of Christian art.¹

-Henry Hart Milman

¹ Henry Hart Milman, *History of Latin Christianity : Including that of the Popes to the Pontificate of Nicholas V*, vol. 8, 1860, 479–80, <https://archive.org/stream/latinchristianity08milmrch#page/478/mode/2up>.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The art-historical literature is in general agreement that a major shift in the presentation of Christian imagery in European art occurred at approximately the same time the Franciscan order was in its early stages of development in duecento Italy.² My goal in this thesis is to shed light on the art-historical and theological reasons behind the Franciscan patronage of artworks that stress the physical and emotional suffering of Jesus. Specifically, I will argue that the shift in artwork produced by the Franciscan order was an outgrowth of the friars' response to Catharism, what was considered by orthodox Christians to be a heretical teaching that proposed Jesus to be a completely supernatural deity as opposed to a monotheist, yet dual-natured, God-Man.

The art-historical research points to the naturalism evident in the artwork of the period as an outgrowth of the artistic desire to faithfully emulate the work of God's creation. Michael Camille expresses the belief that "It is not just that Gothic art as a style looks more 'naturalistic,' but that nature itself becomes an integrated myth of meaning in the elaboration of its structure."³ While this environmental mimesis may play a supporting role in the development of the Gothic style, it is my contention that the cause of the evolution was the perceived need to remind the Christian faithful of the central dogmas of their religion in a compelling, even impassioned, way—especially the

² Two important recent studies which have addressed the influence of the Franciscans on this transitional period are Trinita Kennedy's *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy* (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2014), 2; and Anne Derbes' *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–2, 11. For convenience, I will use of the modern names of countries and regions throughout this paper.

³ Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, Repr, Cambridge New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 199. While Camille discusses this organic and realistic form in terms of architecture, it can readily be applied to the shift in the depiction of the human form as well.

teachings on the Incarnation, the dual nature of Jesus, and the importance of the Passion. To this purpose, my thesis will focus on specific painted panel or *dipintura* crosses created for use in the Italian churches of the early Franciscan order. All the crucifixes under consideration are imposing in size—at least 1.5 meters in width by nearly 2.0 meters in length—and originally positioned in prominent locations in churches. While they did not always remain in their original site, they were not intended to regularly move in procession or pilgrimage. These crosses feature the suffering Christ, or *Christus Patiens*, depicting Jesus' abused body very near to or immediately following his death. My argument is based on the ten extant crucifixes made prior to 1300 C.E. which depict the image of Francis of Assisi at the foot of the cross. We will closely examine three of these examples which are located in the towns of Arezzo, Perugia, and Spello. (The complete listing of these crucifixes and links to their images can be found in Appendix 1).

Even before the Franciscans, the visual focus for churches in Italy was the image of the crucifix.⁴ The earliest Italian painted panel crosses were created in or near Pisa. The *Cross of Maestro Guglielmo* in the Cathedral of Sarzana (1138) serves as the oldest extant example of a monumental painted panel (*dipintura*) cross (Fig. 1).⁵ This crucifix portrays Jesus as the *Christus Triumphans*. In this format of depicting the crucifixion, Jesus appears immune to suffering and death. He stands against the cross fully alive (despite the spear wound); his eyes are open and his face devoid of emotion. The main figure is surrounded by those of a stoic Mary, John the Apostle, and other bystanders, as

⁴ Amy Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," in *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trinita Kennedy (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2014), 38.

⁵ David Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 76.

well as smaller scenes of the Passion on the apron. The original position of this piece is unknown, as it has been moved several times and the church has been remodeled extensively.

Fig. 1 *Cross of Maestro Guglielmo in the Cathedral of Sarzana, Italy (1138)*
https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croce_di_Mastro_Guglielmo#/media/File:Crusifix_Master_Guglielmo..jpg
(in situ) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarzana_Cathedral#/media/File:Sarzana-cattedrale-altare4.jpg

In her book *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, Anne Derbes proposes that one of the greatest artistic transitions to occur during the thirteenth century was the evolution from the *Christus Triumphans* style of crucifix to the *Christus Patiens*.⁶ To examine the role these crosses played in the Franciscans' resistance against the Cathars, I will look at representations of the crucifixion created as monumental panel paintings during the founding century of the Franciscan order. Throughout this study I will address the manner in which these crucifixion images, by their graphic depiction of physical and emotional suffering and framed within their historical and theological contexts, implicitly challenged the fundamental beliefs of the Cathars, who were in direct competition with the Franciscans for both earthly support of donors as well as the competition to win souls for eternity. I intend to elaborate on the capacity of the evolving naturalism of form to evoke viewer emotion and support orthodox religious belief as a counter to the Cathar movement.

⁶ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 4–5.

§1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The acknowledged leader in the study of images of Francis of Assisi is William Cook. For his encyclopedic work, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi: In Painting, Stone, and Glass : From the Earliest Images to Ca. 1320 in Italy : A Catalogue* (1999), Cook traveled to view every known representation of the saint created during that early time period in the region in which the order originated. Cook also considers images which have dropped out of circulation for which there are photographs or only written descriptions remaining. While Cook's study provides a *catalogue raisonné* of depictions of the saint, he does not deeply analyze the artistic style or theological context of the full compositions as I will do in this thesis. In his brief systematic entry on each artwork, he speaks strictly of the image of Francis itself.

In her powerfully argued book *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (1996), Anne Derbes explores the reasons behind the significant transition that occurred in the portrayal of sacred subject matter. She uses the historical backdrop of images produced in Byzantium and northern Europe.⁷ While her focus varies from that of this thesis, she supplies a thought-provoking rationale for the expansion of the Passion narrative depicted on medieval altarpieces in the fourteenth century especially under the patronage of the Franciscans.⁸

In his much debated book, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (1983), Leo Steinberg explores how art has wrestled with the notion of Jesus' physical form, specifically his sexuality, as fully human. While Steinberg avoids mention of Catharism,

⁷ Derbes, 11.

⁸ Derbes, 2–3.

his theories will lend a certain specificity to my argument. Caroline Walker Bynum famously presented a response to Steinberg, which we will also consider. The two authors may actually argue in parallel with only the definition of sexuality dividing them. Their focus on sex—both as the procreative act and as gender—was a strongly contested subject in the belief system of the Cathars and played a pivotal role in Christological arguments of the day.

A collection of essays edited by Trinita Kennedy: *Sanctity Pictured: Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders* (2014) serves as an excellent resource on the materiality of panel painting and the uses of the monumental images inside church architecture. In particular, Amy Neff's important essay, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," elaborates on the theology that was fundamental to the creation of Franciscan artwork. She sees their use of images as having a dual role: an exterior purpose to interact with and educate the viewer; and an interior purpose to stimulate reflection and spiritual growth.⁹ While this author does not address the effect of the Franciscans' reaction to heresy, she points the reader toward the influence of the brothers' devotion to Catholic orthodoxy on the works they commissioned.

More concisely but still quite significant to my research, David Talbot Rice presented a fascinating guide to the evolution from Byzantine works to the duecento Italian panel painting in his book *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase*. Although Rice's 1968 volume is feeling the effects of age, it proposed a valuable connection between the Italian art and eastern exemplars. Similarly Hans Belting investigates the connection between Byzantine and Italian Gothic art in his seminal volume *Likeness and Presence: a*

⁹ Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," 42.

History of the Image before the Era of Art. Throughout this tome, Belting not only explains the material nature of artifacts and their historical settings, but he also exposes the philosophical motivation implicit in the artwork. Belting offers extensive research on the art of the Franciscans; however the religious order's response to the Cathars does not feature in his work.

Sara Lipton's article, "'The Sweet Lean of His Head: Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages,'" concentrates on the medieval act of viewing crucifixes beginning approximately a century prior to Francis. While her focus lies in France and Belgium, Lipton's wide-ranging research provides a map to trace the roots of Franciscan ideas further back to Benedictine and Cistercian influences. In addition to the liturgical framework, Lipton situates her work within the dialectical approach of competing theologies. While she mentions the crosses as a response to heresy in general, this article does not broach the subject of the Cathars specifically.

I will primarily draw from two sources for my study of the materiality of the *dipintura* crosses. The first is Umberto Baldini's book, *The Crucifix by Cimabue*, which studies the restoration of the crucifix of the church of Santa Croce after the 1966 flood of the Arno River. Although this text contained a number of art-historical inaccuracies, its photographic record of the multiple layers which form both the geometric schematics and the construction of the *dipintura* cross remains indispensable. The historical work, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, by the fourteenth century artist Cennino d'Andrea Cennini also provides insight into the traditional process of wood panel painting.

My main source for scholarship on the heterodoxy is *The Cathars* by Malcolm Lambert. Lambert supplied the first extensive English study of Catharism in 1998, for

which he drew from a 1974 survey of the Cathar presence in Languedoc by Walter Wakefield. Despite the sparse research prior to his work, Lambert makes the case that the Cathars' history can be validly reconstructed from the few extant writings that explain the Cathar's mission in their own words. Many of these insights can be found in Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou: the Promised Land of Error* which presents the testimony of Cathar believers in regard not only to their religious beliefs but also day-to-day life in a fourteenth century village in the Languedoc region.

The bulk of the theological underpinnings for my argument rest on the primary sources written by the mendicant friars themselves. While in their texts they do not explicitly name the Cathar heresy, their message focuses on the doctrinal orthodoxy that they contend is the correct and necessary path to salvation. The founder of the order, Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), left behind thirty-eight brief works including letters to religious and secular authorities, prayers, canonical hours, and mystical songs.¹⁰

Bonaventure (1217-1274) became the most prolific author of the early Franciscan order. A theologian and professor at the University of Paris, he was ordained as the Bishop of Albano and served as an adviser to Pope Gregory X and the Second Council of Lyon. He strongly influenced the Franciscan order when he was named its seventh minister general. We will mainly consider his scripture-based meditations on the biography of Christ entitled *The Tree of Life*.

¹⁰ Regis J. Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings for a Gospel Life*, Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 26.

A separate book, *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*, was long believed to have been written by Bonaventure, and indeed it is similar in style and subject.¹¹ However, the author of this mystical treatise has been isolated from the theologian Bonaventure and given the name Pseudo-Bonaventure. He was most likely a Franciscan friar writing in Tuscany between 1250-1300. *The Meditations* was based on the Gospels, the *Historia Scholastica*, the *Glossa ordinaria*, the *Legenda aurea*, the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and other prior ecclesiastical writers, as well as the author's own visionary imagination. Contributing apocryphal detail, Pseudo-Bonaventure's writing serves as guided meditation for the reader, a particular form of prayer that invites the reader to participate in the life of the historical Christ as an eye-witness. With a starting point prior to the incarnation of Christ, the text presents a biography of Jesus through his ministry and passion, concluding with the work of the new church. *The Meditations* was a widely disseminated work, with over two hundred manuscripts still extant.

I will structure this thesis by considering the historical and theological contexts of both the Cathar adherents and the early Franciscan brotherhood. The style and content of Byzantine images will next be explored to locate the roots of the Italian panel crosses. I will then discuss specific exemplar crucifixes in relationship to contemporary primary texts in order to establish the role the early Franciscan crucifixes played in disputing the beliefs of the Cathar movement.

¹¹ Information on Pseudo-Bonaventure is drawn from [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Isa Ragusa, and Rosalie Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology 35 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1961), xxi–xxviii.

CHAPTER 2: HERESY AND REFORM: THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

§2.1: CATHAR HISTORY AND BELIEFS

Although the heterodoxy of Catharism spread across Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, few first-hand accounts survive to tell the story. What is known of the Cathars' history is, for the most part, relayed through contentious sources: the eyes of the Church and the confessions of Cathar adherents given during periods of inquisition.¹² The origins of the Cathars' dualist philosophies can be traced back to Bogomilism, a Christian sect founded in Bulgaria that rejected the beliefs of the Catholic Church.¹³ Catharism progressed through the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century. Spreading rapidly across the north and central Italian peninsula by the later part of the twelfth century or early thirteenth century, this specific heresy created large-scale fear and unrest both in its self-promotion and in the religious and secular reaction to suppress it.¹⁴

The Cathar communities of the eleventh century had remained self-contained and largely inconspicuous. Those of the twelfth century exerted their influence more stridently in an attempt to convert Catholics to their beliefs.¹⁵ The Cathar community grew to the point of setting up its own hierarchy of leaders and erudite authorities.¹⁶ All were arranged in dioceses and regularly met in councils—mirroring the organization of the Catholic Church. Cathars were sectioned into ecclesiastical ranks. The *Perfecti* were the Cathar elite, serving the equivalent of priests. Drawn from the *Perfecti* were leaders

¹² Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass., USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 2.

¹³ Lambert., 23.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou: The Promised Land of Error* (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), viii. Lambert, *The Cathars*, 1. See map in Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass., USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 52.

¹⁵ Lambert, 14.

¹⁶ Lambert., 22.

called bishops. These passed their authority to two *Perfecti*, termed elder and younger sons. Deacons also assisted the bishops and *Perfecti*.¹⁷ Serving as missionaries, apologists, and sometimes martyrs, the most devoted Cathar leaders formed an austere heart that strengthened the entire community.¹⁸

Much information concerning the Cathars comes to us from sources later than Francis' lifetime. The early fourteenth-century account of townspeople in Montaillou, in southern France, provides the fullest picture of the beliefs and activities of the heterodoxy.¹⁹ The *Perfecti* embraced a difficult life of fasting on bread and water for three days of the week, routines of cleaning and cooking, long recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and celibacy. *Perfecti* were overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) male, with widows often taking a supporting role to house and board them.²⁰ Along with endless hours of wandering, preaching, and covert civil agitation, the *Perfecti* who remained long in the lifestyle became tempered into authoritative and powerfully charismatic leaders.²¹ In addition to preaching, *Perfecti* had the duties of presiding at meals and blessing the bread, offering medical and spiritual counseling, and performing the consoling ritual. Cathar believers (*credentes*) or simply charitable people often provided the leaders with alms, food, shelter, directions, and a receptive audience.²²

¹⁷ Catherine Léglu, ed., *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2014), 6.

¹⁸ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 22.

¹⁹ The book *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error* by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie provides a rare account of Cathar peasant life in the early fourteenth century based on detailed court proceedings of the Inquisition headed by Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers (later Pope Benedict XII of the Avignon papacy), Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, 1st ed (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), vii.

²⁰ Lambert, 276, 279.

²¹ Lambert, 247.

²² Lambert, 266–67.

Theologically, Cathars were dualists. They believed in an evil god and a good god.²³ The good god formed all non-material things—especially the invisible soul. In Italian Catharism, the good god was believed to be “more eminent and more ‘eternal’” than the evil god.²⁴ The evil god, the creator of materiality, was written about in the Old Testament.²⁵ This god was responsible for forming bodies and the natural world.²⁶ Cathars held that upon one’s death, the soul was again entrapped in either a human or an animal body by the evil god. Not wanting to create more physical bodies to serve as prisons for souls, the *Perfecti* abstained from sexual relations.²⁷ Fearful of consuming an animal body that contained a reincarnated soul, they abstained from meat, dairy products, and eggs. Cathars believed that all material things were evil and should be avoided. The most devout followers led an austere lifestyle—owning no property and working or begging for their minimal consumption of food and drink.

For the purpose of this study, it is crucial to note that Cathars also held Docetist beliefs. In their view, because of the inherent corruption of physical matter, they postulated that Jesus could not have possessed a body. His human form was merely an illusion taken on by his incorporeal spirit in order to educate and strengthen his followers. The Cathars contended, therefore, that Jesus could not have physically suffered during the events of the Passion. This divergence from the Catholic doctrine will especially

²³ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 4.

²⁴ Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, viii.

²⁵ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 5; Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 324.

²⁶ Léglu, 6.

²⁷ See Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, Chapters 8–12. *Credentes* were permitted to marry and bear children, and also participated in extramarital affairs. The *Perfecti*, while avowed to chastity, were also quite susceptible to temptation.

shape my later chapters when we will look at the iconography of the Franciscan crucifixes in which the apparent suffering of Christ takes a pivotal role.²⁸

The Cathars did not consider themselves a vehicle of reform for the Catholic Church. It was not simply that they disagreed with a number of doctrinal items. Rather the Cathars considered themselves to be the “true Christians”—seeing themselves as a direct opponent to what they considered to be the Church of Satan.²⁹ They claimed apostolic succession, universality, and a creed which had “lain concealed from the time of the martyrs even to our own day and has persisted thus in Greece and other lands.”³⁰ Conversion to Cathar beliefs often occurred on a personal level, with one-to-one invitation and interaction. The conversation continued with introduction to the apocryphal revelations made to the Cathars. Convinced of their superiority and direct apostolic lineage they believed only Cathars would actually be saved.³¹

Diversity was manifest in the Cathar doctrines, and not every *Perfectus* preached the same belief.³² Though quite late in the history of the Cathars, the inquisition testimonies of three leaders provide the most extensive historical record of Cathar beliefs. The doctrine taught by Pierre Autier, Jacques Autier, and Guillaume Bélibaste falls within the mainstream of Cathar conviction and can provide examples of the varied beliefs posited in the heterodoxy.³³ Pierre Autier (c. 1245-1310) preached a creation story in which Satan stood outside the gates of paradise for one thousand years until he was

²⁸ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 4–5.

²⁹ Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, viii; Lambert, *The Cathars*, 21.

³⁰ L.Paolini quoted in Lambert 23.

³¹ Lambert, 246–47.

³² Lambert, 250–253.

³³ The testimony of these Cathar leaders was attained between 1309-1321. Lambert, 230; Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 319–320.

able to seduce some of the angels of Heaven. These angels were composed of a “soul, heavenly body and spirit.”³⁴ With promises of treasures and wives he tempted them to leave paradise until “they fell like rain upon the earth over nine days and nights.” Satan trapped the angels in bodies so they would forget their past. But he had to ask for God to animate them. Autier believed that God permitted the angels to depart but would allow their return one day. The angels would need to move from body to body (human and animal) until they found themselves in the body of a Cathar. Once the Cathar was ritually consoled (cleansed), the angel could return to paradise. There would be no bodily salvation, however, as the physical body would remain bound to the evil earth. The Catholic clergy, Autier preached, were the leaders of the angels who first abandoned Heaven. Even they could eventually return, but their transmigration from body to body would entail worse suffering. Autier considered the world itself to already be hell, with the earth taking on the state of full damnation when all the repentant angels returned to paradise.

Cathars rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Jacques Autier (died 1305), the brother of Pierre, believed that God was divided into three parts: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Guillaume Bélibaste (died 1321) also taught that God was divided into three persons for the short term—between the life of Jesus and the end times—at which point God would return to a single unified state. Rather than a Trinitarian doctrine, the majority of Cathars believed that Christ was an angel who had been loyal to the Father.³⁵

The Cathars rejected all Catholic sacraments: baptism, Eucharist, penance, confirmation, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction—all of which utilize the human

³⁴ Quotes in this section are taken from Lambert, *The Cathars*, 1998, 2501–251. Le Roy Ladurie, 325.

³⁵ Lambert, 252, 254; Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 361.

body or earthly elements such as water, oils, bread, and wine, and were intended to connect the ineffable God with the physical human experience.³⁶ Cathars opposed the sacrament of baptism saying it was descended from John the Baptist rather than Jesus. Preachers told stories of children dying from illnesses brought on by the water of baptism. They planted doubts about the priest maintaining the seal of confidentiality in the sacrament of reconciliation. Pertaining to marriage, sexual intercourse was considered a sin, and women signified the wickedness of intercourse. For a woman to find salvation, her soul would need to change to a male soul after death. Therefore the sacrament of marriage was an even greater depravity because within marriage people had sex more frequently and with impunity. True marriage must wait for paradise or be between spirit and God.³⁷

While the life of a *Perfectus* was demanding, the overwhelming majority of Cathar believers were not required to sacrifice throughout their entire life.³⁸ The only necessary action to break the cycle of reincarnation and release a soul to heaven could be attained on one's deathbed. *Perfecti* initiated followers into the elite with a rite called the *Consolamentum*, which they considered to be a baptism of the Spirit. The ritual used a book of the Gospels or the New Testament being placed on the adherent's head along with spoken blessings.³⁹ It was the only sacrament practiced by the Cathars. As a sign of purification and renunciation of material goods, it was usually given on one's death bed (or in preparation to take on the role of a *Perfectus*).⁴⁰ It absolved the believer of all

³⁶ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 5.

³⁷ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 248–252.

³⁸ Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, viii.

³⁹ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 21.

⁴⁰ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 276.

previous sin and was a convenient and simple resolution to complicated lifestyles.⁴¹ Once the believer was consoled, he or she participated in the *endura*, or total (and eventually suicidal) fasting.

Prior to the early thirteenth century, Cathars participated in community life, working along with Catholics in city councils, serving as witnesses in civil courts, receiving appointments to offices such as rectors, consuls, and town chamberlains. Lambert believes it is unlikely that Cathar beliefs were held in secret in many communities, and there must have been widespread tolerance or shared belief. Families of wealth and social status were well represented on the official roles of heretics, but records show the lower classes also joined the ranks, including people employed as cobblers, tanners, and household servants.⁴² Lambert explains:

Few of those convicted [of heresy] revealed much depth of doctrinal understanding. A majority appreciated the perfect, revered them, believed that they were good and holy and accepted their teaching that the Roman Church could not save and that the keys of salvation were now in their hands.⁴³

Catharism was not the only heresy to come to prominence in the twelfth century; however, the effects of Catharism were felt more substantially by the Church than the effects of other heterodoxies at that time.⁴⁴ Rather than presenting their own doctrines, Cathars preyed on the doubts of Catholics. According to Lambert, “The object of the

⁴¹ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 6.

⁴² Lambert, *The Cathars*, 275.

⁴³ Lambert, 277.

⁴⁴ Lambert, 1.

leadership was to break down the structure of custom and ritual which retained Catholicism's place in daily life, and to replace it with a set of Cathar observances.”⁴⁵

As a result of the increased rivalry, Catharism became despised and persecuted. In a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux asking for the abbot's insight in battling the strength of the Cathar argument, a monk explains the Cathars' lifestyle:

They unchurched the Catholics...on moral grounds because of their claim to observe the apostolic life in a way in which the Catholics did not. They claimed no property, 'possessing no house, or lands or anything of their own, even as Christ had no property nor allowed his disciples the right of possession.'⁴⁶

Despite widespread acceptance in some locales, many Cathars hid their religion—pretending instead to be united to the Church for fear of the communal ostracization of excommunication or even physical abuse.⁴⁷ The popular conception of heretics was that they “attacked core Christian beliefs, social order, and the very existence of the Church itself.”⁴⁸

The response of the Catholic Church to the Cathar heresy was varied in its effectiveness. The Catholic Church was seen as a unified body, but heresies were diverse in their beliefs and practices. This multiplicity gave credence to the concept that heterodoxies originated with the devil and were spread through sorcery, orgies, ashes of burnt children, and scatological feasts.⁴⁹ Toleration of varying religious beliefs was practically non-existent, and people who practiced different religions were “guilty of incorrectness that should be remedied, but people willfully dismissing the central tenets and truths of Christian belief were to be converted or considered to

⁴⁵ Lambert, 249.

⁴⁶ Lambert, 22.

⁴⁷ Barbara Newman in the Introduction to Hildegard, Columba Hart, and Jane Bishop, *Scivias* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 35.

⁴⁸ LÉglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 16.

⁴⁹ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 8-10.

be at fault.”⁵⁰ Catholic bishops often failed at handling these situations. They were untrained in battling the complex apologetics used by the eloquent leaders of heterodox movements or ignorant of their own orthodox doctrine. Other times bishops were too overwhelmed by secular affairs to give a fair hearing, serving as they did as both religious heads and lords of the manor.⁵¹

A lull in active, or at least prevalent, heresies occurred during the period between the decline of the Carolingian Empire and the *fin de millennium*. Subsequently the medieval reaction to heterodoxy was modeled on the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who had dealt with the heresies of his own day, specifically the Manicheans and Donatists. His warnings regarding the “secret vices” of the heretical practitioners and the subsequent heavy-handed suppression influenced the reactions of the later medieval period.⁵² Crowds and soldiers would, on occasion, persecute accused heretics themselves. Inquisitions began in the twelfth century under Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) as an attempt to moderate secular mass lynching. The process of interrogation was anything but merciful however. Torture, trial by ordeal, and capital punishments were carried out by the secular power at the direction of not only the clergy, but also secular nobility eager to profess their orthodoxy, and lay mobs hoping to rid their villages of heretical contagion. Although the death penalty was discouraged by Augustine’s texts, the contemporary histories discussed it as an unfortunate need.⁵³ The number of people executed under the direction of the Church in the official inquisition records numbered remarkably fewer than popular history or fiction would suggest, however.⁵⁴ For example, only five people

⁵⁰ Léglu, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, 4.

⁵¹ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 16.

⁵² Lambert, 4–6.

⁵³ Lambert, 17–18.

⁵⁴ Lambert, 258–259. The records of Geoffrey d’Ablis (d. 1316) at Carassonne, Bernard Gui (1260-1331) at Toulouse, and Jacques Fournier (1285-1342) at Pamiers include roughly one thousand to one thousand five

were executed at the hotbed of heresy, Montailou. More typical punishments included imprisonment, marking with yellow crosses worn on clothing, confiscation of property, and forced pilgrimages.⁵⁵

There is scant evidence in the research regarding the Cathars' opinion of art in general or material used specifically for religious purposes; but with their rejection of materiality as evil, it would follow that artworks were not held in higher esteem than other matter. Their ascetic movement was based in Bogomilism, which had developed a church structure that rejected the sacraments, icons, and relics—any mediated symbol or representation of the Divine.⁵⁶ One example of Cathar iconoclasm is that of a twelfth-century leader in France, Peter of Bruys, who was killed by mob violence. He had built a bonfire of crucifixes but was subsequently pushed into the fire by an angry crowd of lay Catholics.⁵⁷ Speaking on behalf of a modern Cathar movement, James McDonald explains, “The Cathars detested all representations of the Christian Cross. They regarded it as no more than an instrument of torture - and found worship of an instrument of torture as offensive as modern rationalists do.”⁵⁸ Later in this thesis, we will see that in contrast to the Cathar beliefs which would have abolished all religious imagery, the Franciscans promoted the use of art in direct, yet subtle, defiance to Cathar principles.

hundred people interrogated. Torture is rarer than supposed with imprisonment and testimony of informants working effectively.

⁵⁵ Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, xvii.

⁵⁶ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 268.

⁵⁷ It is noted however that *Perfecti*, on occasion, gifted their followers with badges and small domestic trinkets, so there does not appear to have been a complete prohibition on material items. Lambert, *The Cathars*, 17.

⁵⁸ James McDonald, “Cathars and Cathar Beliefs in the Languedoc,” accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.cathar.info>.

§2.2: FRANCIS OF ASSISI, FOUNDING BROTHER

In the earliest official biography of the saint, the *Legenda Maior* (1260-1266), the mendicant friar and theologian Bonaventure describes Francis as the son of a prominent cloth merchant in Assisi, one of many small hilltop villages in Umbria. Francis lived a life typical of his luxurious social class, although Bonaventure makes clear that Francis was never enslaved to pleasures or riches. As a young adult, Francis underwent a series of conversion experiences: he suffered a serious illness, received a visionary dream, and was moved to clothe an impoverished knight and embrace a poor leper. He fully incorporated the counter-cultural dimensions of the Christian faith when he gave to the poor all his family's clothing and money to which he had access. Finally he became one of the poor he had originally sought to help.⁵⁹

Francis experienced a mystical event in the dilapidated church of San Damiano near Assisi. Praying as he lay beneath the painted panel crucifix, Francis heard a voice coming from the image of Jesus on the cross. It told him three times, "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling completely into ruin."⁶⁰ Francis understood the words he heard to be the voice of God emanating from the painted wooden cross. This phenomenon shaped the remainder of Francis' life and ministry. Francis continued to focus on the suffering of Jesus at the crucifixion and based his preaching on the Passion. The event at San Damiano continued to inspire the Franciscan order and influenced the subsequent artwork it produced. As the basis of our exploration of the *dipintura* crucifixes, we will first study that very painting, the *Cross of San Damiano*, which is

⁵⁹ Bonaventure and Ewert H Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 185–90.

⁶⁰ Bonaventure and Cousins, 191.

credited with motivating Francis and is still preserved in the convent of the Poor Clares, the order of cloistered sisters that Francis began with his friend and follower Clare of Assisi.

**Fig. 2 *Cross of San Damiano in the Basilica of Santa Chiara, Assisi, Italy*
(late twelfth century)**

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/31/Kruis_san_damiano.gif

Very similar to the *Cross of Maestro Guglielmo* (Fig. 1), the *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2) is dated to the late twelfth century, when it was created by an anonymous north Umbrian artist.⁶¹ Considered an historiated cross, its side panels depict scenes of Jesus' Passion.⁶² Rather than appearing attached to the wood of the cross, the image of Jesus stands erect as if in front of the cross. His hips are barely turned to his right and are covered with an opaque white and gold cloth, intricately tied with a three-part knot below his navel. The legs are straight and his feet are pierced separately by two nails; blood erupts from the feet and the hands in stylized radiating drops. His face is wide eyed and rosy cheeked. His body is unblemished except for a discreet wound on his right rib cage, nearly beyond sight around his side. It is interesting to note that in the Passion narrative, the side was pierced by the soldier's spear only after Jesus had expired on the cross yet here he appears fully alive. The crown of thorns is absent, typically not represented in depictions of the crucifixion until the middle of the thirteenth century.⁶³ Around the nails in the hands a starburst of blood can be seen, flowing to the elbows and then dripping down onto two more angels beneath each arm while a final two angels

⁶¹ "Artstor," accessed February 23, 2016, <http://www.artstor.org/>.

⁶² Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 4–5.

⁶³ Paul Thoby, *Le Crucifix, des Origines au Concile de Trente: Étude Iconographique* (Nantes: Bellanger, 1959), 156.

stand at the end of the arms of the red bordered cross. The angels converse nonchalantly, gesturing toward Jesus.

Flanking Christ, and about a third of his size, are his mother Mary and John the Apostle on his right, and on his left stand Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the centurion. Three smaller figures, approximately one-sixth the height of Jesus, look on from the edges of the crowd. Above the shoulder of the centurion can be seen a small head. This is thought to be the centurion's son whom Jesus healed. Behind him are three additional tops of heads representing the household of the centurion (based on John 4: 45-54: The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole household). The person on the viewer's left is labeled as Longinus, traditionally the name of the soldier who pierced Jesus' side with a lance. Opposite him may be Stefatus, the soldier who offered Jesus the sponge soaked in vinegar.⁶⁴ Alternately, this unlabeled figure may be Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus, as the figure is older, bearded, and non-uniformed.

The disembodied hand at the top of the cross represents God the Father granting his blessing. In the small T- shaped section at the top of the cross, Jesus stands as the resurrected Christ holding a cross scepter amidst ten angels. If there is evidence of the nail wounds in his feet or right hand, it is very faint. Below this is a plaque with Jesus' name abbreviated to its first three letters in Greek: IHΣ. The line above the letters indicates the use of a contraction. In full, the text reads: "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the

⁶⁴ Information on the iconography of the *Cross of San Damiano* originates in "Franciscan Friars Third Order Regular - San Damiano Cross," accessed November 18, 2015, http://www.franciscanfriarstor.com/archive/stfrancis/stf_san_damiano_cross.htm.

Jews,” as described in the gospel accounts. Beneath Jesus’ bleeding feet is a row of haloed saints. While badly damaged, these saints have been assumed to be local patron saints of Assisi: Damian (to whom the church in which the cross originally stood was dedicated), Rufinus, Michael, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul.

With Jesus’ head raised and almond-shaped eyes open, this Christ appears quite communicative. This iconographic type of Jesus’ crucifixion, known as the *Christus Triumphans*, has a long tradition in Byzantine art. Psellus, an eleventh-century chronicler of Constantinople, describes the *Christus Triumphans* icons of the crucifixion as an effort to relay the atemporal paradox of “‘then’ and ‘now,’ the event and its depiction.” He believes this is effected by painting great beauty but at the same time presenting Jesus “living, at his last breath.” While the image includes the side wound of Jesus, which occurred after his death, Hans Belting explains that this paradox relays a cessation of the rules of earthly time. “The image is intended to be not a narrative but a unity of ideas.”⁶⁵

Francis took the mystical directive given by the cross to repair Jesus’ church literally. Working along with his new brotherhood, he prepared the dilapidated building of San Damiano to become the home of Clare and her sisters. The structure remained their convent until 1257, at which time they moved--along with the crucifix--to the Church of San Giorgio in Assisi. The cloister of the Poor Clares and the Basilica of Santa Chiara were built to incorporate the existing chapel. The *Cross of San Damiano* was displayed to the public for the first time in 1957.⁶⁶

The Rule of Francis was inspired by three gospel passages:

⁶⁵ Belting, *Likeness and presence*, 271.

⁶⁶ “San Damiano Cross,” accessed November 18, 2015, http://www.stfrancis.edu/about/san-damiano-cross/#.Vkyk-r_cB2E.

- Matthew 19:21 If you would be perfect, go, sell all that you possess and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven.
- Matthew 16:24 If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
- Luke 9:3 Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics.⁶⁷

Francis interpreted the Gospels' call at face value. The brothers took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Francis sought the permission of Pope Innocent III to found his religious order in 1209.⁶⁸ While hesitant to condone the friars' regimen of punishing material deficiency, the pope gave permission for the brothers to continue their lifestyle of begging and preaching.⁶⁹ During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an increasing number of itinerant preachers, including Francis, strove to adhere to an apostolic life of penance and poverty, calling also for reform among the clergy and greater participation for lay people.⁷⁰ Rather than enclosing themselves in a monastery, the Franciscans eschewed material possessions, begging for their physical needs. Francis preached throughout Italy, France, Spain, and as far as Egypt in the midst of the Fifth Crusade.⁷¹

In certain ways, Francis' ideology mirrored the Cathar *Perfecti*. In his *Second Version of His Letter to the Faithful*, he wrote: "We must hate our bodies with their vices and sins... We must also deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of servitude

⁶⁷ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 109; Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 64.

⁶⁸ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 64.

⁶⁹ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 109.

⁷⁰ Lambert, 15.

⁷¹ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 14.

and holy obedience as each one has promised to the Lord.”⁷² It seems that it would have been a small step for Francis and his followers to join the Cathars’ vein of ascetics.

However Francis made a conscious effort to remain within the orthodoxy of the Church.

Six years after Francis’ Rule was confirmed in Rome, Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Lateran Council to order (1215). Its purpose was to institute church reforms in response to the spread of Islam and the Cathar heresy.⁷³ The main topic on the first day of the plenary session was the discussion of heresy in the regions where Catharism had the strongest foothold. The Church approached it with a twofold tactic of accepting the return of contrite heretics and utilizing civil law to deal with those who clung to their excommunicated beliefs.⁷⁴ The “dogmatic definitions” published by the council were aimed at the beliefs of the Cathars. Lambert explains, “The definition of transubstantiation, the affirmation of the necessity of baptism and the legitimacy of marriage cut directly at the Cathar rejection of matter and all sexual intercourse and their pejorative, skeptical attitude to the mass.”⁷⁵ Although there is no official record of Francis’ presence at the council, it has long been believed that he was there and was greatly affected by Pope Innocent’s reform-minded goals.⁷⁶ Francis focused much of his writing to promote the teachings of the Catholic church which were emphasized during the council; for example, the dual human and divine natures of Jesus, the importance of the Eucharist, the honored

⁷² Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 70.

⁷³ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 43.

⁷⁴ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 111.

⁷⁵ Lambert, 108.

⁷⁶ For an example of the widespread belief that Francis attended the council, see the entry on Francis of Assisi in Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi) which cites G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1923), as its source for Francis’ presence at the council. However, there is no mention of this occurrence in Chesterton.

<https://archive.org/stream/francisofassisi00chesuoft#page/n165/mode/2up>; See also “Catholic Encyclopedia: St. Francis of Assisi,” accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06221a.htm>.

role of Catholic clergy, and encouragement to frequent churches—all of which countered the Cathar’s anti-Catholic impulse.⁷⁷

While there is little written about Francis’ interaction with the Cathar believers, they were prevalent in Northern Italy and Southern France. Francis would have been familiar with them and aware of their philosophies, especially their rejection of material goods. The influence of the Cathars in Assisi cannot be denied. In 1203 the *Podestà* (chief magistrate) of the town was a Cathar adherent. As a member of the merchant community, it is likely that Francis’ family interacted with this magistrate.⁷⁸ It is known that a Cathar bishop also held sway in the Spoleto Valley, where Francis roamed.⁷⁹

Francis’ ideas about engagement with non-orthodoxy were perhaps influenced by his close proximity to Cathar adherents. In the *Earlier Rule*, Francis’ directions on the manner in which the friars are to live as missionaries among Muslims and “non-believers” is a model of subtlety and gentle example. He offers two guidelines:

One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they [the friars] are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God when they see that it pleases the Lord, so that they [the non-believer] believe in the all-powerful God—Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸⁰

The *Later Rule* is less specific to the manner of engaging with non-believers, instead emphasizing that the friars’ should be devoted to the teachings and will of the

⁷⁷ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 171.

⁷⁸ Vida Dutton Scudder, *The Franciscan Adventure ; a Study in the First Hundred Years of the Order of St. Francis of Assisi* (London, Toronto : New York: J. M. Dent and sons, limited; E. P. Dutton & co., Inc., 1931), 20.

⁷⁹ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 171.

⁸⁰ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 121.

Catholic Church and committed to poverty and humility.⁸¹ These guidelines mark the increasing gentleness with which the Franciscans approached the Cathars.

In the early biographies of Francis, there is only one direct reference to the Cathar heresy. Thomas of Celano offers a story that relays an attempt of local Cathars to discredit Francis. The Cathars wanted to spread word that Francis was not as perfect as those of the higher order of Cathars because he consumed meat. When Francis was invited to dinner in Alessandria, he was served poultry, which he shared with a beggar who came to the door. The following day, as Francis was preaching to a crowd, the supposed beggar, whom Celano called a “son of Belial,” publicly showed his evidence that Francis consumed meat. Celano tells us that the poultry the Cathar displayed miraculously turned into fish (which was considered acceptable by the Cathars—fish was believed to reproduce without coitus). The crowd turned on the Cathar, who asked for forgiveness from Francis.⁸² The scene of Francis converting a Cathar is depicted in a *dossal* from 1260 in Orte.⁸³

**Fig. 3 Franciscan *Dossal of Orte*, Museo Diocesano Orte, Italy (1260)
and detail of lower left corner**

(image from Bradley R. Franco, in *The World of St. Francis of Assisi: Essays in Honor of William R. Cook*, ed. Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 38.

Detail from <http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/foto/40000/9600/9251.jpg>)

The legacy of Francis was to set an implicit example of moral living rather than explicitly preaching the doctrine of the Church.⁸⁴ Lambert explains the influence this had:

⁸¹ Francis et al., 144.

⁸² Lambert, *The Cathars*, 173.

⁸³ Bradley R. Franco, in *The World of St. Francis of Assisi: Essays in Honor of William R. Cook*, ed. Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 38.

⁸⁴ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 171.

It may be that other preachers in Italy followed Francis's approach, stressing positively what the pillars of belief were and enjoying respect for the priesthood and hierarchy rather than attacking heresy explicitly, and that this explains the lack of anti-heretical sermons in extant collections...⁸⁵

Evidence shows that Francis was concerned about heresy infecting his fledgling community. By his Rule, he set a guard to protect the order against newcomers who might hold beliefs that were not in keeping with the Church, saying all postulants must have their beliefs verified. Those whose views were not in keeping with doctrine were to be held for questioning by the Cardinal Protector.⁸⁶ Francis wrote in the *Earlier Rule*: "All the brothers must be Catholics, [and] live and speak in a Catholic manner. But if any of them has strayed from the Catholic faith and life, in word or in deed, and has not amended his ways, he should be completely expelled from our fraternity."⁸⁷

The order was also careful of their associations outside the brotherhood. While long established religious communities were reluctant to break off ties with patrons who were connected to heretics, the Franciscans, as a new order, did not have such loyalties to ancient and extensive donor networks or worries about discriminating against a donor of questionable belief.⁸⁸ As literacy and access to scripture increased, lay people clamored for more active participation in their faith. The New Testament, especially, was looked to as a model for simple apostolic life in contrast to the wealth and power of the monasteries.⁸⁹ In the early thirteenth century, especially in urban areas, revival movements and lay confraternities rose in cooperation with the friars' preaching efforts.

⁸⁵ Lambert, 173–174.

⁸⁶ Lambert, 171.

⁸⁷ This teaching reflected Francis' commitment to uphold the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council. See Appendix 2 Fourth Lateran Council Canon 3 *On Heresy*. Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 124.

⁸⁸ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 135.

⁸⁹ Lambert, 12–13.

These organizations gave the laity a voice and active participation in the life of the Catholic Church. This newfound responsibility involved training members to argue against heresy as well as promoting personal devotion to fortify orthodox beliefs.⁹⁰

Francis internalized the doctrinal teachings that were prominent during his era, especially in regard to Incarnational and Eucharistic theologies. The Council of Chalcedon (451) had proclaimed Jesus was true God and true man: “Like us in all respects apart from sin.”⁹¹ In earlier periods, the Christology heavily promoted the divinity of Jesus. By the Middle Ages, the pendulum had swung again to the point where Christ’s godliness was taken for granted and it was his humanity that was questioned.⁹² There came an upsurge in lay piety based on the Franciscans’ stress on the human nature of Jesus. This focused devotion on Christ’s suffering and death as well as on his incarnation through Mary.⁹³ Lambert explains:

St. Francis of Assisi played a major role in the development of a piety focused on the Holy Family and the humanity and sufferings of Jesus. This worked powerfully against the menace of Catharism, of which he [Francis] was more aware than is commonly supposed.⁹⁴

Francis was devoted to contemplating the passion and death of Jesus.⁹⁵ “In fact,” emphasizes Anne Derbes, “The term ‘Franciscan Spirituality’ has become virtually synonymous with the veneration of Christ’s suffering on the cross.”⁹⁶ Just as the founder of the order discovered inspiration through the painted panel *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2), the Franciscans continued to utilize this form of sacred depiction to influence the

⁹⁰ Lambert, 1.

⁹¹ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 19.

⁹² Steinberg, 10.

⁹³ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 288.

⁹⁴ Lambert, 1.

⁹⁵ Lambert, 171.

⁹⁶ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 17.

faithful and guard against heterodoxy. As we will see, the painted image evolved in an effort to promote orthodoxy.

CHAPTER 3: THE ARTISTIC CONTEXT OF THE EARLY FRANCISCANS

By 1217, the Franciscan order had grown to eleven provinces throughout Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and the Holy Land. These early friars lived in wooden huts and begged alms to meet their physical needs.⁹⁷ Francis calls on the brothers to make use of homes or churches as guests and pilgrims. Trinita Kennedy elaborates: "...art had no place in the original intentions of their founders...[Francis] reminds his own followers that they 'must be careful not to accept any churches, poor dwellings, or anything else constructed for them unless these buildings reflect the holy poverty promised by us in the Rule.'" ⁹⁸ However, after the death of Francis in 1226, the order adopted a more tempered approach to poverty. Pope Gregory IX (1227-41) released the Franciscan brothers from the austere poverty instituted by Francis when he promulgated the papal bull *Quo elongati*, which states that the order was permitted to utilize buildings, books, furniture, and decoration that were owned by other people. This allowed the brothers to work collaboratively with the papacy, secular governments, and lay people to construct elaborate churches throughout Italy. ⁹⁹

The Franciscan order stands as the most prolific patron of the arts in Italy from the thirteenth century through the Renaissance.¹⁰⁰ The 1230 papal bull that created this arrangement of *usus simplex* specifically allowed for the decoration of Franciscan churches with suitable artworks. In the towns of Bologna, Florence, Milan, Naples and Siena, the mendicant order's churches competed in size and extravagance with the local

⁹⁷ Unless noted, information is drawn from Derbes, 23–24.

⁹⁸ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 3; Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 155.

⁹⁹ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy et al., vi.

diocesan cathedrals.¹⁰¹ The immensity and beauty achieved were due in great part to the admiration and donor backing the Franciscan order had attained during its early decades.¹⁰²

Assisi became a magnet and workshop for aspiring artists.¹⁰³ Two years following the death of Francis, Pope Gregory IX assisted the young order in the construction of the basilica that would serve as the saint's tomb, building a pilgrimage destination of impressive size and beauty.¹⁰⁴ In 1253 Pope Innocent IV visited Assisi, remaining for six months. Somewhat disappointed in the plainness of the new church, he wrote the bull *Decet et expedit* which not only permitted abundant decoration of the basilica but also established papal funding for the project.¹⁰⁵ Over the following century, the papal basilica of San Francesco in Assisi evolved into the foundation and critical exemplar of Franciscan art for all of Italy.¹⁰⁶ We will study this space as the venue for the first and arguably the most influential crucifix commissioned by the Franciscan order.

The upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi is built in a cruciform shape with its long nave oriented along an east-west line. Its transept contained the high altar, and a side altar was situated in each arm.¹⁰⁷ Wooden choir stalls for the friars lined the sides of the apse with a papal throne at the center (installed by the 1280s).¹⁰⁸ A *tramezzo* screen, similar to the Byzantine iconostasis, possibly divided the lower nave where the laity

¹⁰¹ Kennedy et al., 2.

¹⁰² Kennedy et al., 9.

¹⁰³ Arthur Waldon, "The Influence of St. Francis of Assisi on Mediæval Art," *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, American Periodicals, January 1883, 52, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.mil.missouri.edu/docview/1301482309?pq-origsite=summon>.

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 74.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Cooper and Robson, 62.

worshipped from the choir area where the friars would gather closer to the high altar. *Tramezzi* were utilized solely in monasteries and churches built by religious orders in Italy. The screen served to segregate the worship space by gender. In most liturgical situations, women remained in the lower nave while men could enter beyond the screen. However, women are documented as being permitted in the altar area as well during non-liturgical times.¹⁰⁹ According to Marcia B. Hall's research from the 1970s as well as her current work, most *tramezzi* were dismantled by the sixteenth or seventeenth century and were, for the most part, forgotten as an element of Roman rite architecture.¹¹⁰ The screen, usually a masonry construction, served as a focal point for contemplation during the Mass while only glimpses of the altar could be seen through the open colonnade. Thus it aided in preserving the mystery of the sacrament. In Assisi, foundations are in place beneath the floor which would have been able to support a masonry screen. The *tramezzo* in the basilica of San Francesco seems to have been demolished by the 1290s in order for the fresco cycle by Cimabue to be painted in the nave without spatial disruption. Only a large wooden beam, like an epistyle in Byzantine churches, remained spanning the width of the nave (Fig. 6).¹¹¹

**Fig. 4 Sketch of Giunta Pisano's 1236 Crucifix,
formerly in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Italy**

(image from Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 65)

¹⁰⁹ Donal Cooper, "Experiencing Dominican and Franciscan Churches in Renaissance Italy," in *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trinita Kennedy, 2014, 50.

¹¹⁰ Marcia B. Hall, "The Tramezzo in the Italian Renaissance, Revisited," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 216.

¹¹¹ Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 62.

The oldest known crucifix created for the Franciscan order sat atop this beam (Fig. 4). This crucifix was executed by the artist Giunta Pisano of Pisa (ca. 1180-1258) under the direction of Elias of Cortona, the vicar general of the order from 1221-1227 and later minister general (1232-1239). The crucifix is dated 1236, and it was placed on the *tramezzo* upon completion of the church's construction in 1253.¹¹² It is known only from written descriptions and a seventeenth century print based on it. A similar example from the same time period is Pisano's painted panel crucifix, which he created on a smaller scale for the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli alla Porziuncola (ca.1230-1240) (Fig. 5).¹¹³ Both crosses are examples of the *Christus Patiens* style, depicting the deceased corpus of Jesus. The curving torso of Jesus stands against a simple apron that is decorated with a geometric patterned ribbon. Half-length portraits of Mary and John the Apostle look toward Christ at the center.

Fig. 5 Crucifix of Santa Maria degli Angeli alla Porziuncola, near Assisi (ca.1230-1240)

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e3/Giunta_Pisano_-_Crucifix_-_WGA09628.jpg

For San Francesco, Elias commissioned Giunta Pisano to create a work that blended Byzantine style with Latin iconography. Unlike the cross at the Porziuncola which does not depict any figure at the feet of Christ, Pisano utilized a popular Italian convention of inserting a founder or donor image (of Elias) at the foot of the cross.¹¹⁴ Most likely positioned in an easily accessible area of the Upper or Lower Basilica until it

¹¹² Cooper and Robson., 63.

¹¹³ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 6.

¹¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, this section on the Upper Basilica is taken from Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 64-72.

was raised to the *tramezzo*, this cross inspired numerous monumental crucifixes throughout the region. No other minister general mimicked Elias' donor figure though. Instead, the image of Francis took Elias' place at the foot of the cross. It is possible that the details of the image and the accompanying inscription identifying both artist and donor were illegible once the cross was in place above the nave. Subsequent iterations may have assumed the small friar at Jesus' foot in Pisano's cross was in fact the order's founder.

Giunta Pisano utilized a technique for creating his cross that had been in place for centuries for wood panel paintings. Cennino Cennini (1370-1440), in his fifteenth-century instructions to artists, describes this process. Cennini says that panel paintings, such as the *dipintura* crucifixes, consist of four layers: the wooden support, the smooth white ground, the paint layer, and finally varnish covering the entire project.¹¹⁵ The panel is often from the poplar tree, although sometimes it is chosen from lime (linden) or willow trees. It must be free of knots and scraped perfectly smooth. Imperfections, when unavoidable, may be repaired with a mixture of sawdust and boiled glue.¹¹⁶ For large crosses, several panels are joined together with long narrow beams using nails and wooden pins. The joints or seams are covered with linen or canvas. The ground layer is composed of a sheet of linen or canvas (or separate strips if a larger piece is unavailable) adhered to the wooden board with gesso and sizing (parchment clippings boiled down to a thick paste). After this has thoroughly dried, it is scraped and sanded until reaching the complexion of ivory. A stick of willow charred at the tip is used to make a sketch on the

¹¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the description of the painting technique is drawn from Cennino Cennini and Daniel V. Thompson, *The Craftsman's Handbook* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 70–99.

¹¹⁶ Umberto Baldini, Cimabue, and Ornella Casazza, *The Crucifix by Cimabue* (Italy: Olivetti, 1980), 12.

now white board. The sketch is then reworked and details added with a squirrel-hair paint brush and the original charcoal drawing is erased with a feather brush. To gild the background, at this point in the process, a red bole, mixed with egg white and water, is applied around the figures. Gold leaf is laid gently and pressed with a cotton or wool cloth to achieve adhesion. Once applied, the gold is burnished using a precious stone or sharpened animal tooth. The tempera paint itself is a formula of powdered pigments mixed with egg yolk. Landscape and draperies should be painted first, followed by flesh. Once the paint is thoroughly dry, the panel may be varnished in one or more coats to bring out the depth of the colors.

Cennini's detailed instructions indicate the control and expertise present in medieval artists' workshops in which these panel paintings were created, codified after centuries of tradition. Their work must be methodical and in tune with nature and the seasons. In addition to the precise technical direction, though, Cennini imbues his instruction with devotion and humanity. He tells his fellow artist, "Your life must be organized as if you were studying theology or philosophy or some other science."¹¹⁷

Fig. 6 Remains of the *Tramezzo* in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi
(Image from Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 64.)

Pisano's crucifix in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco was possibly five meters in height, taking up a substantial part of the nineteen-meter elevation from floor to the peak of the vault.¹¹⁸ The monumental cross stood atop the beam until 1622 when it was

¹¹⁷ Baldini. 11.

¹¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, this section on the Upper Basilica is taken from Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 63–72.

removed to improve the sight lines for an elevated seating area in the nave. The cut ends of the beam remain visible in the walls, jutting out of the frescoed scenes painted by Cimabue (Fig 6). The cross was repositioned under the rose window in the eastern façade. There it suffered exposure to the elements through the broken window panes above. A seventeenth-century friar mentioned the cross' poor condition in 1683; and the last account indicates that it fell and broke in the eighteenth century, with no further mention past 1785. The Italian antiquarian Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle photographed the Upper Church in the 1870s recreating a theoretical scene of the thirteenth-century construction (Fig. 7). He gives dominant placement to a replica of Pisano's crucifix, mirroring seventeenth-century descriptions that claimed its size was "gigantic."¹¹⁹

**Fig. 7 Historicist Photograph of the Upper Basilica of San Francisco
by Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle (ca. 1870s)**

(Image from Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 66.)

There is mention of two other panel paintings atop the *tramezzo* in San Francesco. Both were attributed to Giunta Pisano in seventeenth-century texts. One is described as a Pentecost scene of the Holy Spirit descending upon Mary and the apostles. The other shows the Archangel Michael battling Lucifer. These themes related to the dedications of the side chapels in the transept arms. An arrangement of three panel paintings spread across the top of a beam or screen may have been frequent in thirteenth-century Italian sanctuaries. We can see Cimabue's rendition of how these liturgical spaces were organized in two scenes from his frescoes in the nave of San Francesco.¹²⁰ While it is

¹¹⁹ Cooper and Robson, 65.

¹²⁰ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 5.

believed that Cimabue's frescoes do not portray any actual set of panels, they reflect the use of panel paintings common to the period's monastic churches.¹²¹ The fresco *Verification of the Stigmata* (Fig. 8) shows three panel paintings from the perspective of viewers in the nave; while the scene of the *Miracle at Greccio* (Fig. 9) presents the view of a the *tramezzo* from the choir area, showing only the cross atop the screen. With its comparatively small size, the crucifix in the *Nativity at Greccio* is supported by a wooden scaffold which provides a counter-weight.¹²² The large monumental crosses, such as Pisano's in San Francesco, may have additionally been supported by chains from the vault above or from beams in the roof.¹²³ The crosses of the early Franciscans grew to a massive scale.¹²⁴ The average size for the extant thirteenth-century crucifixes in this study measures 2.69 meters in width by 3.71 meters in height (eliminating examples which have been cut down; see Appendix 1). It is conceivable that the prototype cross by Giunta Pisano more than doubled the dimensions of the *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2).

Fig. 8 *Verification of the Stigmata* by Cimabue, Upper Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Italy (1297-1300)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/Giotto - Legend of St Francis - -22- - Verification of the Stigmata.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/Giotto_-_Legend_of_St_Francis_-_22_-_Verification_of_the_Stigmata.jpg)

Fig. 9 *Nativity at Greccio* by Cimabue, Upper Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, Italy (1297-1300)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9a/Giotto - Legend of St Francis - -13- - Institution of the Crib at Greccio.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9a/Giotto_-_Legend_of_St_Francis_-_13_-_Institution_of_the_Crib_at_Greccio.jpg)

¹²¹ Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 74.

¹²² Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 18.

¹²³ Cooper, "Experiencing Dominican and Franciscan Churches in Renaissance Italy," 51.

¹²⁴ Although outside the subset of crosses examined in this study, some extant examples of Italian medieval crosses measure nearly six meters. Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 66.

The backdrop for the *tramezzo* panel paintings in San Francesco would have been a set of three stained glass windows composed of two lancets each (See Cavalcaselle's photograph, Fig. 7). They depicted scriptural themes from both the Old and New Testaments. Their mid-century dating makes these apse windows among the earliest use of stained glass in Italy.¹²⁵ Above the windows, the vaults were painted a canopy of cerulean blue with golden stars. A further program of frescoes depicting the four evangelists filled the space above the choir in the apse, but these vaults would not have been visible from the congregation's sightlines in the nave.¹²⁶

§3.1: HEIR TO THE ICON

Belting calls Italian panel painting the "heir to the icon."¹²⁷ Although the Byzantine Empire had passed its zenith, its skilled craftsmen remained sought after in the west. Amy Neff explains that, "Coming from the East, where Christ and his followers had lived their lives, and following age-old traditions, Byzantine icons seemed to possess unequalled authenticity."¹²⁸ Decline and unrest in the capital pushed artisans toward Italy (and other regions) where work was plentiful and admiration for the empire's lavish style still held firm.¹²⁹ The influx of icons, relics, decorated manuscripts, and luxury goods resulting from the sack of Constantinople in 1204 provided models of Byzantine art from which to work. Thus the style was repurposed in order to lay claim to the reputation and wealth of the recently powerful imperial capital.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Cooper and Robson, 75.

¹²⁶ Cooper and Robson, 82.

¹²⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 21.

¹²⁸ Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," 36.

¹²⁹ Rice, *Byzantine Painting*, 9.

¹³⁰ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 15.

In his 1968 book *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase*, David Talbot Rice drew a comparison between Giunta Pisano's monumental cross in San Francesco and the *Crucifixion* wall painting in the Monastery Church of Nemanja in Studenica, Serbia, created in 1208 (Fig. 10), as well as a similar rendition at the Church of the Resurrection in Žiča, Serbia, painted between 1219 and 1230 (Fig. 11). Rice describes these frescoed examples as "something new in Byzantine art."¹³¹ Rice explains that Italian painting at the turn of the thirteenth century appears static and detached, seemingly oblivious to the shifts toward naturalism and emotion that occurred in the period of Byzantine revitalization, most of the evidence for which can be seen in the Balkans, or in new trends in Germany or France.¹³² The *Maniera Greca* (Greek Manner), which was a style considered tired and worn by the sixteenth-century writer Giorgio Vasari, can be held in contrast to the progressive Greek Revival style occurring in the Balkans immediately prior to the early Franciscans.¹³³ Rice believes, though, that the crucifixion images in Studenica and Žiča are not entirely Byzantine in style. There is evidence that the artist was trained in Salonica rather than Constantinople. Rice goes so far as to say that the similarity between these portrayals and Giunta's crucifixes demonstrates an association between Serbia and Italy, possibly even a direct connection to Pisano.¹³⁴ Rice states that despite earlier models in Germany (for example the *Gero Cross* in Cologne), the crucified corpus at Studenica with its twisted body, bent head, and closed eyes and must be considered the precedent for the iconography which spread throughout the western Baltics and Italy. The history of the Cathars could also play a role in this theory, as

¹³¹ Rice, *Byzantine Painting*, 46–47.

¹³² Rice, 76.

¹³³ Rice, 40, 81.

¹³⁴ Rice, 47, 76.

Bogomilism (the immediate predecessor of Catharism) was a strong and widespread movement in Serbia during the late twelfth century. The Bogomils' organization of their dualistic religion in the Balkans—with advanced hierarchical, communal, and ritual structures—eased the development and diffusion of the Cathars in Serbia, and perhaps later the move into northern Italy. They were not a welcome influence however, and the rulers of Serbia, including Stefan Nemanja and his descendants, used military force to root out the adherents including tactics such as forbidding their teaching, exiling, and executing the followers.¹³⁵

Fig. 10 *Crucifixion* wall painting in the Monastery Church of Nemanja in Studenica, Serbia (1208)

http://www.serbiatouristguide.com/live/digitalAssets/29323_manastiristudenica-30027.jpg

Fig. 11 *Crucifixion* wall painting in the Church of the Resurrection in Žiča, Serbia (1219-1230)

(Image from David Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 85.)

The Princeton-Michigan expeditions to Mount Sinai (1956-1965) led by Kurt Weitzmann brought to light many previously unknown icons from the Byzantine period and allows us to travel to even earlier prototypes of the Crucifixion images under discussion. In the Monastery of St. Catherine, the oldest known extant rendition of a painted *Christus Patiens* can be found on an epistyle beam that is believed to have been created at Mount Sinai in the early twelfth century. It depicts a nearly exact pose as the Studenica fresco. The original beam (measuring approximately 4.75 meters in width by .40 meter in height) has been divided into four separate planks that are currently housed

¹³⁵ Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, Yale Nota Bene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 183–84.

in two chapels of the Monastery of St. Catherine. Considered together, it presents one of the oldest complete depictions of the *Dodecaorton* (or the Twelve Great Feasts of the Byzantine Church). In the Chapel of Constantine and Helena, the illustrations include the Entry into Jerusalem, the *Christus Patiens* Crucifixion, and the Harrowing of Hell on the first board (Fig. 12). The Ascension, Pentecost, and Dormition of Mary are on the second (Fig. 13). Located in the Chapel of St. George, the third section depicts the Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and the Raising of Lazarus (Fig. 14); and finally the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Presentation of Jesus (Fig. 15).¹³⁶

***Dodecaorton Epistyle, Chapel of Constantine and Helena, , Monastery of St. Catherine,
Mount Sinai, Egypt (Early Twelfth Century)***

Fig. 12 The Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, and the Harrowing of Hell
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/7703474554/>

Fig. 13 The Ascension, Pentecost, and Dormition
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/7703477088/>

***Dodecaorton Epistyle, Chapel of St. George, Monastery of St. Catherine,
Mount Sinai, Egypt (Early Twelfth Century)***

Fig. 14 Baptism of Christ, the Transfiguration, and the Raising of Lazarus
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/7703475306/>

Fig. 15 Annunciation, the Nativity, and Jesus' Presentation in the Temple
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/7703476326/>

¹³⁶ Kurt Weitzmann and John Galey, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, the Icons* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1976), 66–67.

Retracing the roots of the *Christus Patiens* we may look even further back in time. While the earliest surviving *Christus Patiens* dates to the 12th century, there exists textual evidence that crosses with the same iconographic format could also be seen in the capital of the empire as early as the eleventh century. History records a papal legate sent to Constantinople in 1054 critiquing the local Church for depicting “the image of a dead mortal on a cross.”¹³⁷

Returning to Italy, the use of Byzantine models became widespread beginning in the 1230s and 1240s and continued with regularity through the century. Anne Derbes reasons that a vast array of avant-garde Byzantine images became readily available to Italian painters at this time.¹³⁸ That the Franciscans should develop a style of art based on the Byzantine was a logical outcome. Francis himself visited the Levant in 1219 and had missionaries active in the eastern Mediterranean during his lifetime. By 1220, the Franciscans had a congregation in Constantinople from which developed an active trade in religious images with the west.¹³⁹ The minister general of the Franciscan order, Elias of Cortona, also served as the provincial minister of the Holy Land, and as such he traveled extensively through the Byzantine Empire—perhaps even to Mount Sinai.¹⁴⁰

The Italian monumental crucifixes of the early Franciscans act as a transmutation of the eastern epistyle renditions of the Great Feasts of the Byzantine Church. While the epistyles present Jesus’ crucifixion as just one part of a series of scriptural events shown at the topmost portion of an iconostasis, the western church pulls the crucifixion to the center, enlarges it significantly, and excises the background in order to focus on the

¹³⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 270.

¹³⁸ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 14.

¹³⁹ Derbes, 24–25.

¹⁴⁰ Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, 69.

corpus on the cross. In the eastern iconography, the central point of the iconostasis was typically the *Deesis*—an image of Christ enthroned in majesty flanked by his mother and John the Baptist. Angels and other disciples are often included on either side as well, depending on the size and extravagance of the piece. The panel crucifixes of the west replace the *Deesis* image with Jesus isolated on the cross, but the intercessory message of Christ and the accompanying saints remains the same as in the Byzantine scheme.¹⁴¹ The increased dimensions, substantial increase of materiality (wood, cloth, paint), and the physical prominence of these crosses afforded the image significant power. In addition, the devotional performance of gazing upon the crucifix constituted a desired participative action by the laity and caused viewers to figuratively and literally raise their attention to the celestial order.¹⁴²

§3.2: ORTHODOX FRAMEWORK

Through my research, it has become clear that examples of the *Christus Patiens* were created far earlier than Pisano's crucifix. In fact, an extended period occurred in which both *Christus Patiens* and *Christus Triumphans* images were synchronous. What then were the reasons behind the varying formats? Han Belting offers an explanation: "The purpose of the icon [of the crucifixion] was to integrate the different doctrines on this central article of faith in such a way that they could be discussed, or their nature could be contemplated, in terms of the image."¹⁴³ The variety of modes used in

¹⁴¹ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 21.

¹⁴² Sara Lipton, "'The Sweet Lean of His Head': Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages," *Speculum* 80, no. 4 (2005): 1193.

¹⁴³ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 270.

representing the crucifixion were based on varying Christological beliefs which struggled to define the nature of Jesus.¹⁴⁴

Returning to Pisano (Fig. 4), it will become clear that the theological treatises and mystical essays of the Franciscan order were inextricably linked to the design of his innovative crucifix.¹⁴⁵ While Pisano's panel cross laid the groundwork for subsequent Franciscan Passion artwork, we can look to the theologian Bonaventure for the art's explosive proliferation under the guidance of the order. This theologian greatly influenced the spirituality and culture of the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁶ Drawing on Thomas of Celano's earlier biography of Francis as well as remembrances by other brothers, Bonaventure assembled the official *vita* of the saint—an edition of which was provided to each friary per a decree made at the Chapter of Paris in 1266. With 1,530 houses in the brotherhood and an additional 400 monasteries for the Poor Clares, this widespread distribution ensured that Francis' story was one of the most broadly distributed books of the period.¹⁴⁷

Along with his administrative duties, Bonaventure also turned his attention to teaching about sacred images, providing theological explanations for devotional practices that were currently in use.¹⁴⁸ Bonaventure supported using artwork to enhance the congregation's understanding of scripture and church teachings.¹⁴⁹ In his brief but complex work, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, Bonaventure explains how all

¹⁴⁴ Belting, 120.

¹⁴⁵ Baldini, Cimabue, and Casazza, *The Crucifix by Cimabue*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Bonaventure and Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), xix, 7-8, 19.

¹⁴⁷ Bonaventure and Ewert H. Cousins, 41.

¹⁴⁸ Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," 34.

¹⁴⁹ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 8.

knowledge can be connected to theology (See Appendix 3 for relevant sections).¹⁵⁰

Embracing a metaphysical philosophy in which light is the highest form of created matter and is the basis for beauty, color, and action, Bonaventure understood all created light to emanate from the primal light of Truth, which is God. Bonaventure sees all creation as saturated with this supernal light—therefore with the image of God. The only manner in which humans may gather knowledge is through the senses. The sense of sight provides access to “luminous and colored bodies.”¹⁵¹ Material images, when received by the eyes, create delight in the viewer. For the medieval person, this enjoyment was based on the Greek tradition of order and proportion. The more closely the image was considered to be in congruence with the “first image” of God (the incarnate Word), the more beautiful it was believed to be. Art, according to Bonaventure, takes the physical form of the archetype created within the mind of the artist. He sees this as analogous to the work of creation by God and believes the divine can shine through the artifacts created by craftsmen.¹⁵² This is a philosophy directly opposed to the Cathar’s conception of evil materiality. Bonaventure believes art should have the qualities of being “beautiful, useful, and enduring.”¹⁵³ It should delight the viewer, cause the viewer to ponder it and find goodness and honesty therein.¹⁵⁴ In the reflection of the Incarnation within artworks, Bonaventure acknowledged great agency in the artifacts created for the purpose of doctrinal education.

¹⁵⁰ Explanations were drawn from Zachary Hayes’ “Commentary on the Text” in Bonaventure and Zachary Hayes, *St. Bonaventure’s on the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, Works of Saint Bonaventure 1 (St. Bonaventure, N.Y: Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 1996), 2–17.

¹⁵¹ Hayes in Bonaventure and Zachary Hayes, 17.

¹⁵² Bonaventure and Zachary Hayes, 25, 49.

¹⁵³ Bonaventure and Zachary Hayes., 51.

¹⁵⁴ Bonaventure and Zachary Hayes, 26–27, 51.

In addition to Bonaventure's philosophy of art, Hans Belting offers the cult of Francis of Assisi as a cause for a shift in the western church from the veneration of relics to the veneration of icons, based on the growth of panel paintings after 1200.¹⁵⁵ The brotherhood's responsibility for this transition most likely worked in concert with the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 62, which aimed to reduce the proliferation of illegitimate relics by requiring new relics to be verified by the Vatican and prohibiting the exhibition and sale of existing relics.¹⁵⁶

Beginning in the thirteenth century, the icon of the dead Christ, hanging slumped on the cross, became the dominant form of crucifixion imagery. So many crosses are extant from Franciscan churches that it is presumed the crosses were ubiquitous in the order's churches.¹⁵⁷ As Belting writes, "The new type attracted viewers' attention when the time was ready for it. St. Francis of Assisi had developed a model for the cult of the Crucified, whom he wanted to resemble even in his sufferings."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 308.

¹⁵⁶ "Fourth Lateran Council: Internet Medieval Sourcebook. Hanover College," accessed March 11, 2016, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/344lat.html>.

¹⁵⁷ The ten crosses depicting Francis at the foot of Jesus created by 1300 are listed in Appendix 1. Cooper, "Experiencing Dominican and Franciscan Churches in Renaissance Italy," 51.

¹⁵⁸ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 358.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGY AND MATERIALITY IN THE *DIPINTURA CRUCIFIXES*

In this chapter, we will turn to the early Franciscan textual sources in conversation with the subset of crucifixes that depict Francis at the foot of the cross. For the early Franciscans and the pilgrims who worshipped in their churches, these particular crosses served as a reminder that Francis' ministry was framed by mystical experiences in which the crucifix played a central role—the vocalization by the *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2) and the stigmatization of Francis, which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. The literature I will present, by Bonaventure, the author known as Pseudo-Bonaventure, and Francis himself, was composed nearly contemporaneously to the creation of the crucifixes that will be discussed. Bonaventure's *The Tree of Life*, from which his meditations on the Passion are drawn, was written between 1257-1267 while he was based in Assisi as the minister general of the order.¹⁵⁹ Similar to this first text but more imaginative are the selections from Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. This work is less precisely dated, with a proposed timeframe between 1250 and 1300 and location theorized as Tuscany.¹⁶⁰ Francis' texts are taken mainly from the first and second versions of his Rule for the brothers' way of life (1209 or 1210, and 1223 respectively), as well as his letters and prayers, penned as an itinerant preacher between 1209 and his death in 1226. This literature will enable us to consider the interfaces which took place among the friars, the Catholic faithful, the Cathar adherents, and most importantly for this study, the artwork. By focusing on the details of example crosses in Arezzo, Spello, and Perugia we will explore the specific subjects of Incarnational and

¹⁵⁹ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis*, 10.

¹⁶⁰ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, xxii.

Eucharistic theology, the emotional tenor of the additional figures portrayed on the crucifixes as models for believers (specifically Mary, John the Apostle, and Francis), and the evolving representation of the physicality of Jesus to express his human nature. Some elements of the artwork that I will explicate repeat from one example to the next; therefore I will describe selected features of each composition to illustrate the various points of my argument. Through these themes we can witness how the Franciscans subtly, yet clearly, used the images to argue against Cathar beliefs.

Map 1: Cathar Routes and Bishoprics

(Map from Malcolm Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass., USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 52.)

When the map of extant thirteenth century crucifixes depicting Francis of Assisi at the foot of the cross (Appendix 1) is compared with the bishoprics of the Cathar communities (situated by 1200) and theoretical routes proposed by Malcolm Lambert, it becomes clear that these important Franciscan artworks are concentrated along a corridor of Cathar influence. This northern central array of Italian villages was a spiritual battleground from the Valley of Spoleto to Florence and Bologna, continuing northwest to Languedoc.

The Franciscan charism has been colloquially interpreted as “*Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.*”¹⁶¹ From the very origin of the religious order, the artwork commissioned by the Franciscans expressed this sensitivity toward non-verbal communication which could be found in Francis’ Rules, thereby contributing much to the battle for doctrinal consistency in Catholic teaching. The graphic depiction of the dead

¹⁶¹ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 122.

Christ in these large crucifixes, displayed in the most prominent place above the altar, became the main tool of the Franciscans. Utilizing artworks to promote orthodoxy among Catholic believers, they worked in a sophisticated yet approachable manner to thwart heresy in their communities.

§4.1 FOCUS ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

**Fig. 16 *Crucifix of the Church of San Francesco, Arezzo, Italy*
by a Follower of Master of Santa Chiara (ca. 1250-1270)**

<http://www.turismo.intoscana.it/site/shared/turismo/immagini/San-Francesco-2012-23.jpg>

The cross in Arezzo was most likely created for an earlier church and relocated to the new sanctuary built in the fourteenth century (Fig. 16). William R. Cook dates this example to 1270; however some sources place it as early as 1250.¹⁶² It was created using egg tempera paint on a wooden base. One of the larger examples at 5.75 x 3.70 meters, it is the best preserved of the crosses we will consider. Its artist was an anonymous Umbrian painter connected to the Master of Santa Chiara (also known as the Master of Donna Benedetta).¹⁶³ The crucifix is topped with a circular panel containing an image of Christ as *Pantocrator*, holding a book of the scripture and blessing the viewer. This image is a reminder that the ruler and judge of humanity took a human form and was able to interact with people during his earthly life as Francis recalls in his letter to the faithful, “Though He was rich beyond all other things, in this world [Jesus]...willed to choose poverty.”¹⁶⁴ Beneath the roundel is a rectangular plaque depicting Mary with her hands

¹⁶² William R Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi: In Painting, Stone, and Glass : From the Earliest Images to Ca. 1320 in Italy : A Catalogue* (Firenze; Perth [W.A.]: L.S. Olschki ; Dept. of Italian of the University of W. Australia, 1999), 29. “Artstor,” Accessed February 23, 2016. <http://www.artstor.org/>

¹⁶³ Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 67.

held in a modified orant position close to her chest. Two archangels flank her, holding staves and gesturing toward Mary who looks up toward the *Pantocrator*. This motif is given the title “Our Lady of the Angels.” The star positioned beneath this plaque mirrors the three stars which often appear on her cloak in icons of Mary as a reminder of her virginity. The star could also allude to Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem which scripture states was marked with an astronomic event.

Francis focuses on the doctrine of the Incarnation in much of his writing concerning Mary, stating: “The blessed Virgin is so honored, as is right, since she carried Him in [her] most holy womb.”¹⁶⁵ Francis goes on to promote the belief in the human nature of Jesus, “. . .in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, from whose womb He received the flesh of our humanity and frailty.”¹⁶⁶

The Incarnation of Jesus was the Church doctrine which the Cathars most strongly disavowed. Pierre Autier taught that “Christ was a pure spirit, not in reality or even appearance born of Mary, who was not a woman at all: she was simply the will to do good.”¹⁶⁷ Bélibaste differed from Pierre Autier in his stance on Mary—saying that she was an actual woman who was “only spiritually the mother of Christ.” He taught that Jesus took a visible body from Mary, who was “sometimes interpreted as the Cathar Church and sometimes as an actual figure, albeit without a true human body.” The Cathars at Montailou believed that “Christ could not have existed in earthly flesh, for incarnation would automatically have Satanized him.”¹⁶⁸ Christ was immune from human

¹⁶⁵ Francis et al., 57.

¹⁶⁶ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 53.

¹⁶⁷ Unless noted, information and quotes from this section are taken from Lambert, *The Cathars*, 251, 254.

¹⁶⁸ Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, 1978, 324.

travails such as hunger, thirst, the effect of temperature, or physical pain. Nor could he suffer death, as he was already a free spirit.

The earliest *dipintura* crucifixes created by the Franciscans should not be viewed as mere illustrations for the writings of Bonaventure and Pseudo-Bonaventure, but should rather be considered as their inspiration. After Pisano's 1236 prototype, the oldest cross of our subset hails from 1254 (see Appendix 1 for the full chronology). It is conceivable that Bonaventure meditated on these very crosses as he composed *The Tree of Life* (1257-1267). In contrast to the Docetist teachings of their Cathar contemporaries which viewed Jesus' body as an illusion, the treatises and meditations of Bonaventure and Pseudo-Bonaventure focus on the humanity of Christ. In Bonaventure's verses, he explores the theological question of the incarnation of God, reflecting on Jesus' physicality from his humble birth, through his obedient childhood, to the years of his public ministry, and finally his suffering at the crucifixion.¹⁶⁹ It was held in Catholic teaching that while creation was considered a great deed performed by God, an even more powerful act was that of God becoming human, which in turn sanctified all of creation.¹⁷⁰ Amy Neff tells us Bonaventure sought answers for "the perplexing theological problems of why human salvation required God to take human form...[Bonaventure] believed in the value, even the necessity, of *seeing* Christ, because Christ's visibility demonstrated that the unseen God had fully taken on the form and flesh of a human being."¹⁷¹ This focus necessarily has implications for the development of art by the Franciscan order.

¹⁶⁹ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 12.

¹⁷¹ Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," 33.

Returning to the crucifix in Arezzo (Fig. 16), the 1250-1270 dating aligns almost precisely with the writing of Bonaventure's contemplations (1257-1267). This cross has a beveled frame painted in gold. The background of the cross is black while the apron is decorated with alternating black and red cruciform flowers, resembling the dogwood blossom—a traditional symbol of the crucifixion. From a distance this design appears to be diamond shaped. The face of Christ appears swollen with a prominent nose, drooping closed eyes, and a full beard. His long hair is parted in the middle and the crown of thorns fills the narrow forehead. The words *Rex Glorie* (King of Glory) are written above Jesus' outstretched arms. These terminate in open hands pierced with nails. The blood falling from the palms swirls as if suspended in clear water. The bones of the sternum and ribs are stylized as the body twists to the viewer's left. Jesus' side wound is barely bleeding. The hips, pelvis, and upper legs are covered with a transparent cream colored cloth thinly striped in red and black and fringed in gold. The outline of Jesus's thighs is clearly visible through the cloth, which is knotted below the naval in a position suggestive of genitalia. In his meditation on the crucifixion, Pseudo-Bonaventure exhorts his reader to

Pay diligent attention to this and consider His stature in every part. And to make yourself more deeply compassionate and nourish yourself at the same time, turn your eyes away from His divinity for a little while and consider Him purely as a man.¹⁷²

Taking this instruction many years later, Leo Steinberg convincingly establishes in *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, that the physical, even sexual, nature of Christ depicted in art serves the purpose of emphasizing Jesus' humanity. Steinberg points to Bonaventure's writing as evidence:

¹⁷² [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 330.

When man sinned...he fell headlong into weakness, ignorance, and malice...He could no longer imitate divine power, behold divine light, or love divine goodness. The most perfect way for man to be raised out of his misery was for the first Principle to come down to man's level, offering Himself to him as an accessible object of knowledge, love, and imitation. Man, carnal, animal, and sensual, could not know, love, or imitate anything that was not both proportionate and similar to himself. So, in order to raise man out of his state, the Word was made flesh; that He might be known and loved and imitated by man who was flesh...¹⁷³

In all save two of the ten crucifixes from our subgroup, a prominent and intricately tied knot stands out below Jesus' naval (See Appendix 1 for details). Steinberg would consider these an allusion to an erect phallus—a reference to Jesus' humanity.¹⁷⁴ The noted Jesuit scholar John W. O'Malley responded positively to Steinberg's radical hypotheses. He admits that the representation of Jesus' phallus as a symbol of his Incarnation is acceptable from a theological standpoint.¹⁷⁵

Other explanations have been offered to counter Steinberg's hypothesis, most notably by Caroline Walker Bynum. While Walker Bynum does agree with Steinberg that medieval symbolism is multivalent and based on theological beliefs and devotional practices, she feels the art should be viewed independently of the erotically charged lens through which modern viewers judge medieval representations of the body.¹⁷⁶ Bynum believes that Steinberg reads too much into medieval and renaissance theology in order to come to his conclusion that depictions of Jesus' genitalia serve as a symbol for his

¹⁷³ Bonaventure, "St. Bonaventure: The Breviloquium," IV, 3, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://agnuz.info/app/webroot/library/7/13/>; Bonaventure quoted in Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 121.

¹⁷⁴ Although Steinberg deals mainly with Renaissance images, his use of Bonaventure's text justifies an extrapolation to earlier depictions of the crucifixion. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 201.

¹⁷⁵ Steinberg, 216.

¹⁷⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," *Renaissance Quarterly* / *Publ. by the Renaissance Society of America*, 1986, 438.

humanity.¹⁷⁷ Bynum argues that Jesus' phallus was understood in medieval times not as a sexual organ, but rather as the locus of shedding the first blood of salvation that occurred during Jesus' ritual circumcision. Bleeding, in the sacrificial context, represented purging and atonement. The focus she finds in the texts is that "humanness" is recognized in a shared capacity for suffering, rather than sexual temptation. Bynum criticizes Steinberg's lack of medieval and renaissance writings which discuss Jesus' genitalia as an organ for erotic or reproductive activity. In her view, medieval and renaissance texts reveal an emphasis on redemption as being brought about by the "humanation" or "enfleshing" of God in all parts of the body, not just the genitals. Bynum concludes her analysis saying, "...there is little textual support for Steinberg's argument that the artistic focus of Renaissance painters on Christ's penis was a theological statement about sexuality."¹⁷⁸ In this regard, I believe Walker Bynum's reading of Steinberg's term *sexuality* is limited to the procreative or erotic action. Rather, I propose that Steinberg considers *sexuality* to be an inherently human attribute of creative potentiality, regardless of the sex act. In such a reading, the symbolism of the knotted loincloth certainly does support an emphasis on the Incarnation.

Below the thighs, Jesus' legs are depicted simply with ovals at the knee caps and calf muscles delineated on either side. The legs are pressed together at the heel with his feet pointing away from each other at a gentle angle. They are nailed to the cross separately. Pseudo-Bonaventure, in more florid text than the true Bonaventure, emphasizes the agony the man Jesus would have experienced in a meditation which

¹⁷⁷ Unless noted, information in this section is taken from Walker Bynum., 403-413.

¹⁷⁸ Walker Bynum., 437.

juxtaposes Christ's dual natures. When Jesus' divinity is considered, it is in relation to his humanity:

Look at Him diligently, therefore, and be moved to pity and compassion...Next return to His divinity and consider the immense, eternal, incomprehensible, and imperial Majesty incarnate, humbly bowing down, bending to the ground...¹⁷⁹

The cross in Arezzo is decorated in the side terminals with half-length portraits of Mary and John the Apostle, painted at one third scale compared to Christ. John, on Jesus' left, gestures with his open right hand toward Jesus. His left hand has deteriorated enough that its position is unreadable. Unique to the Arezzo cross, John faces away from Jesus, looking down at the viewer, perhaps in reference to the Gospel writer's impetus to relay the Paschal mystery to the congregation gathered below.

Mary stands at Jesus' right hand with her head bowed, eyes looking toward the crucified Christ. Her left hand reaches to her face as if wiping tears, while her right hand gestures toward her son. Her red dress, the color of suffering, is bunched in an empire waist, perhaps indicating her miraculous pregnancy. Bonaventure's reflection on Mary focuses not only on her grief as a mother, but also on the role she played as the provider for the flesh of Christ's humanity:

You were present at all these events, standing close by and participating in them in every way. This blessed and most holy flesh—which you so chastely conceived, so sweetly nourished and fed with your milk, which you so often held on your lap, and kissed with your lips—you actually gazed upon with your bodily eyes now torn by the blows of the scourges, now pierced by the points of the thorns, now struck by the reed, now beaten by hands and fists, now pierced by nails and fixed to the wood of the cross...now oppressed by sadness and sorrow partly because of his most sensitive response to bodily pain.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 331.

¹⁸⁰ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, 152.

Francis of Assisi stands below the cross. He appears larger in relation to the figure of Christ than the other depictions of the saint considered in this subset. Francis holds Jesus' right foot in both his stigmatized hands and tenderly presses his lips against the nail. The right toes of Jesus' foot point to the side wound of Francis' stigmata, which is exposed through an opening in his robe. The blood drips over Francis' hands and flows behind the saint, with blood from Christ's other foot pouring onto Francis' left foot, which is also clearly wounded with the stigmata. The placement of Francis at the feet reflects the hierarchical arrangement of the body in medieval belief. The words of the early church historian Eusebius (ca. 263-339) expressed the hypostatic union to reveal this understanding: "The nature of Christ is twofold; it is like the head of the body in that He is recognized as God, and comparable to the feet in that for our salvation He put on manhood as frail as our own."¹⁸¹ The head was considered godlier while the feet touched the materiality of earth.¹⁸² Francis' embrace of Jesus' feet is thus not only a recognition of the saint's poverty and humility, but it is also an expression of Francis' devotion to Jesus' human nature.

Leo Steinberg recognizes the evolving illustration of Jesus' duality in art. He expounds, "But in celebrating the union of God and man in the Incarnation, Western artists began displacing the emphasis, shifting from the majesty of unapproachable godhead to a being known, loved, and imitable."¹⁸³ Steinberg identifies the development in which art begins to focus on the human aspects of Jesus, but he does not offer any

¹⁸¹Eusebius' *History of the Church*, I, 2, quoted in Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 150.

¹⁸² Steinberg, 149.

¹⁸³ Steinberg, 14.

reasons for the transition. As the early Franciscans dealt with this very question of Jesus' dual nature, it is likely that they enacted a move to artwork which emphasized the humanization of Jesus in response to the Cathar's strict belief in a single natured divinity. The Cathar's claim that Jesus was only divine (presenting merely an illusion of a body) was an unacceptable challenge to orthodoxy that the early brotherhood felt had to be countered in every possible way.

§4.2 EUCHARISTIC FOCUS

Complex deliberations concerning the meaning and process of the Eucharist took place during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—debates in which the early Franciscans took part. The Fourth Lateran Council declared the doctrine of the Real Presence in 1215 which set forth the Church's belief in the physical presence of Jesus on the altar, transformed from the bread and wine.¹⁸⁴

The ultimate goal of the Cathars was to discredit and abolish the Mass because of its crucial standing in Catholic devotional practice.¹⁸⁵ Cathars took a rationalist approach to the sacrament of the Eucharist. In his extensive examination of Cathar history, Malcolm Lambert explains how Pierre Autier, “used the ancient *mot* [joke] about Christ's body needing to be as big as a mountain to feed the priests.” Another critique lay in the question of Jesus' body being eaten, digested, and excreted into the latrine. Autier also questioned his attentive crowds about the possibility of mice consuming the Body of

¹⁸⁴ Derbes, 17–18. Canon One, “Fourth Lateran Council: Internet Medieval Sourcebook. Hanover College,” accessed March 11, 2016, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/344lat.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 248.

Christ. Lambert says Jacques Autier claimed “there was nothing worthwhile in the mass but the gospel and the paternoster; chants and the rest were a deceit of the priest.”¹⁸⁶

In contrast, Francis believed the Eucharist flowed from and continued the Incarnation.¹⁸⁷ Reflecting on the celebration of the Eucharist as mirroring Jesus’ human life, Francis wrote,

As He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true.¹⁸⁸

This primary focus on the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist encouraged the early Franciscans not only to continue the practice of placing a cross prominently in their churches but to amplify its presence. Ritually the doctrine of the Real Presence was reinforced by the elevation of the host during the Eucharistic prayer, an addition to the Roman missal promoted by the Franciscans. Anne Derbes points out that the Eucharistic rite was framed more and more by elaborate altarpieces, with the monumental cross resting at the head of this structure. The Franciscans acted as powerful proselytizers for the veneration of the once suffering, now risen, body of Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁸⁹ The monumental cross was a focal point for the worshipper, highlighting the altar as the sacred space where Jesus’ sacrifice was re-presented during the liturgy.¹⁹⁰ In his expanded letter to the faithful, Francis points out the relationship between the Eucharist

¹⁸⁶The Cathar version of the Pater Noster refers to “supersubstantial bread” removing the temptation to consume material food. Lambert, 248.

¹⁸⁷ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹⁸⁸ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 27.

¹⁸⁹ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 18.

¹⁹⁰ Neff, “Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans,” 42.

and the cross, finding it remarkable that Jesus should “through His own blood, offer Himself as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross.”¹⁹¹ At the lower section of the cross in Arezzo (Fig. 16), Christ’s blood is painted as flowing down the cross and onto the supporting rocks, a symbol of the earth. It would not be a far leap in the minds of the congregation gathered for Mass to imagine the blood continuing its descent onto the altar, joining in the sacrifice of the mass occurring below the image.

Francis was fastidious about the Eucharist and the material goods pertaining to it.

In a letter to the custodians of the brotherhood he requested they

beg the clergy to revere above everything else the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy written words which consecrate [His] Body. The chalices, corporals, appointments of the altar, and everything which pertains to the sacrifice must be of precious material.

Francis further explains that his friars should express the necessity for the Eucharist in their preaching. He says:

And in every sermon...[tell them] that no one can be saved unless he receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. And when It is sacrificed upon the altar by the priest and carried to any place, let all the people, on bended knee, praise, glorify, and honor the Lord God living and true.¹⁹²

Francis’ exhortation to orthodox belief and practice would have spoken directly against the Cathars’ vehement opposition to the Eucharist.

¹⁹¹ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 68.

¹⁹² Francis et al., 53.

§4.3: COMPANIONS AT THE CROSS

Another approach the early Franciscans used to underscore the humanity of Christ in their crucifixes was by focusing on the companions of Jesus who stood at the foot of the cross. The Cathars insisted the crucifixion was a simulation—that Jesus was unharmed by the tortures of the Passion. In contrast, the Franciscans promoted the companions of Christ as giving witness to (and sharing in) Jesus’ agony, offering a symbol of verification for the events they believed took place. Depictions of Christ’s passion are the predominant topic in surviving thirteenth-century panel paintings, either as scenes within a larger narrative of the life of Jesus or exclusively showing the Passion.¹⁹³ The earlier style of historiated crucifixes with aprons depicting a small crowd of people is described in narrative form by Pseudo-Bonaventure. He writes, “with the Lady, there were also John and the Magdalen, and the Lady’s two sisters, that is, Mary Jacobi and Salome, and perhaps others as well.”¹⁹⁴ Emulating Pisano’s example in Assisi the congested side aprons of the cross, as seen on the *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2), transitioned to backgrounds with floral or geometric designs.¹⁹⁵ The next early Franciscan example we will consider exhibits the displacement of Mary and John the Apostle to the arms of the cross which increases the viewer’s focus on the body of Christ.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 2.

¹⁹⁴ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 335.

¹⁹⁵ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 4–5.

¹⁹⁶ Derbes, 20–21.

**Fig. 17 *Crucifix of Perugia* in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia, Italy
St. Francis Master (1272)**

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocifisso_di_Perugia_del_Maestro_di_San_Francesco#/media/File:Crucifix_Maestro_di_San_Francesco_Perugia.jpg

At 3.25 x 4.86 meters, the crucifix housed in the Perugia Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria (Fig. 17) is the second largest of the extant crosses which depict Francis at the base (after the Arezzo example, Fig. 16). It was originally created for the Church of San Francesco al Prato in Perugia. Construction of the church began 1251. Over the centuries the building suffered damage due to earthquakes and landslides and has been demolished and rebuilt at least twice. The artist known as the St. Francis Master dated the cross in 1272, noting on the inscription below the feet of Jesus that it was executed in the reign of Pope Gregory X (ca. 1210 – 1276, reigned 1271-1276). This dating would place the painting of the Perugian cross in close proximity to the written works of Bonaventure and Pseudo-Bonaventure.

While the head of the cross is similar to that in Arezzo in regard to the *Pantocrator* and Our Lady of the Angels panels, the crucifix in Perugia deviates significantly for the lower terminals. While the focus in Byzantine altar imagery was on the *Deesis* at the center of the epistyle, the monumental crosses of the Franciscans shifted the liturgical attention to the crucifixion. The panel crucifixes of the Franciscans limit the contemporary bystanders of the scene to Mary and John the Apostle (Fig. 18).¹⁹⁷ Mary remained at Jesus' right hand. John the Apostle replaced John the Baptist from the *Deesis*. Jesus was no longer the static enthroned ruler but transitioned to the twisted, bleeding body.

¹⁹⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 358.

The raw emotion expressed by the bystanders is an important evolution. No longer standing rigid and stoic, their grief is even more pronounced than had been depicted in the examples from Serbia and Mount Sinai. The crucifix of Perugia presents Mary and John as full length figures, painted at one quarter scale compared to Jesus. Both turn toward Christ in the center. The disciple John, traditionally believed to be the follower described as “beloved” in Christian scripture, holds his head bowed deeply to his upraised right hand. He lifts his left hand over his heart in a gentle clasp. John’s eyes appear downcast, as if gazing at the nail wound in Jesus’ hand. In his meditations on the Passion, Pseudo-Bonaventure recounts Jesus’ address to Mary and John from the cross, giving one to the other as adoptive mother and son.¹⁹⁸ Pseudo-Bonaventure analyzes the dismay of the bystanders,

all of whom...wept vehemently, nor could they be comforted for their beloved Lord and Master...What could they do, filled with bitterness, overwhelmed with sorrow, drunk with wormwood? Everyone wept unconsolably.¹⁹⁹

Fig. 18 Crucifix of Perugia, termini details

<http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/foto/40000/10800/10615.jpg>

<http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/foto/40000/10800/10617.jpg>

On the viewer’s left Mary’s head bows deeply, her gaze locked on her son’s face.

The anguish of the woman is described in detail by Pseudo-Bonaventure:

All this is done and said in the presence of His most sorrowful mother, whose great compassion adds to the Passion of her Son, and conversely. She hung with her Son on the cross and wished to die with Him rather than live any longer.²⁰⁰

At the moment of Jesus’ death the author describes,

¹⁹⁸ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 336.

¹⁹⁹ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, 335, 337.

²⁰⁰ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, 335.

Oh, what was the soul of the mother like, then, when she saw Him thus painfully weaken, faint, weep, and die! I believe that either she was so absorbed by the multitude of her sorrows as to be insensible or was half dead...²⁰¹

The author relays that after Jesus had expired, the soldiers returned to verify the prisoners' deaths, or hasten it by breaking their legs. Both Mary and John entreat the soldiers to leave the body in peace. Ignoring their request, a soldier "opened a great wound in the right side of the Lord Jesus; and blood and water came forth."²⁰² The side wound is depicted on the cross of Perugia as a spurting cleft on the right ribcage of Jesus, bisected by a long crack which reveals the division between the cross' wooden panels. The blood interplays with the alternating red and blue / burgundy and black blossoms which form the geometric background for this cross.

Also painted as a witness to the crucifixion is Francis of Assisi himself (Fig. 19). The image of the cross shaped the experience of Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscan order, beginning with the tradition of Francis' conversion taking place at the foot of a crucifix which spoke to him and ending with the saint's miraculous stigmatization near the completion of his life. The representation of the saint at Jesus' feet can be understood to serve dual symbolic roles. First, Francis can be perceived as an *alter Christus*: an iteration of Jesus for the contemporary medieval world.²⁰³ Second, Francis was seen as an exemplar for Christians as he was understood to spiritually witness Christ's passion as the most ardent adorer of Jesus' sacrificial and redemptive body and blood.

²⁰¹ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, 337.

²⁰² [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, 339.

²⁰³ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 19.

Fig. 19 Crucifix of Perugia, foot detail

<http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/foto/40000/10800/10613.jpg>

The driving force behind the early artistic representations of Francis was the desire to display the saint as the perfect imitator of Christ.²⁰⁴ In doing so the early brotherhood set up a parallel to the Cathar tenet of spiritual and physical poverty. Francis had a devotion to the crucified Christ that permeated his daily prayer and emphasized his own determination to imitate Christ. Seven times each day, he prayed from the *Office of the Passion*. This prayer, composed by Francis, was based on psalms and scriptures which focused on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In his prayers, Francis identified with Jesus, addressing God as “my most holy Father” in a more personalized and intimate manner than the original psalms or scripture passages on which Francis’ verses were based.²⁰⁵

Francis’ miraculous stigmatization was considered to be prime evidence that the saint shared a typological connection with the crucified Christ.²⁰⁶ Describing the phenomena of Francis’ stigmatization Bonaventure wrote,

On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph with six fiery and shining wings descend from the height of heaven. And when in swift flight the Seraph had reached a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the figure of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross...the fact that he was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow... [Francis] came down from the mountain, bearing with him the image of the Crucified, which was depicted not on tablets of stone or on panels of wood by the hands of a craftsman, but engraved in the members of his body by the finger of the living God.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Kennedy et al., 4.

²⁰⁵ Armstrong and Francis, 177, 180.

²⁰⁶ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 21.

²⁰⁷ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis*, 305-307.

Bonaventure understood the marking of Francis with the sign of the cross as a herald to Francis' eventual transformation into the total likeness of the crucified Christ which would occur upon Francis' death.²⁰⁸ Francis had shared his experience of the stigmatization with only a few close brothers, but was physically impaired by the wounds of the stigmata for the rest of his life. Bonaventure recounts, "Since he could not walk because of the nails protruding from his feet, he had his half-dead body carried through the towns and villages to arouse others to *carry the cross* of Christ."²⁰⁹ After the death of Francis, Elias of Cortona discovered the marks on Francis' body and announced their significance in a letter dated October 1226.²¹⁰ In 1255, Pope Alexander IV (reigned 1254-61) confirmed that he had witnessed the stigmata in Francis' hands, feet, and side while the man was still living. Only after this pronouncement do the Franciscans depict the saint bearing the wounds of Christ in their artwork.²¹¹

Trinita Kennedy argues that the manner in which Francis was understood by the order and his depiction in both public and private areas evolved in the first century after Francis' death. Memories of the man were replaced by images of the saint as *alter Christus*.²¹² Bonaventure actively promoted Francis as a second Christ, stressing his humility, life of renunciation, and embrace of poverty. Images were produced to reflect the similarity between the saint and Jesus starting in the mid-century and increasing during the time Bonaventure served as minister general to the order.²¹³ In his *Legenda*

²⁰⁸ Bonaventure and Cousins, 305–306.

²⁰⁹ Bonaventure and Cousins, 315.

²¹⁰ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 18.

²¹¹ Kennedy et al., *Sanctity Pictured*, 23.

²¹² Kennedy et al., 19.

²¹³ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy*, 21–22.

Maior, written 1260-1266, Bonaventure hails Francis as “the outstanding follower of Jesus Crucified.”²¹⁴ Bonaventure says, “In all things he wished to be conformed to Christ crucified, who hung on the cross poor, suffering and naked...for he strove to conform himself to Christ and to imitate him perfectly.”²¹⁵ Hans Belting describes the spiritual understanding and practice that was employed during this era. By meditating on a sacred image, medieval lay people could imitate the life of a saint. Because the image incorporated the same motifs that the saint had utilized or that had inspired the holy life, the laity were able to join in the saint’s sphere of influence, overcoming the distractions of secular life.²¹⁶ Pseudo-Bonaventure continues in this vein, commenting on Francis’ constant devotion to and emulation of Christ. Through this example, Pseudo-Bonaventure believes that every Christian can follow Francis’ path to divinization.

With such ardor did he [Francis] change himself that he had become almost one with Him and tried to follow Him as completely as possible in all virtues, and when he was finally complete and perfect in Jesus, by the impression of the sacred stigmata he was transformed into Him. Thus you see to what a high level the contemplation of the life of the merciful Jesus Christ may lead...²¹⁷

Painted at one fifth scale to Jesus, the kneeling image of Francis in the Perugia cross would have been visible to the congregation even when it was raised to the *tramezzo* of the church in Perugia. Shown against a background of brown flowers, Francis gestures with his left hand toward the wounds in Jesus’ feet. Two streams of blood cascade from Jesus’ feet, pooling onto the inscription at the base of the cross. Francis’ right hand is raised in a teaching gesture addressing the congregation below. In

²¹⁴ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God ; The Tree of Life ; The Life of St. Francis*, xiv–xv.

²¹⁵ Bonaventure and Cousins, 318.

²¹⁶ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 362.

²¹⁷ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 3.

this pose, he mirrors the docent position of the *Pantocrator* at the head of the cross. Viewers could witness in Francis' adoration at the foot of the cross the love, self-abnegation, and dedication necessary to join in the redemption provided by Christ.²¹⁸ As noted above, the cross of Jesus can be understood as a framework for the saint's vocation beginning with his call to rebuild the Church under the *Cross of San Damiano* (Fig. 2) and reaching fulfillment in the stigmatization. In the artwork of the Franciscans, the wounds of Francis evolved to a more pronounced duplication of Christ's wounds. Francis took on the persona of *alter Christus*, and in this form he embodied a virtual crucifix.

§4.4: TORTURED PHYSICALITY

During the Gothic period, craftsmen began to inspect natural forms in close detail in order to execute bodies and their environment with greater accuracy. Yet this naturalism was tempered by the contemporary conception of the human body as a structure that followed a pattern of divinely inspired geometry.²¹⁹ Returning to the fourteenth century artist's handbook, Cennini explains the correct measurements of a human figure. These instructions had been rigorously adhered to from Greco-Roman tradition and were well established by the age of Pisano and the early Franciscans.²²⁰ Using a compass, the layout of the figure is determined by a series of circles and arcs upon a grid. The resulting human form is described as the *homo quadratus*, in which "all measurements of the human body and all movements of its limbs may be enclosed in the two most important and primitive geometrical forms, the circle and the square."²²¹ These

²¹⁸ Neff, "Painting, Devotion, and the Franciscans," 39.

²¹⁹ Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 133–34.

²²⁰ Cennini and Thompson, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, 48–49.

²²¹ Baldini, Cimabue, and Casazza, *The Crucifix by Cimabue*, 18.

measurements served the artists of the medieval period as a tool to faithfully represent Jesus' body as both a physical construction and an expression of divine perfection.²²² The illustration of the body as an ordered concept did not purge it of human messiness. If anything, the depiction of Jesus' body was shown with greater goriness as the thirteenth century progressed.

In their texts, theologians could neglect the details of Christ's physicality. It was sufficient to explain that Jesus took human form and then he served, suffered, and died. But artists worked directly with the contours and colors of the body to illustrate both Jesus' life and death.²²³ Sculptors moulded the muscular legs of an itinerant preacher and wounded side of the corpse. The painter shadowed the weary eyes and blood dripping from pierced forehead. It was the artist who delivered theology to the sight of the believers, and through the image taught them what to believe. The early Franciscan theologians, working in the shadow of crucifixes such as Pisano's, innovatively described the suffering they saw in paint and wood and encouraged believers to meditate on the physical reality. After their texts were widely and rapidly disseminated, their written words reciprocated grisly details of the Passion back to subsequent crucifixes. This can be observed in the *Crucifix of Spello* which was produced at the end of the century, ca. 1290 (Fig. 20). This crucifix, and a similar cross in Montefalco, are possibly by the Expressionist Master of Santa Chiara (who may be have been Palmerino di Guido) (See links to the digital images in Appendix 1).²²⁴

²²² Baldini, Cimabue, and Casazza, 13–19. Also see Baldini's illustrations on page 65 of *The Crucifix by Cimabue*.

²²³ Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 16–17.

²²⁴ Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi*, 216.

The crucifix in the Church of Sant' Andrea in Spello probably had its origin in a Tuscan church but was moved to Perugia by 1400. It has been severely cut down, with the terminals possibly deteriorated beyond retention or more likely harvested as separate icon panels.²²⁵ The predominant color of the remaining background is a grayish blue. The narrow vertical rectangles remaining of the apron reveal a burgundy and gold floral pattern with a diamond geometry.

Bonaventure's words are echoed in the crucifix of Spello with the aim to elicit emotion from both the reader and the viewer.²²⁶ Each of Bonaventure's meditations appeals directly to the senses. Asking the believer to participate in the action of the scene, he utilizes graphic descriptions to produce an emotional impact.²²⁷ Bonaventure's description of the crucifixion is straightforward yet still vivid:

Fig. 20 *Crucifix of Church of Sant' Andrea in Spello, Italy (ca. 1290)*

http://www.borgodispello.it/pages/highslide2/images/large/spello_quadro_cristo.jpg

Bearing his cross for himself, he was led forth to the place of Calvary. There he was stripped completely and covered only with a cheap loincloth. Thrown roughly upon the wood of the cross, spread out, pulled forward and stretched back and forth like a hide, he was pierced by pointed nails, fixed to the cross by his sacred hands and feet and most roughly torn with wounds.²²⁸

The distinguishing feature of the corpus at Spello is its sophisticated modeling. Each muscular curve is delineated by shadow. The ligaments of Jesus' shoulders protrude while his hands curl in to shaded palms. The loincloth is not knotted here but rather is

²²⁵ No evidence for the terminal panels (presumably images of Mary and John the Apostle) was discovered in the research for this study.

²²⁶ Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. in the Preface to Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, xiv.

²²⁷ Bonaventure and Cousins, Introduction 35.

²²⁸ Bonaventure and Cousins, 148.

tissue thin, revealing the contours of Jesus' legs and groin. Following Pseudo-Bonaventure's words: "Behold, the Lord Jesus is crucified and extended on the cross so that each of His bones can be numbered," the chest, sternum, and ribcage of Jesus are stylized to emphasize the bones, although they are more naturalistically painted than the other torsos in our subgroup (see links to the digital images in Appendix 1).²²⁹

Like all but one cross in this study (that in Arezzo, Fig. 16), the crucifix in Spello does not depict Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. Bonaventure only briefly mentions that Jesus was tortured in this way and gives no further description of Jesus' face throughout the Passion.²³⁰ On the painted crucifix, Jesus' head is tipped forward onto his chest. His stylized ginger hair is capped by a halo of gold. The typical tripartite decoration of the halo has been reduced to only two arms in this example—the third seeming to be lost behind the drooping head. The beard blends into the shadow on the chest. Having tasted the gall and vinegar, Jesus' mouth rests in a neutral position with the lips slightly open.

Pseudo-Bonaventure frequently entreats the reader to "attend," "imagine," and "be present" as he graphically describes Jesus' sufferings.²³¹ Seemingly responsive to the growing personal agency of the laity, Pseudo-Bonaventure presented the manner in which Jesus was affixed to the cross in two potential historical situations, and invites the reader to choose whichever provides the more meaningful meditation. In the first scenario, Jesus ascended the cross on a ladder and was held there while soldiers embedded the nails. In the second, Jesus was nailed to the wood while lying on the ground and subsequently

²²⁹ [Pseudo] Bonaventure, Ragusa, and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ; an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, 334.

²³⁰ Bonaventure and Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, 149.

²³¹ Bonaventure and Cousins, 318, 320, 333.

raised upright. In both scenarios, Jesus' arms are stretched and nails driven through his hands. His feet are bound with a single nail being struck through both feet.

Pseudo-Bonaventure elaborates:

On all sides, rivers of His most sacred blood flow from his terrible wounds. He is so tortured that He can move nothing except His head. Those three nails sustain the whole weight of His body. He bears the bitterest pain and is affected beyond anything that can possibly be said or thought.²³²

In earlier depictions of the crucifixion, from the Byzantine through Pisano's and even up to our example from Perugia (Fig. 17), Jesus' feet are nailed separately to the cross (See Appendix 1). But as the end of the century nears, the artists closely reflect the writings of the Franciscans. The Spello image emphasizes the painful curve of the ankle to accommodate a single wound. The blood from each extremity pours naturalistically, overflowing the lines of the cut down cross. The gash in Jesus' chest is especially prominent with blood emptying down toward the image of Francis at the base. The saint kneels at the feet of Jesus, leaning in toward the viciously large nail head above the toes. In her article "'The Sweet Lean of His Head:' Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages," Sara Lipton examines the effects of this increasingly violent representation on the psyche of the congregation:

In suggesting that the heightened emphasis on Jesus's suffering embodied in the new iconography could well unsettle even faithful and orthodox Christians, the *Meditation* signals the power and autonomy of visual response. No matter how ardently viewers of art might believe in Christ the Savior (there is no reason to think that the *Meditation* was written for souls wavering in their faith), and no matter how familiar they might be with the narrative of the Crucifixion and the general form of the crucifix, they could still be shocked and distressed by an image of the dying Jesus, that is, by the appearance of a work of art. One did not have to be a heretic or a Jew to be worried by the visual similarities between the crucified God

²³² Bonaventure and Cousins, 334.

and dead and defeated mortal bodies-especially when their impact was not yet blunted by convention.²³³

In her article, Lipton describes a method of observation that was considered spiritually effective by the medieval viewer. It involved “the extended process of looking encompassing the passage of time and thereby incorporating the faculty of memory.”²³⁴ In her analysis of a text by Rupert of Deutz, in which the twelfth-century Flemish Benedictine was able to embrace the image of the crucified Christ, Lipton makes it clear that sustained looking at the crucifix of Christ is only half the equation necessary for a transcendental experience. Once a believer spends time in adoration, it was believed to be contingent on the Divine to draw near to the believer in the circumstance of a mystic vision.²³⁵ One can draw a parallel between Rupert of Deutz’s embrace of the corpus and Francis’ interaction with the body of Christ both at San Damiano and in the stigmatization. In addition, as the Benedictine monk was writing in response to the negative reaction of a Jewish man to the crucifix (which the man considered a repulsive idol), we can find a connection between Rupert’s impetus to describe his experience and that of Bonaventure who was also reacting to non-believers in the context of a Cathar region.²³⁶ Thus the gaze of the congregation upon the tortured corpus of Christ was thought to serve as a route to a transcendental event sanctioned by orthodoxy.

²³³ *The Meditations* Lipton mentions here is a Twelfth century manuscript of a follower of Bernard of Clairvaux. Nevertheless her argument can be applied to the Franciscans’ texts as they also elaborated on Bernadine themes. Lipton, “‘The Sweet Lean of His Head’: Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages,” 1186.

²³⁴ Lipton, 1176.

²³⁵ Rupert of Deutz’s commentary on Matthew (*De gloria et honore Filii hominis*), written in 1127. Lipton, 1178.

²³⁶ Lipton, 1181.

As a promotion of orthodox theology, the Franciscans' concentration on Jesus' physicality represented in images would have indeed alienated the Cathars. The Cathars would not only have found it offensive that the Catholic witnessed the physical human nature of Jesus within the imagery of the Passion, but would have rejected Catholic use of created artwork as a source of belief. A tenet of ascetic groups such as the Cathars was their disdain of religious artifacts and relics.²³⁷ The Cathars followed in an active heritage of anti-materialists. Despite the dearth of textual sources explicating their thoughts on this matter, it follows that they would have rejected all icons, narrative art, and reliquaries.²³⁸ The wooden boards, the animal glue, the precious gold leaf, the egg tempera paints—all the elements of a monumental crucifix—would have been held in contempt. In contrast, from the beginning, the Franciscans valued the edifice of the church building and its material accoutrements. Even while devoted to poverty, Francis felt it was his duty to repair churches. He exhorts his brothers: "The Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: 'We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the whole world and we praise You because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.'²³⁹ While the Cathars shunned crucifixes as part of the evil of created matter, for Catholics the crucifix became the locus of adoration and theological thought. Amy Neff describes how the particularly Franciscan method of prayer in which the visual image is fully integrated engenders the divinization of the viewer,

²³⁷ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 12.

²³⁸ Lambert, 17.

²³⁹ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 229–30.

causing him or her to more closely resemble God. This approach to redemption brings us back to Francis, for it was made possible by the saint's fervent love of Christ. Neff explains:

“[It] is on the cross that Christ fully descends to humankind's essential poverty, degradation, and humiliation. The suffering of Christ's Passion is explained as an abasement that is necessary in order to inflame human love and compassion; that love enables humans to join Christ in salvation. By engaging the viewer's heart, the image of the Passion draws out the viewer's emotions empathetically, in what is known as affective devotion.”²⁴⁰

In the medieval conception of art, if a physical image elicited love from the viewer, it was believed to have the power to transform him or her into the likeness of the divine.²⁴¹ The Franciscans used the devotional tool of focusing on the physical suffering of Jesus with extreme effectiveness, beginning in the age when it was a response to the Cathar's rejection of Jesus' human body and continuing to modern times.

²⁴⁰ Neff, 38.

²⁴¹ Neff, 43.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The Franciscan response to the Cathars was an approach of orthodox instruction and emotional devotion to the humanity and suffering of Christ. The early brotherhood promoted these emphases through both mental images evoked by written texts and material images displayed in the most prominent and sacramentally important space of their churches. Francis served as an orthodox alternative to the Cathars. Through his Rule, Christians who desired to follow the Gospel's call to poverty could live an austere lifestyle while remaining true to the Catholic body. Francis' example of *alter Christus* encouraged followers to gaze on the image of Christ in the *dipintura* crucifixes, just as the saint had done, with the desire to similarly take on the aspect of Christ.

The conversation between Cathar and Franciscan belief and practice and its effect on the art of the period could continue in numerous directions. An interesting study would be to measure the occurrence of the *Christus Patiens* as it correlates to times of increased manifestation of Manichean and Docetist heresies. This can further be compared to a theorized rise in the instances of *Christus Triumphans* during times when the divine nature of Jesus was questioned, as in a response to Islamic conversions.

Continuing the study of the Franciscans' promotion of the Incarnation and the human nature of Jesus, artwork depicting both Mary and the child Jesus could be examined. Through my research, I have found that the icon of the *Hodegetria* (in which Mary holds and gestures toward the small Jesus) is often paired with Passion images in diptychs. This physical connection could be understood as reinforcing my thesis of the Franciscans' attention to the humanity of Christ as a tool against heresy in both public worship spaces as well as in smaller domestic shrines or even mobile diptychs. As seen

earlier, illustrations of Francis staging the *crèche* at Greccio (Fig. 9) can also relay the concept of Jesus' embodiment. Leo Steinberg elaborates on the message inherent in this theme:

For the infant Christ, in Renaissance as in medieval art, is like no other child, whether he sits up to give audience, or rehearses the Crucifixion; whether he hands the keys of the kingdom to Peter, or snatches a makeshift cross from his playmate St. John. He engages in actions, such as eating grapes or perusing a book, from which common babies desist... In short, the depicted Christ, even in babyhood, is at all times the Incarnation—very man, very God.²⁴²

Against the Cathar's anti-material stance, the Franciscans' promotion of the belief that the created world was not evil, or even neutral, but was in fact sanctified by the Divine could be explored by the many examples of artwork commissioned by the friars which feature nature. The *Canticle of the Creatures* is Francis' text which counters most directly the Cathars' hatred of all material things. In this prayer, Francis calls on anthropomorphized Brother Sun and Sister Moon who radiate in the likeness of Jesus; Brother Wind and Sister Water who give sustenance and purity; Brother Fire who is beautiful and strong; and Sister Mother Earth who "sustains and governs us."²⁴³ God is praised through each of these creatures as well as by humanity who exists in cooperation with the elements.²⁴⁴ While Francis positively alludes to the story of creation in his poem, the Cathars considered the book of Genesis to be the story of the Old Testament god, whom they considered to be the source and ruler of evil.²⁴⁵ For a continued study of these themes, there exist a number of medieval artworks depicting the personified elements, renditions of Francis' sermon to the birds, and the illustrations of his conversion of the

²⁴² Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 10.

²⁴³ Francis et al., *Francis and Clare*, 38–39.

²⁴⁴ Armstrong and Francis, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 208.

²⁴⁵ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 173.

wolf of Gubbio. Francis is traditionally held to have treasured the environment and the synergetic relationship between God, humanity, and nature. This appreciation for the created world could be studied especially in the frescoes painted for the brothers in which landscape features prominently.

The Franciscans were not the first religious community that used art to mobilize against heretics. In his book on the decoration of the Cathedral of Chartres, Adolf Katzenellenbogen theorizes that the scenes depicted in the tympanum sculptures were chosen as a foil to heresy which denied the legitimacy of the mass and the value of the Eucharist. Supported by the Second Lateran Council of 1139, the See of Chartres had sculpted the image of the child Jesus on the altar along with a relief of the Last Supper.²⁴⁶ Bonaventure most likely encountered the philosophical influence of the School of Chartres during his education and subsequent professorship at the University of Paris. His promotion of art as a catechetical and devotional instrument may have been based on the effective use of the image which he had witnessed in France. Bonaventure's writings could be more thoroughly explored for traces of his connection to the theories of art employed by the See of Chartres.

Searching back to find even earlier roots of the visual philosophy employed by the Franciscans, a study could be made of the theories of light and geometry proposed by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (before 532) and put into practice by Abbot Suger (1081-1151). The latter's creative influence following his design of the basilica of Saint Denis near Paris had spread south of the Alps by the time of Francis.




²⁴⁶ Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ, Mary, Ecclesia* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 22–23.

Looking forward beyond the thirteenth-century timeframe of this thesis, further research could trace a proposed artistic transition which may have occurred as the Franciscans moved from a Neo-Platonic worldview to an Aristotelian mindset—what Malcolm Lambert describes as a “more balanced, humane and positive view of the visible world and man’s place in it.”²⁴⁷ Lambert believes this evolution also may have contributed to the decline of the Cathars who would have rejected its sympathetic approach to material creation.

The Franciscan crucifixes of duecento Italy serve as a framework for exploring the contrasting faiths the Franciscans and Cathars maintained within parallel communities. Through the crosses’ painted theology of the Incarnation and the Eucharist, in the depictions of the companions who suffered alongside Christ, to the increasingly naturalistic portrayal of Jesus that forged the path for Cimabue and Giotto and eventually the realism of the Renaissance, the influence of the Franciscans’ response to the Cathars, while subtle, should not be overlooked.

²⁴⁷ Lambert, *The Cathars*, 288.

Appendix 1: Thirteenth-Century Crucifixes Depicting Francis of Assisi at the Foot of the Cross

Crucifix by Current Location	Original Location	Width/Length Meters	Date	Background Decoration	Artist	Additional Figures	Loincloth Description	Francis' Stigmata	Number of Nails in Feet
Arezzo, San Francesco ²⁴⁸ http://www.turismo.intoscana.it/site/shared/turismo/immagini/San-Francesco-2012-23.jpg	Previous church at this location	3.70 x 5.75	ca. 1250-1270	 Black, red, and gold floral/diamonds	Unknown Umbrian painter related to Master of Santa Chiara	Mary, John (in terminal, half length, both face to viewer's right) Francis (at foot) Two angels with Mary (above Jesus' head)	Cream Transparent Knotted	Hands and side wound visible	2
Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale http://diversiobi.weebly.com/uploads/6/2/4/0/6240138/3046504.jpg?357	San Francesco, Bologna	2.13 x 2.69 Cut down ²⁴⁹ or 3.09 x 1.96 ²⁵⁰	ca. 1254-1265 ²⁵¹	 Geometric florals and bands in burgundy, green, and cream	Probably an Umbrian follower of Giunta Pisano	Francis kneeling at a distance Mary and two angels above Jesus' head* Terminals are missing St. Helen added fourteenth-century ²⁵²	Purple Opaque Knotted	Hand wounds visible	2
Assisi, Santa Chiara http://static.panoramio.com/photos/large/108254671.jpg	same	3.00 x 4.15	ca. 1260	 Red and black quatrefoil diamonds/florals	Master of Santa Chiara (Master of Donna Benedetta), possibly identified Benvenuto Benvieni	Mary John (Full length) Our Lady of the Angels Francis, Clare, Abbess Donor Donna Benedetta	Cream Opaque Knotted	Hand wounds visible (?)	2




²⁴⁸ Unless otherwise noted, Appendix 1 information is based on Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi*.

²⁴⁹ William R Cook, *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 72, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=280775>.




²⁵⁰ "Itinerari Artistici: Dal Duecento Al Gotico," accessed March 12, 2016, <http://diversiobi.weebly.com/il-gotico.html>.

²⁵¹ "Itinerari Artistici: Dal Duecento Al Gotico."

²⁵² Itinerari Artistici: Dal Duecento Al Gotico."

<p>Faenza, Pinacoteca Civica</p> <p>https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/82/b3/4e/82b34e3500fb8f0d846ee0e9643ce061.jpg</p>	Santa Chiara, Faenza	1.55 x 1.96	1260-1270	 <p>Geometric diamonds, bars, circles</p>	Blue Crucifix Master	Mary John Francis (not touching)	Purple Opaque Knotted	Unknown due to damage	2
<p>Crucifix by Current Location</p> <p>On-line Image</p>	Original Location	Width/Length Meters	Date	Background Decoration	Artist	Additional Figures	Loincloth Description	Francis' Stigmata	Number of Nails in Feet
<p>Gualdo Tadino, Pinacoteca Comunale</p> <p>http://www.keytombria.com/Gualdo_Tadino/Pinacoteca_files/GT-Pin-Crocifisso.jpg</p>	Formerly Church of San Francesco, Gualdo Tadino	2.39 x 3.02	ca. 1270	 <p>Red squares with green outlines</p>	Maestro del Crocifisso di Gualdo Tadino ²⁵³ or Master of Santa Chiara	Mary John (full length) Francis (not touching)	Purple Opaque Knotted	Hand wounds visible	2
<p>Perugia Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria</p> <p>https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocifisso_di_Perugia_del_Maestro_di_San_Francesco#/media/File:Crucifix_Maestro_di_San_Francesco_Perugia.jpg</p>	San Francesco al Prato, Perugia	3.25 x 4.86	1272 (dated)	 <p>Blue and red floral</p>	St. Francis Master	Jesus Blessing Mary of the Angels Mary John (full length) Francis kneeling, barely touching foot)	Orange Opaque Knotted	Hand and foot wounds	2
<p>Florence, Villa Acton</p> <p>http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/foto/40000/10800/10677.jpg</p>	Origin unknown	1.62 x 2.50 Cut down	ca. 1295	Apron removed late fourteenth or early fifteenth century	Maestro del Crocifisso Stoclet or late follower of St. Francis Master	Francis holding foot Terminals are missing	Opaque (no color image available) Knotted	Hand and Foot wounds visible	2

²⁵³ "Key to Umbria: Gualdo Tadino," accessed March 12, 2016, http://www.keytombria.com/Gualdo_Tadino/Pinacoteca.html.

<p>Nocera Umbra, Pinacoteca Comunale Perugia</p> <p>https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/54/Cristo_Crocifisso_Pinacoteca_Comunale_di_Nocera_Umbra.JPG</p>	Church of San Francesco, Nocera Umbra	2.52 x 3.20	ca. 1285-1295	 <p>Red and black floral diamonds</p>	Master of the Cross of Nocera Umbra	Mary John (full length) Francis	Red Opaque Knotted	Hand and foot wounds	2
<p>Crucifix by Current Location</p> <p>On-line Image</p>	Original Location	Width/Length Meters	Date	Background Decoration	Artist	Additional Figures	Loincloth Description	Francis' Stigmata	Number of Nails in Feet
<p>Spello, Sant' Andrea Church</p> <p>http://www.borgodispello.it/pages/highslide2/images/large/spello_quadro_cristo.jpg</p>	Probably Spello; possibly Florence	1.80 x 2.50 Cut down	ca. 1290	 <p>Gold floral with diamond outline on burgundy field Cut down apron</p>	An Umbrian Master (perhaps Expressionist Master of Santa Chiara who is probably Palmerino di Guido)	Francis (kneeling toward foot nail, hand touches foot) Terminals are missing	Ivory Transparent No knot	Hand and foot wounds visible	1
<p>Montefalco Museo Civico</p> <p>http://www.medioevoinumbria.it/wp-content/gallery/resources/Museo%20Civico%20-%20Montefalco/Crocifisso.jpg</p>	Formerly the Church of San Francesco, Montefalco	2.40 x 3.00	ca. 1300	 <p>Gold and brown florals</p>	Montefalco Cross Master (probably Expressionist Master of Santa Chiara who is probably Palmerino di Guido)	Mary John (half length) Francis (kissing nail)	Ivory Transparent No knot	Hand wounds visible	1

Appendix 2

Fourth Lateran Council: Canon 3 on Heresy (1215)

We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known, for while they have different faces they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails, since in all of them vanity is a common element. Those condemned, being handed over to the secular rulers of their bailiffs, let them be abandoned, to be punished with due justice, clerics being first degraded from their orders. As to the property of the condemned, if they are laymen, let it be confiscated; if clerics, let it be applied to the churches from which they received revenues. But those who are only suspected, due consideration being given to the nature of the suspicion and the character of the person, unless they prove their innocence by a proper defense, let them be anathematized and avoided by all until they have made suitable satisfaction; but if they have been under excommunication for one year, then let them be condemned as heretics. Secular authorities, whatever office they may hold, shall be admonished and induced and if necessary compelled by ecclesiastical censure, that as they wish to be esteemed and numbered among the faithful, so for the defense of the faith they ought publicly to take an oath that they will strive in good faith and to the best of their ability to exterminate in the territories subject to their jurisdiction all heretics pointed out by the Church; so that whenever anyone shall have assumed authority, whether spiritual or temporal, let him be bound to confirm this decree by oath. But if a temporal ruler, after having been requested and admonished by the Church, should

neglect to cleanse his territory of this heretical foulness, let him be excommunicated by the metropolitan and the other bishops of the province. If he refuses to make satisfaction within a year, let the matter be made known to the supreme pontiff, that he may declare the ruler's vassals absolved from their allegiance and may offer the territory to be ruled by lay Catholics, who on the extermination of the heretics may possess it without hindrance and preserve it in the purity of faith; the right, however, of the chief ruler is to be respected as long as he offers no obstacle in this matter and permits freedom of action. The same law is to be observed in regard to those who have no chief rulers (that is, are independent). Catholics who have girded themselves with the cross for the extermination of the heretics, shall enjoy the indulgences and privileges granted to those who go in defense of the Holy Land....²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ "Fourth Lateran Council: Canon 3 on Heresy, Internet History Sourcebooks Project," accessed February 26, 2016, <https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lat4-c3.asp>.

Appendix 3: Relevant text of *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology* by Bonaventure

11. By the same process of reasoning is Divine Wisdom to be found in the illumination of the *mechanical arts*, the sole purpose of which is the *production of artifacts*. In this illumination we can see the *eternal generation and Incarnation of the Word*, the *pattern of human life*, and the *union of the soul with God*. And this is true if we consider the *production*, the *effect*, and the *fruit* of a work, or if we consider *the skill of the artist*, *the quality of the effect produced*, and *the utility of the product derived therefrom*.

12. If we consider *the production*, we shall see that *the work of art* proceeds from *the artificer* according to a similitude existing in *his* mind; *this* pattern or model *the* artificer studies carefully before *he* produces and then he produces as he has predetermined. The artificer, moreover, produces an exterior work bearing the closest possible resemblance to the interior exemplar, and if it were in his power to produce an effect which would know and love him, this he would assuredly do; and if that effect could know its maker, it would be by means of the similitude according to which it came from the hands of the artificer; and if the eyes of the understanding were so darkened that it could not elevate itself to things above itself in order to bring itself to a knowledge of its maker, it would be necessary for the similitude according to which the effect was produced to lower itself even to that nature which the effect could grasp and know. In like manner, understand that no creature has proceeded from the Most High Creator except through the Eternal Word, "in Whom He ordered all things," and by which Word He produced creatures bearing not only the nature of His *vestige* but also of His *image* so that through

knowledge they might become like unto Him. And since by sin the rational creature had dimmed the eye of contemplation, it was most fitting that the Eternal and Invisible should become visible and take flesh that He might lead us back to the Father. Indeed, this is what is related in the fourteenth chapter of Saint John: "No one comes to the Father but through Me," and in the eleventh chapter of Saint Matthew: "No one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." For that reason, then, it is said, "the Word was made flesh." Therefore, considering the illumination of mechanical art as regards the production of the work, we shall see therein the Word begotten and made incarnate, that is, the Divinity and the Humanity and the integrity of all faith.

13. If we consider the *effect*, we shall see therein the *pattern of human life*, for every artificer, indeed, aims to produce a work that is beautiful, useful, and enduring, and only when it possesses these three qualities is the work highly valued and acceptable.

Corresponding to the above-mentioned qualities, in the pattern of life there must be found three elements: "*knowledge, will, and unaltering and persevering toil.*" *Knowledge* renders the work beautiful; the *will* renders it useful; *perseverance* renders it lasting. The first resides in the rational, the second in the concupiscible, and the third in the irascible appetite.

14. If we consider *the fruit*, we shall find therein *the union of the soul with God*, for every artificer who fashions a work does so that he may derive *praise, benefit, or delight* therefrom--a threefold purpose which corresponds to the three formal objects of the

appetites: namely, a *noble* good, a *useful* good, and an *agreeable* good. It was for this threefold reason that God made the soul rational, namely, that of its own accord, it might *praise* Him, *serve* Him, *find delight* in Him, and be at rest; and this takes place through charity. "He who abides in it, abides in God, and God in him," in such a way that there is found therein a kind of wondrous union and from that union comes a wondrous delight, for in the Book of Proverbs it is written, "My delights were to be with the children of men." Behold how the illumination of mechanical art is the path to the illumination of Sacred Scripture. There is nothing therein which does not bespeak true wisdom and for this reason Sacred Scripture quite rightly makes frequent use of such similitudes.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ "Bonaventure: Retracing the Arts to Theology," accessed March 11, 2016, <http://people.uvawise.edu/philosophy/phil205/Bonaventure.html>.

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