Mendicants and the Italian Communes in Salimbene’s *Cronaca*

“That means,” Colonel Aureliano Buendia said, smiling when the reading was over, “that all we’re fighting for is power.”

*Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude*

“Lest they be broken in the difficulties of life as they arise, it is necessary that men be instructed about what man is.”

*Salimbene, Cronaca*

Dino Compagni opens the second book of his *Chronicle of Florence* with a passionate denunciation of his fellow Florentines. “Arise wicked citizens full of discord: grab sword and torch with your own hands and spread your wicked deeds. Unveil your iniquitous desires and your worst intentions. Why delay any longer? Go and reduce to ruins the beauties of your city. Spill the blood of your brothers, strip yourselves of faith and love, deny one another aid and support. Sow your lies, which will fill the granaries of your children. Do as did Sulla in the city of Rome. Yet all the evils that Sulla achieved in ten years, Marius avenged in a few days … more is consumed in one day of war than is gained in many years of peace, and a small spark can destroy a great realm.”

One can sense the urgency and distress as Compagni describes the implosion of the regime of the Florentine *popolo* during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, a regime in which he had heavily invested his efforts, hopes and emotions. At the same time, as one reads Compagni, one cannot help but think that there is, indeed, nothing new under the sun. Violent conflict, both within cities and between cities, plagued the world of the communes during the centuries before and after St. Francis. This conflict generated seemingly interminable, and at

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times frenetic, political experimentation. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries communal governments tested the relative merits of episcopal rule, consular regimes, podestarial governments, popular regimes, and signorial boss rule (to varying degrees indigenous, imperial, or papal), all the while crafting legislation and designing judicial procedures, both secular and ecclesiastical, to direct the polycentric interests of the city toward a community of purpose.\(^2\)

Despite this experimentation, or perhaps, because of it, there was an inherent instability to the communes. As Carol Lansing writes, “popular governments, despite their relative autonomy and … their innovations in judicial apparatus, were after all fatally weak.”\(^3\)

Institutional mechanisms were not sufficient, at least by themselves, to restrain factional violence. Urban clergy and laity therefore crafted political theologies to reinforce institutional solutions, hoping to create civic identities sufficiently broad and compelling to unite the disparate interests that comprised communal society – urban and rural lineages; professional, mercantile and manufacturing associations; and peasants – into something that at least approximated a community. As one might expect, it was not uncommon for these political theologies to be self-serving, providing a theological justification for the political claims of a commune or of a particular group within a commune.\(^4\) Typically, these political theologies were no more durable than the coalition of political and religious interests that created them.

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\(^3\) Lansing, *Passion and Order*, 24.

This is the world in which the mendicants settled. Statistics concerning Franciscan settlements give us an idea of just how successful the mendicant movement in Italy was. By 1230, barely two decades after the founding of the order, there were already four hundred Franciscan houses. By mid-century there were as many as ten thousand Minorites in Italy alone. Therefore it comes as no surprise that over the course of the thirteenth century, there is hardly an aspect of communal life, whether public or private, left untouched by the mendicants. Most obviously, they belong to the story of pastoral care and lay spirituality, where they were less innovators than catalysts that sustained and energized processes already underway. As providers of pastoral care, their influence flowed through well established channels into practically every corner of communal life. They preached fiery sermons to crowds in city streets and piazzas, converting some, entertaining some, provoking some to anger. They heard confessions, sometimes to the consternation of the secular clergy, who, nevertheless, frequented mendicant schools and read mendicant manuals that helped them preach and hear confession more

By far the best local study on this subject is Marc von der Höh, Erinnerungskultur und frühe Kommune. Formen und Funktionen des Umgangs mit der Vergangenheit im hochmittelalterlichen Pisa (1050-1150) (Berlin, 2006)


6 See Augustine Thompson, Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125-1325 (University Park, 2005), 10-11.

effectively. As the friars set down roots in the cities, lay confraternities gravitated to them, looking for direction and counsel in developing spiritualities consonant with their sense of calling, whether contemplative, active/charitable, or penitential. The growing number of mendicant saints provide yet another measure of the friars’ success in shaping civic consciousness.

Mendicant spirituality was intensely incarnational, like that of their spiritual great-grandfather, Pope Gregory the Great; therefore as one follows their pastoral work, one passes almost imperceptibly from the interior life of the soul to the palazzo comunale – two fronts in the battle between charity and carnality. They begged for alms and organized the distribution of charity to the poor. With the financial support of laypersons and communal governments, they left their mark on the urban landscape, itself a quasi-liturgical space, by building magnificent churches and piazzas. Many of these same benefactors sought burial in their churches, causing still more consternation among the secular clergy. The friars served as bishops, sometimes

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8 See Luigi Pellegrini, “Mendicanti e parroci: coesistenza e conflitti di due strutture organizzative della 'cura animarum',' in Francescanesimo e vita religiosa dei laici, 129-167; Roberto Rusconi, “I Francescani e la confessione nel secolo XIII,” Francescanesimo e vita religiosa, 251-309; George Dameron, Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante (Philadelphia, 2005), 133-134; See Lawrence, The Friars, 152-165 for a useful summary.


11 Lester Little, Liberty, Charity, Fraternity: Lay Religious Confraternities at Bergamo in the Age of the Communes (Bergamo, 1988).

12 See Thompson, Cities of God, 419-422; See also the collection of articles, Architettura e urbanistica degli ordini mendicanti in Storia della città: Rivista internazionale di storia urbana e territoriale 9 (1978).
appointed by the papacy, sometimes elected by the local clergy – evidence that their relation with the clergy was not always hostile. Laypersons attended their schools. They served as communal officials, administrators in public works projects, participated in the crafting of communal statutes, conducted inquisitions. They negotiated peace settlements between civic factions and between warring cities, both of whom typically grew impatient with peace and soon returned to battle, providing yet more opportunities for the friars to preach and negotiate treaties and truces. Futile? Perhaps, but sometimes, repetition is the mother of learning. On more than a few occasions, we find the friars on the other side of the negotiating table, embroiled in quarrels themselves. Franciscans fought each other over the meaning of poverty and Joachite eschatology. One does not have to look hard to find a spirit of rivalry between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, even as both united against the secular clergy and those who took up its cause, like William of St. Amour or William FitzRalph. The friars sometimes found themselves at odds with other orders, some long established, like the Cistercians, and some new, like the Apostles. Given the ubiquity of mendicant activity, the range of sources that scholars have used to study the friars is quite broad: saints’ lives, canonization proceedings, chronicles, minutes of civic councils, notarial records, inquisition registers, judicial records, episcopal registers and constitutions, civic

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14 The best study on the mendicant schools is Marian Michèle Mulchahey, First the Bow is Bent in Study: Dominican Education Before 1350 (Toronto, 1998); Lawrence provides a useful summary in The Friars, 127-151.

statutes, art, architecture, literature, drinking songs, theological treatises, manuals for preachers and confessors, canon law, rulings of provincial chapters, papal and imperial registers.\footnote{For a useful survey of the range of sources typically available in communal archives, see \textit{Chiese e conventi degli ordini mendicanti in Umbria nei secoli XIII – XIV: Inventario delle fonti archivistiche e catalogo delle informazioni documentarie}. \textit{Archivi di Orvieto}, eds. Marilena Rossi Caponeri and Lucio Riccetti (Perugia, 1987).}

No easy task, to describe the complicated and difficult marriage between the mendicants and the communes. Confronted with such a topic that is, quite frankly, overwhelming, the goal of this chapter will be modest – to sit back and listen to Salimbene, one of the most loquacious children of this marriage, talk about himself and his parents. His chronicle, which covers events in Italy from 1168-1288, is arguably the most important narrative source for thirteenth-century Italy.\footnote{For an introduction to the bibliography on Salimbene, see Scalia’s introduction to Salimbene de Adam, \textit{Cronica}, ed., Giuseppe Scalia, \textit{(Corpus Christianorum. Continuata Mediaevalis)} 125, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1998), i-li.} Near the beginning of his chronicle he writes, “And I have been in this Order for many years as priest and preacher: I have lived in many provinces, seen many things, and learned much.”\footnote{Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 56. I have generally followed Baird’s translations for the passages that I have included in this chapter. \textit{The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam}, trans. Joseph L. Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Robert Kane (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies) 40 (Binghamton, 1986), 13. As one reads the chronicle, one is struck by the freedom with which Salimbene moves from place to place. Piecing together evidence in the chronicle, Scalia has provided a detailed summary of Salimbene’s travels. After joining the order in Parma in 1238, we can summarize his travels as follows: Fano (1238-1239); Lucca (1239); Jesi (1239); Siena (1241-1243); Pisa (1243-1247); Cremona and Parma (1247); France (1247-1248, including Lyons, Troyes, Provence, Paris, Sens, Auxerre, Vezelay, Arles, Marseilles, Hyères, Aix, Tarascon, Beaucaire, and Nice); Genoa (1248); back to France (1249 Hyères, Avignon, Lyons); Vienna and Grenoble (1249); Susa, Alexandria, Tortona (1249); Genoa, Bobbio, Parma, Bologna (1249); Ferrara (1249-1256); Borgo San Donino in 1259; Reggio and Parma (1260); Ravenna, Argenta, Ferrara (1264); Faenza, Assisi, Perugia, Verna (1265); Parma and Ravenna (1266); Ravenna (1268-1269); Imola (1270); Forli, Ravenna (1273); Faenza (1274); Bologna (1276-1277); March of Ancona or Romagna (1279); Reggio (1279-1285); Montefalcone (1285-1288). He died in 1288, probably at Montefalcone. Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, ix-xii.} Born in Parma in 1221, he entered the Franciscan Order in 1238. From comments scattered throughout the chronicle, it is clear that he wrote the chronicle in 1283-1288, while living in the Franciscan convent at Reggio.\footnote{For a discussion of the length of his stay in Reggio, see Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, xii.} As one listens to the friar in his mid sixties reflect upon his fifty years in the order, one cannot help but be amazed at the breadth of his experience. This is, of course, what makes him such a wonderful source for a study of the friars and...
communes. Indeed, there is scarcely anything in the long list of mendicant activities mentioned above that cannot be found in his chronicle.

As one might expect from a child of such a difficult marriage, Salimbene is a puzzling personality. There is a worldliness about him that sometimes seems out of place for a follower of St. Francis. The distance between the ideals of St. Francis and the realities of the lives and outlooks of Salimbene and his fellow Franciscans, as portrayed in the chronicle, has led a few scholars to question the depth or authenticity of his conversion – an old friar who no longer believes, but still plies the trade. Other scholars have found in the troubling distance between the real world of Salimbene’s chronicle and the ideals of St. Francis a useful way to chart “those numerous, thorough-going compromises with the real world, which were eventually to make the friars the most popular subject of ridicule and satire in medieval literature,” as Baird put it. Baird goes on to write that by the time Salimbene wrote his chronicle, “the Order had, in short, come to terms with harsh reality (perhaps inevitable if it was to continue to exist), while still espousing ideals which it no longer embodied. Salimbene is himself a perfect exemplar of the inherent contradictions which are characteristic of his Order.” And so, Salimbene gives us the real story behind the triumphalism of the legends – a conventional, conformist religiosity that looks rather pale against the heroic spirituality of St. Francis.²⁰ At issue in such judgments is the question of conversion; to what extent did Salimbene convert to Franciscan ideals, and to what extent did he convert Franciscan ideals to the values of the Italian ruling elite? In other words, how and to what extent did the mendicants and the communes influence each other? There is no better case study for exploring this issue than Salimbene’s chronicle.

Salimbene’s chronicle is not an easy text to get one’s arms around – 979 pages in Scalia’s edition – therefore I will focus on a limited range of issues: Salimbene’s identity as a member of the communal ruling class, looking at the way in which his aristocratic outlook shaped his experience and outlook as a friar, and vice versa. Finally, I will consider the implications of Salimbene’s chronicle as a distinctive political theology, offering citizens of the communes a sense of identity very different from that of typical communal political theologies.

**Salimbene: Lineage and Conversion**

Salimbene was an eyewitness to much of what he reports. There is, however, no pretense of the objective, transparent observer in his style. Though one can easily detect the typically dry, annalistic style of the chronicle sources that form the substrata of his narrative, there is a profound sense of authorial presence, of subjectivity, in the narrative that resuscitates the dry bones of his sources and brings them into the realm of human experience. As a result, the work often reads more like personal memoires than a chronicle. For this reason, we know a great deal about Salimbene’s life story and his outlook. For example, we learn of his birth in the midst of a dry and loosely connected narrative of events, some violent, some sacred, that occurred in 1221. “And in that same year on the feast of St. Lawrence, the 10\textsuperscript{th} of August, the Mantuans were overcome, put to flight, and captured by exiles from Bedullo, who had come from Fabbrico and Campagnola in order to burn and pillage Bedullo. In 1221 the blessed Dominic died on the 6\textsuperscript{th} of August. And I, Brother Salimbene de Adam of the city of Parma, was born in the same year on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of October, the feasts of Saints Dionysius and Doninus.”\footnote{Salimbene, Cronaca, 50; Baird, 8.} We learn another interesting detail of Salimbene’s life as he tells of an earthquake that shook northern Italy in 1222, just one year after his birth. “And in that same year on Christmas Day, there was a great earthquake in the
city of Reggio…. And this earthquake was felt throughout Lombardy and Tuscany…. My mother used to tell me that during the time of this great earthquake I lay in my crib, and that she grabbed up my two sisters, one under each arm – for they were small – and, with me left in the cradle, she ran to her family’s home. For she feared, she said, lest the baptistery near our home should fall on her. And because of this, I could never afterward love her as much as before, because she ought to have been more careful of me, the male of the family, than of the daughters. Her explanation, however, was that they were easier to carry, although they were larger.  

One cannot miss the intriguing role that lineage plays in this vignette – his mother’s failure to protect the male child threatened the lineage. Several pages later, still close to the beginning of the chronicle, it becomes clear that the connection between lineage and the baptistery in this story was more than incidental. Salimbene writes, “moreover, when the baptistery of Parma was being built, my father, so he told me, laid commemorative stones in the foundation. This baptistery was constructed on the site of the homes of my kinsmen, who, after the demolition of their homes, left the city and became citizens of Bologna, where they took the name of Cocca.” Salimbene will mention his father’s role in the construction of the baptistery once again, in a passage close to the end of the chronicle, a passage that he would have written three to four years later. And so, it is fair to say that as he wrote his chronicle in the middle years of the sixth decade of his life, after having spent about fifty years in the order of friars minor, his lineage and the baptistery of Parma were very much on his mind.

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22 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 50-51; Baird, 8-9. Given the height of the baptistery, she had good reason to fear. Much later in the chronicle, Salimbene describes a mountain cave in southern France, where St. Mary Magdalene did penance for thirty years; “The height of the mountain above the cave is as great as the height of the baptistery in Parma, and the cave is so high upon the side of the mountain that the three Asinelli towers of Bologna placed one on top of the other would not, I believe (if I am remembering correctly), reach it…” Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 789; Baird, 531.

One can easily imagine why Guido de Adam told his son about laying a foundation stone for the new baptistery. He came from a noble Parmese lineage. To leave a memorial in the very epicenter of the city’s sacred landscape was a mark of honor and distinction for his family. The importance of the baptistery in the city’s sense of identity is brought home to us later in the chronicle as Salimbene recounts Parma’s glorious victory over Frederick II and Cremona in 1247. “Also the Parmese took the Cremonese carroccio, which was in Victoria, and brought it into Parma and placed it with honor in the baptistery.” More important for Salimbene, however, was the link between the baptistery and the glory of his family. He was fiercely proud of his father and his lineage. As he introduces the reader to his father's forebears, the repetition of the names Roland and Oliver among the name stock of his kin speaks volumes about the sense of identity that Salimbene inherited from his family. This knightly ethos, so prevalent among the communal ruling elite, finds expression in other ways. Just before describing his father’s role in the construction of the baptistery, Salimbene tells us that his father was a “strong and handsome man” who had accompanied Count Baldwin of Flanders on the Fourth Crusade. Whether he distinguished himself in battle, Salimbene does not tell us; but we do learn that the war horse that his father took to the Holy Land “was commended for its beauty and excellence over all the others in his company.” Reinforcing these deeply felt connections between his family, the baptistery, and the Holy Land, was Salimbene’s own baptism. “As my relatives tell me, Lord Balian of Sidon, a great baron of France – who had just returned from the holy Land to join the

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24 Salimbene, Cronaca, viii.
25 One of the best examples of this comes from von der Höh, Erinnerungskultur und frühe Kommune, 292-314.
26 Salimbene, Cronaca, 307; Baird, 193. Frederick’s crown was also captured and kept in the sacristy of the cathedral.
27 Salimbene, Cronaca, 55; Baird, 12.
28 Salimbene, Cronaca, 55; Baird, 12. We also learn that Salimbene had an illegitimate brother, born of his father’s concubine, Reechelda. Salimbene tells us, “hic fuit homo pulcher et magnus bellator.” Salimbene, Cronaca, 78. He fought in the service of Frederick II against the church and later did penance for his misdeeds by making a pilgrimage to St. James at Compostella.
Emperor Frederick II – received me at the Holy baptismal font, which was near my home in Parma.”

Finally, there was one other important monument connecting his father, lineage, and the baptistery. After mentioning that his paternal grandmother was buried with her immediate relatives in a family burial plot, Salimbene mentions his father’s place of burial. “At a distance [from the family burial plot] my father had his own monument, a new one in which no one was yet buried, in the Piazza Vetere in front of the doors of the Baptistry, since the first monument [family burial place] was full.”

All of this weighed heavily upon the mind of the sixty-two year old friar as he wrote his chronicle, for he knew that when he died, so too would his father’s line. In the midst of yet another digression on his family, he writes, “I, Brother Salimbene, and my brother Guido de Adam, destroyed our house in both the male and the female line by entering the Religious Order.”

Salimbene was the third of four sons. His oldest brother, Guido, a judge, had married into a noble Parmese family that prided itself on its relation to the Countess Matilda. Several years before Salimbene’s conversion, Guido decided to join the Franciscans. His wife, Adelasia, and daughter, Agnes, joined the convent of Clares in Parma. This sets the stage for the dramatic story of Salimbene’s own conversion, a fascinating story on many levels, not the least of which being the allusions that he weaves into the account. “I Salimbene, the third son, who when I came to the bivium [parting of ways] of the Pythagorean letter [Y] … I entered the order of the

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29 Salimbene, Cronaca, 50; Baird, 8.
30 Salimbene, Cronaca, 79; Baird, 30.
31 Salimbene, Cronaca, 81; Baird, 32
32 Guido was actually Salimbene’s step brother, the son of Lady Ghisla de Marsili, from a noble Parmese family that lived near the episcopal palace in the lower part of the Piazza Vetere. This family apparently produced a number of prominent judges. Salimbene comments, “I have myself seen most of the members of this family. Some of them, especially the judges, dressed in scarlet.” Salimbene, Cronaca, 80; Baird, 30.
33 Salimbene, Cronaca, 56; Baird, 12. Later, Salimbene tells us that he is writing his chronicle for Agnes, his niece. Salimbene, Cronaca, 284; Baird, 177. Salimbene’s second brother died at an early age. His third brother, John, was the son of his father’s concubine.
Friars Minor.”  The image of the Pythagorean Y was a familiar one in the Middle Ages, mentioned in two sources that Salimbene frequently cites – Jerome and Isidore of Seville. Isidore writes, “Pythagoras of Samos was the first to form the letter Y as an example of human life. For its lower shaft signifies early age in its uncertainty, which has not yet given itself either to the vices or the virtues. The bivium, however, which is above, starts with adolescence; its right side is steep but reaches the blessed life; the left side is easier but leads down to fall and ruin. Salimbene’s reference to the Pythagorean Y is more than an incidental reference to show off his erudition. The fact that he repeats the same image in reference to his conversion later in the chronicle suggests that it expresses something fundamental about his self-understanding.

The image was aptly chosen, for Salimbene’s conversion did, in fact, lead to a parting of ways with his father. “All his life my father sorrowed over my entrance into the Order of the Friars Minor, and would not be comforted, because he had no son left to him as an heir.”

Salimbene goes on to tell of his father’s relentless efforts to rescue him from the friars. These efforts culminated in a dramatic showdown between him and his father at the convent in Fano, where Salimbene stayed shortly after his conversion. “And so, many knights came with my father to the place of the friars in the city of Fano, so that they might see the outcome of my affairs; for them, I was made a spectacle; for me, these very things were the source of

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34 Salimbene, Cronaca, 56; Baird, 12-13.
35 Quoted in Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Story of the Choice of Hercules,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 16:3 (1953), p. 185. As Mommsen demonstrates, this symbol was widely known long before Isidore explained its significance. In a letter offering advice to a Roman woman on raising her young daughter, Jerome wrote, Qui autem parvulus est et sapit ut parvulus, donec ad annos sapientiae veniat et Pythagorae litterae eum perducant ad bivium, tam malla eis quam bona parentibus inputantur…“While the son is a child and thinks as a child and until he comes to years of knowledge (sapientiae) to choose between the two roads to which the letter of Pythagoras points, his parents are responsible for his actions whether these be good or bad.” Letter 107 in Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae, ed., Isidorus Hilberg (Vienna, 1996), 297.
36 Salimbene, Cronaca, 423; Baird, 274.
37 Salimbene, Cronaca, 57; Baird, 13.
salvation.”\textsuperscript{38} The knights were not the only onlookers. In the midst of the confrontation, Salimbene’s father requested to speak with his son in private. The friars granted permission, quoting a phrase from John 9:21, “he is of age, let him speak for himself.”\textsuperscript{39} Salimbene writes, “and so the friars permitted this private meeting, especially because they had been greatly encouraged by my previous remarks. Yet they listened behind the door to what was being said, for they trembled like a reed in the water lest my father should change my mind by his enticements.”\textsuperscript{40} For them, as for Salimbene, it was no entertaining spectacle; this confrontation with his father was a cause for fear and trembling. One event, two ways of seeing: another motif, I would argue, that is absolutely fundamental for understanding Salimbene’s chronicle. Those who take the path to the left see the world in one way, those who part to the right see differently.

If we follow the logic of the Pythagorean Y, to take the easier path to the left, the natural path of lineage, would be to choose the path to ruin. Shortly after mentioning that he and his brother Guido destroyed their family line, Salimbene felt obliged to tell the reader why he went into such great detail about his lineage. He listed five reasons. It is the fifth reason that most interests us, for it is the reason that most interested Salimbene, as evidenced by the long digression that it spawned. “The fifth and last reason was to demonstrate the truth of the words of the Apostle James, for he says in the fourth chapter: ‘For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while and afterwards shall vanish away.’ The truth of this can be seen in our own days in the large numbers that death has snatched away from our midst.”\textsuperscript{41} Thus begins a long discourse about families that have been wiped out. About half way through the discourse he writes, “Let us make clear why we have written these things. In my own days I have seen many

\textsuperscript{38} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 57; Baird, 14.
\textsuperscript{39} It is worth noting that St. Jerome cites the exact same phrase from John 9:21 just before mentioning the “Pythagorean letter” in letter 107.
\textsuperscript{40} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 58; Baird, 14.
\textsuperscript{41} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 82; Baird, 33.
families destroyed in many parts of the world. An example is near at hand: in the city of Parma the Cassio family, from which my own mother came, was totally destroyed in the male line. Likewise, I have firsthand knowledge of the total destruction of two wealthy and influential families: the Pagani and the Stephani.” After a string of scriptural citations, he decides that it is time to get back to his history. “But we have written enough about these matters. Now let us return to the course of our history and pick up where we left off. We have already related how in the month of August 1229 the Bolognese besieged the castle of San Cesario and captured it before the very eyes of the armies of Modena, Parma, and Cremona. But that same night a great battle ensued between those armies, and the war machines of the Bolognese were captured by force. In fact, as a small boy, I saw a great number of these machines in Vetere Square in Parma close to the baptistery, the episcopal palace, and the cathedral. In that war there was bitter fighting, and a great many men died on both sides, infantry and cavalry alike.\footnote{Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 87; Baird, 36-37.} Elaborating on the “great many men [who] died on both sides,” Salimbene writes, “It was in this war that Lord Pagano, the son of Albert Giles de Pagani of Parma, podestà of the city of Modena, knighted his son Henry, saying to him, ‘Go attack the enemy and fight like a man!’ The young man did as he was told and, in the first onslaught, was pierced by a lance, so that blood gushed out of his body like new wine from a corkless jug, and he died shortly thereafter. Yet when the father heard the news, he said, ‘Since my son had become a soldier and died fighting like a man, I care not.’”\footnote{Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 88; Baird, 37.}

The story about the death of Henry, the son of Lord Pagano, is important, signaling that Salimbene’s account of his own lineage and conversion was no mere digression. Indeed, it takes us to the chronicle’s core themes. If we were to trace Salimbene’s train of thought – not always an easy task – from the vignette about Henry the knight back to its root, we would arrive at the
sentence, “I, Brother Salimbene, and my brother, Guido de Adam, destroyed our house in both the male and female line by entering the Religious Order, so that we might build it up again in heaven.”

The point is difficult to miss. Lineages are fragile and ephemeral things, especially in the bellicose world of thirteenth-century Italy. For a youth like Salimbene, who was confronted with the choice between family or conversion, following the bivium Pythagorice to the left or to the right would not alter the fundamentally ephemeral nature of lineages. The real difference is whether, at the end of the path, one is left with an eternal home or a handful of dust. Once again, Salimbene had good reason to be proud of his family, for many of the knights, judges, and noblewomen of his lineage chose the steeper, more arduous path of Saints Francis and Clare.

Salimbene: Aristocrat or Friar?

It is often noted that the social and political vision that shapes Salimbene’s narrative is fundamentally incompatible with the spirituality of St. Francis. A common thread that runs through the list of Salimbene’s peccadilloes is an aristocratic outlook that does not seem to fit comfortably with the ideals of the poverello. In this section I will consider some of these more troublesome aspects of Salimbene’s outlook, considering the way in which he assimilates Franciscan ideals into his ‘aristocratic’ view of the social order. I will argue that what is sometimes dismissed as the unreflective, snobbish outlook of an aristocratic friar is best understood as an attempt to develop and translate the ideals of St. Francis into terms

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44 Salimbene, Cronaca, 81; Baird, 32
45 One of the notable features in Salimbene’s description of his lineage is the number of family members – mother, brothers, nephews, nieces, and cousins, who joined or supported the Franciscans and Clares. As we listen to Salimbene describe the way Franciscan ideals flowed into the branches of his family tree, we begin to get a picture of how the mendicants became such a pervasive influence in the life of the communes. Salimbene, Cronaca, 78-82; Baird, 29-32.
comprehensible to the ruling elite. This will provide a basis for examining his political theology in the final section of this chapter.

One obvious way that Salimbene’s aristocratic outlook finds expression in the chronicle is the sense of pride with which he talks about his lineage and his personal connections with the rich and powerful. He was related to Pope Innocent IV by marriage. As he narrates the story of Italian power politics, we often learn of his personal connections with prominent members of the Italian ruling elite. For example, he recalls how he once sat with Lord Azzo, Marquis of Este, under a fig tree and read the works Joachim to him. Azzo’s wife, Lady Mabilia, was one of a number of Italian noble women who were Salimbene’s *devotae*, that is, women who confessed to him and looked to him for spiritual guidance.

He was at home among the elite, for he was a friar with the tastes of a cultivated gentleman. This comes through in a rather innocent way in his refined taste and skill in music. Potentially a bit more worrisome is Salimbene’s refined taste in food and wine, which, when measured against the rigorous asceticism of St. Francis, may strike us as worldly. As he tells of his travels in France, he treats us to a short digression on French wines and the drinking habits of the French and English. While in France, he attended a provincial chapter of the friars at Sens. King Louis IX of France, traveling south from Paris to set off for his ill-fated crusade, attended the chapter at Sens to request the prayers of the friars. After the chapter meeting, King Louis

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46 Salimbene’s step sister was married to a relative of Pope Innocent’s brother-in-law. Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 88; Baird, 37.
47 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 571; Baird, 378.
48 Musical talent and training apparently ran in the family. He mentions that his cousins (the daughters of his father’s sister) were “splendid singers.” Their father was also a talented singer and could play various musical instruments, though not like a minstrel, Salimbene is careful to add. Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 79; Baird, 30. In the midst of his travels from convent to convent, Salimbene apparently had occasion to study music with some friars who were very accomplished liturgical musicians. He writes with great admiration for the musical skills of two of his teachers, Brother Henry at Siena and Brother Vita at Lucca. *Cronaca*, 276-281; Baird, 172-175.
49 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 329-334; Baird, 208-211. In other places in the chronicle, Salimbene inserts goliardic verses on wine, drinking, gambling, and lechery. See, for example, *Cronaca*, 122-126; Baird, 61-64; *Cronaca*, 649-654; Baird, 435-439.
treated the friars to a magnificent meal. “We had, first of all, cherries and, later, the finest white bread; ‘Wine also in abundance and of the best was presented, as was worthy of a king’s magnificence” [Esther 1:7]. And in the Gallic manner many were invited and “compelled to drink,” although they ‘were not willing’ [Esther 1.8]. Afterward, we had fresh beans cooked in milk, fish, crabs, eel-cakes, rice in almond milk and grated cinnamon, roasted eel in splendid sauce, cakes, cheese, and fruit in abundance. And all things were done with the utmost decorum and courtesy.”

While this meal was certainly not typical Franciscan fare, neither was it in violation of the rule. In chapter three of the Rule of 1221, St. Francis writes, “All the friars without exception must fast from the feast of All Saints until Christmas, and from Epiphany, when our lord began his fast, until Easter. The friars are not bound by the Rule to fast at other times, except on Friday. In obedience to the Gospel, they may eat any food put before them.” This is one of many examples of a freedom and flexibility in St. Francis’ approach to rule making that may have escaped at least some of the Spirituals, whose strict adherence to the Rules sometimes earn them recognition as the ‘true’ followers of Francis.

More important, in this vignette, and others like it, a meal is often an opportunity for expressions of communality and humility. King Louis IX ate in the common refectory with the brothers, not, as one might expect, in a private room with a select group of elites. The meal was an occasion for the Minister General, John of Parma, whom Salimbene greatly admired, to exercise his humility as well. When King Louis asked John to sit at the head table with the dignitaries, he refused and sat at a lower table with the brothers. Salimbene writes, “so the

50 Salimbene, Cronaca, 339; Baird, 215  For other references to meals with nobles and dignitaries, see Salimbene, Cronaca, 329; Baird 208-209; Cronaca, 588; Baird, 391; Cronaca, 654; Baird, 439; Cronaca, 605; Baird, 403.
presence of this humble man humbly choosing to sit at a lower table gloriously ennobled that table. Just so, did God place the great stars of the heaven not in one place set aside, but scattered them throughout the sky for the greater beauty and usefulness.\textsuperscript{52} Salimbene notes how John distinguished himself by his humility on another similar occasion. “Thus John of Parma was a communal \textit{communis} person, without private love to any one in particular; and he was very courteous \textit{curialis} and generous at table, so much so that if various kinds of good wine were placed before him, he had it poured out equally in everybody’s cup, so that all could partake communally. And everybody held this to be the height of courtesy \textit{curialitas} and love.”\textsuperscript{53}

One of the most intriguing characteristics of John of Parma’s \textit{curialitas} and communal values is their transferability. Indeed, \textit{curialitas} is the conversion of monastic communality into a knightly virtue, a virtue of an aristocratic court. What would John of Parma’s monastic humility look like in the life of a rich and powerful secular ruler? King Louis IX is one example. Salimbene gives us another example in a moral \textit{exemplum}. “A certain king of England furnishes a good example of courtesy. For once when he was compelled to eat supper with his knights beside a fountain in a forest, one of his men brought forth a single flask of wine. When the king asked if there were any more and was told that there was none, he said, ‘We have enough for all,’ and then emptied the entire flask into the fountain with the words, ‘Let us all drink.’ When the knights saw the king’s courtesy, they rejoiced, seeing that he refused to drink alone when they would have to do without.”\textsuperscript{54} Perhaps this is why, in the Rule of 1223, St. Francis writes, “I warn all the friars and exhort them not to condemn or look down on people whom they see wearing

\textsuperscript{54}Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 470; Baird, 307. This is no insignificant \textit{exemplum}. This is the second time it appears in the chronicle. Earlier in the chronicle, Salimbene inserts it into his \textit{Book of Prelates}, in order to illustrate an interesting principle, “quod singularitas est vitanda et communitas diligenda” (that singularity ought to be avoided and that communal values ought to be cherished). Just before inserting the vignette about the king of England, he notes that \textit{curialitas} and \textit{caritas} are sisters. Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 164-165; Baird, 94.
soft or gaudy clothes and enjoying luxuries in food or drink; each one should rather condemn and
despise himself.” Implicit in this warning and in the general tenor of the rules and admonitions
written by St. Francis is an interesting concept – perhaps only in embryonic form, waiting to be
developed, but still there. The same virtues can express themselves in diverse ways according to
the particular circumstances of the individual, whether a king or a Minister General like John of
Parma who, by all accounts, was faithful to the example of St. Francis. Poverty and wealth,
eating and fasting, are accidents. This is not to say that they are unimportant; indeed, they are
critically important as diverse expressions of essential qualities, individualized according to
particular circumstances. This principle finds expression in one of the guiding principles of
mendicant preaching, the *sermones ad status*, which the mendicants borrowed from St. Gregory
the Great’s *Pastoral Rule*. Preachers must realize that while their goal is to encourage their
hearers to cultivate a common set of virtues, an individual’s particular status constitutes a unique
path to these virtues. This hylomorphic vision that Gregory the Great bequeathed to medieval
Catholic spirituality meant that a common spiritual life could find expression in diverse political
and social statuses. Salimbene was well positioned to translate the spiritual values of St. Francis
for members of his social class.

It is one thing to translate common spiritual values for a particular class; it is quite
another thing to deny these common values to those outside of one’s class. It is here, in his
disparaging comments about the lower orders of society, that Salimbene seems most unlike

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56 Humbert of Romans, who provides a classic expression of this principle in his Treatise on the Formation of
Preachers, quotes St. Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule* extensively. “Gregory says in his *Pastoral Rule*, ‘As Gregory
Nazianzen of blessed memory taught us long ago, there is no single exhortation which is suitable for everyone,
because men are not all held in any necessary equality of moral standards. Often what helps one man harms
another…. So the teacher must devise a sermon which fits the quality of his congregation. There is one way to
address men, another way to address women, one way for the young, another for the elderly, one way for the poor,
another for the rich, one way for the cheerful, another for the sad, one way for subjects, another way for superiors,
one way for servants, another way for masters….’” *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, ed., trans., Simon Tugwell
(New York, 1982), 246.
Francis. This tension is most palpable when he tells the story of Brother Elias, the beleaguered Minister General of the order (1232-1239), deposed in 1239 by Pope Gregory IX. In the course of his diatribe against Brother Elias, which constitutes a separate treatise inserted into the chronicle, Salimbene complains, quite understandably, about Elias’ poor administrative abilities; Elias failed to visit the districts of the order on a regular basis and did not provide a constitution, leaving the order to drift aimlessly. More interesting for our purposes are Salimbene’s complaints about Elias’ policy toward lay brothers, for it is here that we may be tempted to accuse Salimbene of snobbery ill-suited to a follower of St. Francis. “A second fault of Brother Elias was that he accepted many useless men into the Order. I lived in the convent of Siena for two years, for example and I saw twenty-five lay brothers there. Then I lived in Pisa for four years, and I saw thirty lay brothers there.” At the provincial chapters of Tuscany, the lay brothers outnumbered the clerical members of the order. Salimbene acknowledges that there were good reasons for allowing lay brothers in the order. First, “in the construction of palaces, churches, or even houses, rough-hewn stones are laid first.” Second, “The Lord chose the poor for his mission so that the credit for his work would be given not to the noble, the powerful, the wise, or the rich, but to Himself.” Third, “the institution of lay brothers was revealed to St. Francis in a vision, as recorded in chapter three of his legend.” St. Francis closely imitated and followed the Son of God,” who “has chosen the poor in this world.” Salimbene did not object to the presence of lay brothers in the Order; rather he objected to Elias’s failure to establish rules

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57 He begins this section of the chronicle with the heading, “The Beginning of the Book of the Prelate which I wrote about Brother Elias; this book contains much good and useful material, and it continues to the notation, ‘In the year of the Lord 1239, induction 12.’” Salimbene, Cronaca, 140; Baird, 74. The book ends with the words, “Explicit the Book or the Prelate which contains many useful things about good and evil prelates.” Cronaca, 252; Baird, 156.

58 Salimbene, Cronaca, 145-146; Baird, 79. Salimbene was in Siena from 1241-1243, and in Pisa from 1243-1247. Presumably he received clerical orders shortly after his entrance into the order in 1238. He had been ordained a priest by 1248. Salimbene, Cronaca, 477; Baird, 312.

59 Salimbene, Cronaca, 149-150; Baird, 82.

60 Salimbene, Cronaca, 146; Baird, 79-80.
regarding their role. He goes on to say that these lay brothers often traveled about alone, without a companion, in violation of the rule, and they had little regard for the rules regarding apparel. Many of them scorned learning. Salimbene writes, “Yet the lay brothers would even condemn someone for speaking in Latin, crying out, ‘Do you wish to undermine holy simplicity through your learning, you wretch!’” Salimbene comments, “Truly, an ass wishes all it sees to be asinine, as is written in Lamentations.”

These disparaging comments go beyond mere squabbles among Franciscans. Toward the end of the chronicle, he tells a humorous anecdote about a demon-possessed peasant. A friar confronted the demon, asking him, “I would know for a truth that you are a demon who has entered this farmer, if you would speak to me in Latin.” The demon replied in Latin but made so many errors that the friar began making fun of him. The demon replied, “I can speak as good a Latin as you, but this peasant’s tongue is so thick and awkward for speaking that I can hardly make it work at all.” On a more somber note, Salimbene discusses anti-magnate legislation in Bologna, about which he is none too pleased, he writes, “But the populares should fear lest the ire of God come upon them, because they act against the Scripture which says, ‘Judge thy neighbor according to justice. Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens.’ Also it is through the populares and rustici that the world is destroyed, and through the knights and noblemen that it is preserved… it is a pestiferous thing when one who should be lower

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61 Salimbene, Cronaca, 965-966; Baird, 82. Salimbene’s sentiments are not out of line with those of St. Francis, who, in his Testament, expresses a reverence for sacred writings and those who study them: “Whenever I find his most holy name or writings containing his words in an improper place, I make a point of picking them up, and I ask that they be picked up and put aside in a suitable place. We should honour and venerate theologians, too, and the ministers of God’s word, because it is they who give us spirit and life.” Testamentum Sancti Francisci, 13, in Écrits, 206; Habig, 68.

62 Salimbene, Cronaca, 853; Baird, 575.
ascends on high, which God warns will happen because of sin.63 It is hard to imagine these words coming from the mouth of St. Francis.

Nevertheless, to dismiss these comments as the unreflective, self-serving outlook of a snobbish aristocrat obscures as much as it clarifies. The real issue behind these disparaging remarks is the question of hierarchical order and status, not lay brothers and commoners themselves.64 According to Salimbene, Elias inverted the proper order of things – sometimes out of negligence, sometimes by design – by allowing lay brothers to rule over the clergy. “For he placed lay brothers in the positions of guardians, custodians, and ministers, an absurd practice, since there was an abundance of good clerks available in the Order.65 Salimbene acknowledges that in the Rule of 1223, St. Francis allowed for the possibility that provincial ministers might be laypersons, but Salimbene makes an interesting argument. “These words were written to fulfill the need for a particular time, at that point when there were not enough priests and learned men in the Order. But this lack has been remedied, and had already been, in Brother Elias’ time. Thus the cause ceasing, the effect ought to cease also.”66 In other words, sometimes extenuating circumstances require a violation of order and decorum, but barring such constraints, the proper order of things should always be observed.

Likewise, in the vignette on Bolognese anti-magnate legislation, the problem for Salimbene is not the commoners themselves; it is their subversion of social hierarchy by

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63 Salimbene, Cronaca, 966; Baird, 650.
64 With regard to lay brothers, this is especially clear when he praises John of Parma for defining a role for the laity in Order within a carefully considered framework of pastoral care. “Also, Brother John of Parma was the first Minister General who accepted spiritual sons and daughters (devotos et devotas) into the spiritual benefits of the Order of the Friars Minor, by giving out letters sealed with the seal of the Minister General. In this marvelous way, many men and women have become devotees of God and of the Order of St. Francis. Salimbene, Cronaca, 457; Baird, 298.
65 Salimbene, Cronaca, 148; Baird, 81.
66 Ibid. Salimbene’s reading of the rule is plausible. Chapter Seven of the Regula Bullata reads, “If any of the friars … fall into mortal sin, they must have recourse as soon as possible, without delay, to their provincial ministers…. If the ministers are priests, they should impose a moderate penance on such friars; if they are not priests, they should see that a penance is imposed by some priest of the Order.” Ecrits, VII. 1-2, 192; Habig, 62. The logic of this portion of the rule seems to indicate that it would be best if the provincial minister was a priest.
appropriating functions that do not naturally belong to them. Indeed, commoners are as capable of developing and expressing virtues as ruling elites, and these virtues, when cultivated ad status, can produce notable accomplishments that benefit the common good. It was a simple layperson, Brother Benedict, “a simple, illiterate man of genuine innocence and honesty of life,” who began the Alleluia, the great religious revival and peace movement that swept through the cities of north-central Italy in 1233. Later in the chronicle, Salimbene tells the story of John Barisello, a poor, wise man (vir pauper et sapiens) – a tailor and the son of a tenant farmer – whose heroic efforts brought peace to Parma, just as it was about to be taken over by the violent despot and imperial partisan, Uberto Pallavicino. What was the difference between John of Barisello and the Bolognese populares responsible for anti-magnate legislation? John of Barisello saved the community without tinkering with the social order. From Salimbene’s perspective, this meant that John did not place his singular interests above communal virtues. Quite the opposite, the Bolognese populares; they increased their power by altering the social order, thereby injecting the poison of singularity, or private interest, into the community – a poison that can only work itself out through conflict and violence.

Though never expressed so forcefully, these same assumptions about secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies are unmistakably present in St. Francis’ writings. For example, St Francis’ radical concept of humility does not subvert the social order; it presupposes it. In his Admonitions, he writes, “Blessed that person who is just as unassuming among his subjects as he would be among his superiors. Blessed the religious who is always willing to be corrected.”

No question about the order that designates some as superiors and others as subjects; the only

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67 Conversely, as we will soon see, it is the vices and destructive behavior of the ruling elites that comes through most strongly in the chronicle, not their virtues. 
68 Salimbene, Cronaca, 103; Baird, 48
69 Salimbene, Cronaca, 564-568; Baird, 373-377.
70 Admonitiones, XXIII, in Écrits, 112; Habig, 85.
true variable is the willingness of an individual with a given status to renounce their instinct toward self-justification. Likewise, the Eucharistic devotion that is so pervasive in St. Francis’ later writings leaves no room for a spirituality divorced from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. All of his writings presuppose this hierarchy and affirm the superior dignity of priests, whether inside or outside the order. In his Testament, he writes, “God inspired me, too, and still inspires me with such great faith in priests who live according to the laws of the holy Church of Rome, because of their dignity, that if they persecuted me, I should still be ready to turn to them for aid. I am determined to reverence, love and honour priests and all others as my superiors. I refuse to consider their sins…. I do this because in this world I cannot see the most high Son of God with my own eyes, except for his most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others.” In a letter to a General Chapter, St. Francis writes, “Listen to this, my brothers, if it is right to honour the blessed Virgin Mary because she bore him in her most holy womb… how holy, and virtuous, and worthy should not a priest be; he touches Christ with his own hands…. Remember your dignity, then my friar-priests. You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because God is holy. In this mystery God has honoured you above all other human beings.” At the same time he reminds priests that they must be humble, because their dignity is rooted in the Eucharist. “That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God, should humble himself like this and hide under the form of a little bread, for our salvation. Look at God’s condescension…. Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by him.”

Without denying the distinctive features of the two Franciscans, it is fair to say that Salimbene and St. Francis share a conservatism toward the social and religious order that marks them as thoroughgoing children of medieval Christianity. Their conservatism was not too

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71 Testamentum Beati Francisci, 1-10 in Écrits, 204-206; Habig, 67.
72 Epistola toti ordini, 21-29, in Écrits, 248-250; Habig, p. 106.
dissimilar from that of classical Hinduism, taking social status for granted as the path one is given for working out salvation. To undermine the hierarchical order is to undermine the salvation of oneself and others.

While it is tempting to interpret Salimbene’s comments about lay brothers and commoners as the callous outlook of an aristocratic friar, there is more here than meets the eye. He was genuinely moved by St. Francis’ radical poverty and, as we will see in the next section, he was fully aware of its political implications. In it he found a heroic effort to conquer the root of all political and social disorder – bondage to the possessive instinct. At the same time, since he was writing about sixty years after St. Francis’ death, he had the benefit of hindsight. He was much more aware than the Poverello just how problematic mendicant poverty could be, both on a theoretical and practical level. St. Francis’ spirituality was unmistakably communal; that is why it so captivated the imagination of Italians overwhelmed by factional conflict. Yet, it was not altogether clear what role the involuntary poor and the involuntary wealthy were supposed to play. Drawing on the writings of St. Gregory the Great, especially his Pastoral Rule, the mendicants worked through this problem by articulating the principles of a divine economy of begging with two distinct sectors. In the first sector, the wealthy were given opportunities to battle against their acquisitive instincts through charity to the mendicants. The second sector of this economy consisted of the distribution of charity to the involuntary poor with a view to helping them along the path of salvation. Nothing in this system was original to the mendicants. The principles had been fully articulated since the time of St. Gregory the Great and had become part of the stock and trade of Benedictine monasticism. The genius of St. Francis and the mendicants was to see in Benedictine monasticism a spiritual economy that addressed the most fundamental problems of communal politics and society. Just as curialitas was a translation of
monastic communal virtues into a virtue that could be exercised by the secular ruling elite, so too, the economy of begging represents the translation of monastic poverty into an ideal of community for the lay communes. Salimbene offers a wonderful example of the way in which mendicants wrestled with both the potential and problems inherent in the radical poverty of St. Francis in order to create an ideal for communal life.

Salimbene had a difficult time reconciling himself to the task of begging. It was a humiliating experience for him. “When I was living in Pisa, I was very young, and my assigned companion was a certain fickle and lighthearted lay brother from Pisa…. A man from Parma, whom I did not know at all, approached and began to rebuke and condemn me harshly, saying ‘Get out of here you wretch! There are many hired servants in your father’s house who abound with bread [Luke 15.17] and meat, and here you are going about from door to door begging bread from those who have none themselves, although you yourself are rich enough to share with a multitude of the poor. You should be riding through the streets of Parma on your fine horse and engaging in tournaments.’” This encounter troubled him. On an emotional level, begging was an exercise in self abasement and humiliation, neither of which came easy to a man of Salimbene’s pride and status. He recalls that later that night he realized, “not only would it be a long road for me but even, beyond my power, an embarrassing and unbearable kind of labor.”

It was intellectually troubling as well, and the man from Parma put his finger right on the raw nerve. How does a member of the ruling class justify competing with the poor for alms?

This sense of embarrassment that Salimbene mentions is important, for it indicates that his very sense of identity was at stake. He came from the class of knights and noblemen, whose

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73 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 63-65; Baird, 18-19. Later in the chronicle, in the midst of a long discussion in which Salimbene defends the mendicants against the clergy, Salimbene reiterates the difficulty of begging and the embarrassment that one feels when doing it. *Cronaca*, 632; Baird, 423.
job it was to preserve the world.\textsuperscript{74} What role did he play now that he was a mendicant? Many among the secular and ecclesiastical elite saw the mendicants as parasites, burdening the social order. Salimbene and his fellow mendicants did not shrink from this challenge. They embraced begging as central to their identity and made it the cornerstone of a social and political theology. As he writes elsewhere in the chronicle, “the Brothers Preachers and us [the Franciscans] taught many men to be and established the rules.”\textsuperscript{75} It is to Salimbene’s articulation of this social and political theology and mendicants’ place in it that we now turn.

The night after this embarrassing encounter, Salimbene had a dream. He was begging through the streets of Pisa, carefully avoiding the side of the Arno where Parmese merchants owned a hostel. As he walked through the district of St. Michael, he saw Christ, Mary, and Joseph begging from door to door, filling up a common basket with bread. Christ approached Salimbene, and thus begins a long, circuitous discourse on begging, the main principles of which come from the Rules of 1221 and 1223. “I am your Redeemer and this is my mother, and the third one here is Joseph, who is called my father. It is I who left my home and gave up my inheritance, and delivered my beloved spirit into the hands of my enemies so that I might bring salvation to mankind…. Therefore, do not blush my son, to beg for love of me…”\textsuperscript{76} Christ goes on to quote the Rule of 1223, chapter six, exhorting Salimbene not to be ashamed to beg; rather he should see it as a path to salvation and a way to serve God in poverty and humility, the very God who made himself poor for us.\textsuperscript{77} In response to Salimbene’s question, “why do you not give abundantly to your servants and friends… so that they may not be forced to beg with such effort

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 966; Baird, 650. See also comments above concerning his criticism of Bolognese anti-magnate legislation.
\item Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 385; Baird, p. 248.
\item Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 65-77; Baird, 20-29. The idea that Christ and Mary voluntarily embraced poverty and lived on alms is expressed clearly in the \textit{Regula non bullata}, IX.5, in \textit{Écrits}, 140; Habig, 39.
\item \textit{Regula Bullata}, VI. 1-3, in \textit{Écrits}, 190; Habig, 61.
\end{enumerate}
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and labor?” Christ responds, “It is my desire that men give that they may be rewarded for giving for love of me, just as those who receive are rewarded for begging for love of me.” Not surprisingly, these are, essentially, the words of St. Francis. “The friars who are busy begging alms will receive a great reward themselves, besides enriching those who give them.”

In this long discourse we find an articulation of an economy of begging, or at least a part of it, that is already recognizable in the writings of St. Francis. Through voluntary poverty and begging, the friars foster their own salvation, by participating in the humility of Christ. They foster the salvation of those who give alms as well by giving them an opportunity to give to Christ out of love. What about the involuntary poor? Later in the discourse Salimbene makes a traditional distinction between voluntary poverty, which is a path to perfection, and involuntary poverty, which has nothing of inherent worth. Francis does not make this distinction. Rather, he expressed a genuine sense of companionship with the involuntary poor, and admonished the friars “to live among the social outcasts, among the poor and helpless, the sick and the lepers, and those who beg by the wayside.” Why does Salimbene depart from St. Francis here? Is it because of his aristocratic outlook? Perhaps this is part of it. Still, it is fair to say that the place of the involuntary poor in the economy of begging, as found in the writings of St. Francis, was not well developed. By the time Salimbene wrote his chronicle, a variety of circumstances demanded further articulation of these ideas. There were, in fact, several themes that Salimbene harmonized into his sense of identity as a mendicant. First, there was St. Francis, no doubt the dominant theme in Salimbene’s sense of religious identity. Second, there were the critics of the mendicants, who challenged the followers of Saints Francis and Dominic to articulate the

79 *Regula non bullata*, IX. 9, in *Écrits*, 140-142; Habig, 39-40.
80 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 76-77; Baird, 28
81 *Regula non bullata*, IX. 2, in *Écrits*, 140; Habig, 39.
principles of mendicancy in greater detail and in a more coherent fashion than had been necessary for the founders of the mendicant orders. Finally, Salimbene and his fellow mendicants drew upon rich theological and spiritual currents from late antiquity that had long nourished Benedictine monasticism. Salimbene recognized quite rightly that St. Francis and the mendicants were but the fruit of these traditions – grapes harvested from the vineyard, to use a metaphor popular among twelfth- and thirteenth-century ecclesiastical writers.

Who were the critics? Salimbene quite consciously crafted his dream-vision as a defense against two types of detractors. First, there were learned members of the upper clergy, whose spokesman, William of St. Amour, wrote an influential tract against the mendicants. At the end of the vision Salimbene writes, “The vision which I described above is true and contains absolutely nothing false, although I have added some words to that material with respect to the work written by Guillaume of St. Amour…. In this book he had asserted that no religious order depending for its existence on alms, even those that preach the word of God, could be saved.”

There are two other places in the chronicle where Salimbene addresses criticisms from the secular clergy. One takes the form of a long diatribe. The other is more indirect, woven into a story about Brother Rainald of Arrezzo, who reluctantly accepted an appointment as bishop of Rieti, only to renounce the title and return to a humble life of begging. In the climax to this story, Salimbene tells us that one day, as Rainald was begging in the streets of Perugia, he came across a cardinal who rebuked him saying that it is better to give spiritual gifts (which Rainald could have done as a bishop) than to receive them. Rainald responded first by quoting Proverbs; “it is better to be humbled with the meek, than to divide the spoils with the proud.” More important, he offered a succinct statement of the mendicants’ understanding of their role in

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82 Salimbene, Cronaca, 77; Baird, 29. For a brief introduction and overview of the debate between William of St. Amour and the Mendicants, see Lawrence, The Friars, 154-158.
83 Salimbene, Cronaca, 606-647; Baird, 404-434.
society; “it is more blessed to give spiritual things than to beg from others. And this is just what the Friars Minor do.”

How do the friars give by begging? Salimbene tells us as he addresses a second group of detractors, who were potentially more problematic, for they threatened to undermine the mendicant ideal from within. This second group consisted of illiterate laypersons, false mendicants according to Salimbene, whose ignorance of the economy of begging, brought all mendicant orders into disrepute. Later in the chronicle Salimbene devoted a long diatribe against Gerard Segarello, the founder of the Order of the Apostles. There were many things that bothered Salimbene about Gerard and the Apostles. Salimbene mentions that Gerard would lie nude with women in order to test his chastity. He failed to provide any rules or direction for the order. As a result, the members of the order traveled alone and behaved like vagabonds. But worst of all, Gerard and his order had nothing of spiritual value to give in exchange for the alms they received. “These apostles of Gerard Segarello are great fools when they seek to live on alms and yet return no spiritual benefits. And this [the principle that those who receive alms must provide spiritual benefits in return] is made clear by many examples. First, the … clergy, who are well beneficed in the church, are obligated to perform the duties of office because they accepted prebends, namely, preaching, saying Mass, hearing confession of sins, giving good counsel, saying prayers for the living and the dead.”

Salimbene draws the same lesson from the monastic world, quoting St. Bernard: “Those who receive alms without making satisfaction for

84 Salimbene, Cronaca, 498; Baird, p.327
85 Salimbene, Cronaca, 403; Baird, 260.
86 Salimbene, Cronaca, 414-415. Baird, 267-268. Salimbene’s complaints about the Order of the Apostles are much the same as his complaints against the direction of the Franciscan Order under Brother Elias. In both cases, Salimbene felt that lay spirituality, without the direction and counsel of the clergy, would only lead to chaos. See Thompson, Cities of God, 11.
87 Salimbene, Cronaca, 437; Baird, 284. In reality, they did provide benefits. They preached. But this did not satisfy Salimbene, for the preached without proper authority and they were unlearned, therefore their preaching was of little benefit to their hearers.
88 Salimbene, Cronaca, 440; Baird, 286.
the sins of their benefactors stand in danger of the Judgment.”89 In this diatribe against the Order of the Apostles, Salimbene has added a clerical/monastic element to the divine economy of begging that is absent in the writings of St. Francis. In addition to the intrinsic value of giving to someone in need, the giver also derives the benefit of pastoral care. Each party in the transaction has something of value to exchange. Of course, this clericalization of the economy of begging leaves even less room for the involuntary poor; for now the wealthy are not simply giving charity to the poor, they are, in essence, purchasing pastoral care. Why does Salimbene go in this direction? Another example of his callous aristocratic outlook?

We come to the heart of the issue in one of Salimbene’s rants against Gerard. “If he had listened to words of good counsel, he would have gone back to the hoe with his rustics and looked after the pigs and cows, and that would have been better for him than running about the world making a fool of himself and cheating people out of their alms and laying a heavy burden on the Christian people, who are already heavily burdened with a great multitude of mendicants.”90 At issue here, as in other similar remarks, is the problem of social order. It is the very legitimate complaint of William of St. Amour and the Parmese merchant who cast aspersions upon Salimbene in the streets of Pisa. St. Francis offered a powerful image of humility and communal virtues by begging; he did not anticipate the possibility that his ideal could undermine the social order if it became too popular. A glut of mendicants would squeeze the involuntary poor out of the alms market and place an undue burden on the wealthy.91 It is tempting to see in Salimbene’s demand that mendicants be priests, something of a guildsman’s

89 Salimbene, Cronaca, 438; Baird, 285.
90 Salimbene, Cronaca, 441; Baird, 287.
91 Salimbene makes this point repeatedly in his comments on papal legislation concerning the mendicant orders. See Salimbene, Cronaca, 387, 408, 441, 741; Baird, 249, 263, 287, 499. These passages are interesting because it is here, in reference to papal legislation, that Salimbene specifically uses the phrase *ordines mendicantes* and *religiones mendicantes* as a generic label for the mendicants, emphasizing that with respect to the church, the defining feature of their *ordo* was begging.
solution to the problem – institute a licensing procedure to regulate entrance into a trade. In fact, Salimbene found that this problem had long been solved by Benedictine monasticism, as evidenced by his citation of St. Bernard.

This still leaves the problem of the involuntary poor unresolved. In fact, it seems to make it worse, by arguing that alms are most beneficial when pastoral care is offered in return. St. Francis seems to offer little in the way of explicit advice in his writings. He certainly valued the involuntary poor as images of the poor, suffering Christ. This value was, however, projected onto them. This is not to say that it was insignificant, for it was a value that demanded a response of love and respect, not scorn, on the part of everyone who encountered them. Still, there remained to be articulated a role for the involuntary poor as conscious actors in their own right in the economy of begging as it pertained to the economy of salvation. A possible answer to this question is found less in St. Francis’ writings than in his actions, that is, in his pastoral work of preaching and charity among the poor. Here we see the emergence of a distinct sector in the divine economy of begging and salvation – an exchange between the mendicants and the involuntary poor – that is less problematic.

There are hints of this second sector of the divine economy in the Rules of St. Francis. Candidates were required to give all of their possessions to the poor before they could enter the order.92 As noted above, St. Francis also admonished his followers to live in solidarity among the lepers, the poor, and the outcast. Nevertheless, this sector of the economy of begging remains underdeveloped in St. Francis’ writings. One finds them developed much further in the biographies of St. Francis written by Thomas of Celano, who came from a noble family and may

92 Regula non bullata, II. 11 in Écrits, 126; Habig, 32. Celano emphasizes the importance of this rule in a story about St. Francis denying entrance into the order to a man who distributed his wealth to his relatives rather than to the poor. Vita secunda S. Francisci Assisiensis, XLIX. 81, ed. Fathers Quacarachi (1927), 85-86; Habig, 429.
have received his education from the Benedictines at Monte Casino.  

Celano provides a fuller description of what living in solidarity among the poor might look like. “Then the holy lover of complete humility went to the lepers and lived with them, serving them most diligently for God’s sake’ and washing all foulness from them, he wiped away also the corruption of the ulcers.” The saint’s struggle to overcome his revulsion to lepers was a crucial stage in his conquest of self. He was, at one and the same time, working out his own salvation and the salvation of the lepers through his ministry to them. St. Francis adopted this approach to the poor in general. “Of other poor, too, while he yet remained in the world and still followed the world, he was the helper, stretching forth a hand of mercy to those who had nothing, and showing compassion to the afflicted.” In this ministry of compassion, he consciously functioned as a broker between the rich and poor. “He would ask the rich of this world, when the weather was cold, to give him a mantle or some furs. And when, out of devotion, they willingly did what the most blessed father asked of them, he would say to them: ‘I will accept this from you with this understanding that you do not expect ever to have it back again.’ And when he met the first poor man, he would clothe him with what he had received with joy and gladness.” In this way, St. Francis stood at the intersection of the two sectors, uniting rich and the poor in a common drama of salvation.

This second sector of the economy of begging finds expression in Salimbene’s chronicle as well. In his narrative of the Alleluia, he tells the following story about Brother Jacopino of Reggio. “This Brother Jacopino held a great preaching service between Calerno and Sant’Ilario in the bishopric of Parma…. To this service flocked a great throng – men and women, boys and girls, from Parma, from Reggio, from the mountains and valleys, and from the fields and remote

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95 Ibid.
96 Vita prima, XXVIII. 76, p. 80; Habig, 292.
villages. It happened that a poor woman who was with child brought forth a son at this service, and in response to Brother Jacopino’s exhortation, the people lavished gifts on her. In other words, Brother Jacopino preached the gospel to her and addressed her material needs. Among Salimbene’s complaints against Gerard Segarello and the Apostles is that they failed to address the needs of the involuntary poor. “But these Apostles – or some of them – sell their little houses, gardens, fields, and vineyards; and they do not give to the poor but hoard up their golden florins, reserved for their private use to the scandal of their convent.” True mendicant orders respect the principles of begging in both sectors of the economy.

For the clearest articulation of this second sector of the divine economy of begging, we have to look to the Dominican Humbert of Romans. He writes, “Some preachers are so averse to any kind of worldly business that they refuse to help their hearers even in works of kindness. They are like ostriches which neglect their young, and are not following the example of the Lord, who had such compassion on the crowds which followed his preaching that he fed them miraculously in the desert.” He goes on to quote St. Gregory the Great. “So Gregory says, in his Pastoral Rule, ‘Some people are so keen to have all their time to themselves for spiritual affairs, that they do not concern themselves at all with any external matters. But their radical neglect of the concerns of the body means that they fail to help their people in their needs. This often leads to their preaching being ignored, because they castigate the activities of those who go astray without providing them with the necessities of this present life, so that there is no joy in listening to them. If a man is in want, no word of teaching will reach his mind, if it is not backed up by the hand of mercy.’” Here, the poor have been fully integrated into a communal drama of

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97 Salimbene, Cronaca, 106; Baird, 50.
98 Salimbene, Cronaca, 413; Baird, 266.
salvation. Giving has as its end the salvation of the giver and receiver, who is free to act or not to act.

The radical poverty of St. Francis and the Christocentric spirituality in which it was rooted raised many difficult questions, not the least of which were the implications of this radical poverty for the social order. Friars like Salimbene and Humbert of Romans discovered that these were not new problems, and in addressing them, they saw no need to reinvent the wheel. They integrated the radical poverty of St. Francis into a traditional, Benedictine understanding of the economy of charity. It is worth noting that this economy of charity, as expressed in Humbert of Romans and Salimbene, was rooted in something yet deeper. The further one reads in Salimbene and other mendicant writers like Humbert of Romans, the more one is struck by the pervasive influence of Gregory the Great’s theology, calling to mind the words of Jean Leclercq, “It seems that in the realm of theological analysis of the Christian experience, nothing essential has been added to Gregory the Great. But if the great ideas of the past are to remain young and vital, each generation must, in turn, think them and rediscover them in their pristine newness. This is a duty which, in the Benedictine tradition, has not been neglected.”100 In this sense, the mendicants were very Benedictine. Aquinas echoed these sentiments in his commentary on I Corinthians 14:5, declaring that in the Moralia, one can find practically every movement of the human heart.”101

**Salimbene’s Chronicle as a Political Theology**

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St. Francis was a political theologian, a prophet from and for the turbulent world of the communes. He was uninterested in institutional solutions – the search of the proper mix of institutions, procedures, and practices to bring about a just and workable equilibrium. His principal piece of advice to secular rulers was to call to mind the brevity of life, and “put away all worry and anxiety and receive the holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ fervently in memory of him.” He goes on to counsel rulers to send out a herald at a prescribed time each day and call the people to praise and thank God. Underlying the social and political order intact, his political theology targeted what he considered to be the root of the problem – the human condition, which, for Francis, was marred by a seemingly ineradicable instinct to possess -- the source of all violence and poverty. The purpose of his radical poverty was to draw attention to the radical disease it was meant to cure. Through bold, unforgettable actions, gestures, words, and sounds he offered archetypal symbols of virtues, like humility and love, upon which genuine community could be built. He did not expect all members of communal society to kiss lepers, refrain from touching money, and walk around barefoot. He challenged them to translate his archetypal actions into the common realities of everyday life. It is here that Salimbene comes in. His chronicle is a Franciscan commentary on thirteenth-century Italy – a Franciscan analysis of the flood against which Compagni raged.

The skeleton of Salimbene’s chronicle is a political narrative of the north-central Italian communes (Tuscany, Umbria, Marche, Emilia-Romagna, the Veneto, Lombardia, and Liguria), largely derived from his chronicle sources. The political narrative that emerges from Salimbene’s principal chronicle sources is, by and large, a story of conflict at three levels: internal feuds and

102 Epistola ad populorum rectorem, 2, 6-7, in Écrits, 260; Habig, 116.
103 See also, Raoul Manselli, “Spiritualità Francescana e Società,” in Francescismo et vita religiosa, 392, 395.
factional strife, intercity warfare, and the struggle between Empire vs. Church.\textsuperscript{104} Even before
the outbreak of Frederick’s struggle against the church, Salimbene’s narrative is densely packed
with war and violence between and within cities. “On the first of May in 1223, the Cremonese
sailing with almost a hundred boats loaded with salt were captured by the Manutans, and the
vessels were destroyed and sunk in the water of the river Bondeno. In 1224 the Mantuans came
in their boats and closed off the highway to Reggio which passed through the swamps and over
the Taleata, and they prepared bundles of combustible wood and set fire to the bridges and to the
ships at their moorings. It was at that time that Lord Jacopo Palude was killed, an event which
provoked great conflict between the Palude and the Fogliani families of Reggio.”\textsuperscript{105} Such were
the familiar scenes of violence that informed Salimbene’s childhood experience; all the more
reason that the Alleluia, the preaching revival that spread through the cities of north-central Italy,
made such a deep impression on him. “And the crowds of people made stops in the churches and
in the squares, lifting up their hands to God in praise and blessing forever and ever; truly they
could not cease from divine praise because they were so inebriated with divine love. And blessed
was he who could do the most good works and could best praise God. There was no anger in
them, no disturbance, no discord, no rancor.”\textsuperscript{106} The capacity of enemies to become friends, even
if it was only for a short time, must have made a deep impression on the young Salimbene as he
approached the \textit{bivium Pythagorice}.

The year 1236 represents a new phase of the chronicle. The caption above Salimbene’s
first entry for this year reads, “About the introduction of the Emperor to Lombardy. Would that
he had never come!”\textsuperscript{107} At this point, the political narrative focuses on the bitter war between

\textsuperscript{104} For Salimbene’s chronicle sources, see Scalia’s discussion in Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, xx-xxxi.
\textsuperscript{105} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 51; Baird, 9.
\textsuperscript{106} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 103; Baird, 48.
\textsuperscript{107} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 135; Baird, 71.
Frederick II and the papacy, and the misery that it brought on the communes. This strife between imperial and church parties continued long after Frederick’s death in 1250, as Manfred and Conrad continued to fight on behalf of imperial factions. Still his death presented an opportunity to the citizens of the cities to pacify their quarrels. Salimbene describes the flagellant penitential revival of 1260 in such terms. “In the year of the Lord 1260, Indiction III, the flagellants arose throughout the whole world, and all men, both small and great, noble and common, went in procession, naked, whipping themselves through the cities, led by the bishops and men in religious Orders. And peace was made, and men restored their ill-gotten gains. And so many went to confess their sins that the priests scarcely had time to eat.”

With the arrival of Charles of Anjou and the consolidation of Guelf rule throughout Italy, there was a brief period of relative calm; but the opportunity to establish peace was ultimately squandered. The chronicle ends with disorder and strife following the Sicilian Vespers. Urban Guelf factions split into warring parties and prospects of peace were dim.

Such is the narrative skeleton of the chronicle. Into this skeleton, Salimbene inserts an amazing breadth of topics, lending such a diffuse character to the chronicle that it is not always easy to discern principles of structure or design. Anyone who reads Salimbene’s chronicle must wade through a dense and (sometimes) seemingly random flow of information about politics, economics, warfare, religion, law, literature, art, music, personal and family affairs of Salimbene himself, local and regional customs, gossip and scandals, humorous anecdotes, moral exempla, contemporary theological debates, and exegetical questions: all of this woven into a dense fabric of Biblical citations that, at times, go on for pages, leaving the reader with the sensation that he/she is reading a concordance. Adding texture to this fabric of biblical quotations are effusive citations to patristic sources, prophetic literature (especially Joachim of Fiore), proverbs, poetry

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108 Salimbene, Cronaca, 703; Baird, 474.
(ranging from religious to goliardic), and transcriptions of official documents.\textsuperscript{109} The most frequently cited sources in the chronicle (based on Scalia’s index), apart from scriptural citations and the chronicle sources upon which his political narrative is based, are St. Gregory the Great (ninety-six citations, including the \textit{Pastoral Rule, Dialogues, Moralia,} and \textit{Sermons}),\textsuperscript{110} Joachim of Fiore (sixty-five citations, including works falsely attributed to him), Jacopo da Voragine’s \textit{Golden Legend} (sixty-three citations), St. Jerome (fifty-eight citations), St. Augustine (fifty-four citations), St. Bernard (forty-two citations). There are thirty-two citations to the biographies of St. Francis (twenty from St. Bonaventure and twelve from Celano, nine of which come from his second biography). These sources function like glosses on the central text, lending a commentary-like quality to the work as a whole. Salimbene uses these sources to translate St. Francis’ political theology into a critique of Italian power politics.\textsuperscript{111} It is here that Salimbene’s ability to transcend his aristocratic biases is most clear, for there is no doubt that the principal culprits in the narrative are his fellow ruling elites. This is not because they are inherently more wicked; rather, it is because the higher one moves up the social and political hierarchy, the more destructive the possessive instinct becomes.

For Salimbene, as for St. Francis, the defining tension of the drama is the soul’s battle against its instinct to possess. This instinct is simultaneously self-destructive and socially destructive, which is why Italian politics is a front in this battle. In the midst of his narrative of

\textsuperscript{109} Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, xiii.

\textsuperscript{110} Here, recalling Leclercq’s comments about Gregory the Great, we might add that the mendicants appear to have helped the Benedictines in the task of rediscovering and thinking anew the theology of Gregory, at least for thirteenth-century Italians. Part of this process included translating his \textit{Dialogues,} and excerpts of the \textit{Moria} into Italian. See Georg Dufner, \textit{Die dialogue Gregors des Grossen im wandel der zeiten und sprachen} (Padua, 1968), 73-118 for the translation of the \textit{Dialogues} by the Dominican friar, Cavalca.

\textsuperscript{111} At the core of this Franciscan critique is an Augustinian humanism that shapes the chronicle’s political theology. In his \textit{Book of Prelates,} Salimbene includes a reflection on the balance of strengths and flaws in the soul. After quoting a long passage from Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues,} he concludes with the words of Augustine, “Lest they be broken in the difficulties of life as they arise, it is necessary that men be instructed about what man is.” Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 225; Baird, 136. This could easily serve as the motto for the entire chronicle.
the bloody and destructive wars between Pisa and Genoa for control of the seas, Salimbene quotes Seneca, “Men would live very peacefully if the two pronouns yours and mine could be done away with.” The problem with the possessive instinct is that it lures people into the vice of ‘singularity,’ isolating them from community, and rendering them incapable of genuine friendship with others. This is an idea that is both thoroughly Franciscan and thoroughly Benedictine. Celano describes St. Francis in such terms: “From that time when he began to serve the common Lord of all, Francis always loved to do common things, shunning in all things singularity, which is soiled with the foulness of all vices.” These words echo St. Bernard. “Where there is ownership [proprietas], there is singularitas, and where there is singularitas, there is a corner, and where there is a corner, there, no doubt, is filth or rust.” Salimbene was familiar with this term as well. One of the chapter headings in his Book of Prelates reads, “Solitary life [singularitas] should be avoided and communal life [communitas] cherished.”

Nowhere is this singularitas more evident than in the chronicle’s arch villain, Frederick II. Salimbene repeats several times that Frederick’s unrestrained desire to possess rendered him incapable of friendship. “Frederick was never able to be a good friend to anyone. … In fact, in the end he always slandered, confounded, or killed all his friends so that he could obtain all their possessions and treasure for himself and his sons.” For Salimbene, Frederick’s singularitas assumed demonic proportions; he was, in fact, the embodiment of demonic forces unleashed by the failure of the Italian ruling elite to restrain their own violent appetites. Within the chronicle’s narrative framework, his intervention in Lombardy in 1236 infused a new pattern and energy to

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112 Salimbene, Cronaca, 809; Baird, 544.
113 Vita Secunda, IX. 14, p.19; Habig, 374.
115 Salimbene, Cronaca, 164; Baird, 94.
116 Salimbene, Cronaca, 305; Baird, 192. See also Cronaca, 302; Baird, 190.
Italian politics. Hereafter, all war and violence, whether within cities or between cities, was but a front in Frederick’s war against the Church. All combatants were members of either the Imperial party or the Church party. There is more to this than mere labels. At this point, violence and war become nearly autonomous forces beyond the ability of citizens, communal officials, or preachers to manage through peace negotiations or penitential revivals. This is the sense of helplessness expressed so passionately in Compagni’s rage against his fellow Florentines, who had lost control of themselves.

Salimbene makes this point beautifully in an exemplum/parable that he tells toward the end of the chronicle. “A certain lord … owned a very beautiful garden filled with fruits that were a pleasure to behold and a delight to eat. But one day the gardener saw a snake there and chased it all the way to its hole with a hoe raised to give it a mortal blow. But then stopping at the entrance of its hole, the snake spoke to the gardener: ‘Spare me, do not kill me. For I will not harm you by remaining in the garden. I will simply eat the fruit that falls from the tree and rots, and you will have gained a friend, for I will be your companion during your tedious hours of work.’” And so, as the story goes, the gardener and the snake became good friends until one day, when the gardener was away, the snake killed the gardener’s infant son. The gardener waited for his chance to avenge the deed and finally, one day caught the snake napping and cut off its tail. “This vengeance assuaged the grief he felt for his dead son, and so a few days later he again came upon the snake and said, ‘Shall we make peace?’ ‘No,’ replied the snake, ‘for you will never be able to love me when you recall the death of your son, nor can I love you while I see my tail so distorted from the blow you struck. Let us each do what he must as he sees best for his own benefit.’” Salimbene concludes, “This is a perfect exemplum for the Emperor Frederick who sowed the seeds of dissension and factions and curses throughout Italy, which last to this
very day and cannot be resolved, because of man’s innate wickedness and the evil wrought by the devil… who ‘oversowed cockle among the wheat and went his way.’” 117

Because the Italian ruling elite allowed Frederick, the demonic sower of discord to sow dissension among them, God judged them by allowing them to fall prey to their own violent instincts. In his narrative of warfare and strife between church and imperial parties in Tuscany in the immediate aftermath of Frederick’s death, Salimbene writes, “In Florence, the Guelfs ruled for the Church; the Ghibellines for the empire; and the names of these two parties became synonymous for the Church and Imperial factions throughout Tuscany, and they still are. But both parties have drunk from the cup of the wrath of God even to the dregs. And those who have the upper hand cannot boast that they have escaped the sword of divine indignation and vengeance, if they have brought about factions and divisions in the cities, they are at the same time ‘divided by the wrath of his countenance’” 118 He goes on to cite the sixth chapter of Jeremiah, “Behold I will bring evils upon this people, the fruits of their own thoughts…. ” In other words, God’s judgment is to let the Italian ruling elite taste the fruits of their own actions. “How true these things were, these eyes of mine have seen, and a great multitude of other people have too, but especially those who experienced them on their own bodies.” 119

How does one escape the demonic fruit of one’s own singularitas? The way forward is the way back. Immediately following his reflections on God’s judgment Salimbene includes a series of reflections on the remedy – contemptus mundi. He begins by inserting a long anonymous poem, sometimes attributed to Bernard of Morlaix. “Worldly prosperity and life’s brevity deceive many men,/ In the very midst of life suddenly they are cut off by death…/ Whoever embraces the delights and riches of this world/ Becomes ultimately a pauper, cut down

117 Salimbene, Cronaca, 888; Baird, 596.
118 Salimbene, Cronaca, 574; Baird, 381.
119 Ibid.
by fortune’s sword or death’s.../ All things transitory are nothing; they have an inherent flaw, / And the man who delights in them is by very nature sinful.”

He develops these reflections further with a series of quotations from Gregory, Jerome, and Augustine. “St. Gregory spoke on this subject at the end of the third book of the Dialogues in this manner: ‘We should despise this world even when it treats us well and even when it caresses us with prosperity. For afterward it always afflicts us with so many scourges, wearies us with such great adversity ... – what else is all of this save a crying out to us not to love it?’” “What Jerome says pertains to this subject: ... ‘Let us return to ourselves [emphasis mine], therefore, and view our own extreme brevity of life. Are you yourself, I ask, aware of the changes in your own life: of being a child, a boy, a young man, an adult, an old man? Daily, we are dying, daily changing. And yet we believe ourselves to be eternal.” And then Augustine: “Why do you wander through the many? Love one good in which all goods are contained, and it suffices. Desire a single good which is every good, and that is enough.” “O wretched flesh, you must embrace that life where there is life without death, youth without age, light without darkness, joy without sadness, peace without discord, desire without injury, a kingdom without change [emphasis mine]. You must seek these seven.”

No reference to St. Francis in these passages; yet these reflections are Franciscan to the core. We need only recall Francis’ advice to secular rulers, “Consider and realize that the day of death is approaching.” It is significant that this string of quotations culminates in the Christian Platonism and humanism of St. Augustine. Where does contemptus mundi lead? It leads one to return to that Good which all things share in common. Only in this common good is there peace...
without discord, desire without injury. It is equally significant to note where \textit{contemptus mundi} does not lead. The things in the world are not evil. They are goods contained in a higher Good. The ‘world’ that one ought to hold in contempt is the system of human relations bewitched by the words ‘mine’ and ‘thine.’ Thus St. Francis can reverence nature but hold the ‘world’ in contempt.

For Salimbene, as for St. Francis, \textit{contemptus mundi} was a penitential attitude that required a regimen of pastoral care to bear the fruit of peace. Pastoral care fostered \textit{contemptus mundi} by leading laypersons through a regimen of preaching, confession and penance, and the Eucharist. Salimbene uses an \textit{exemplum} that he, no doubt, used many times in preaching to illustrate the power of confession. When a certain friar heard that a demon claimed ownership of him, Salimbene tells us that the friar “blushed and retraced his steps and went immediately to a priest, to whom he confessed his sins, especially those for which he had remorse of conscience. And coming back, he said to the demon, ‘Tell me wretch, what I have done to make me totally yours’ Then the demon answered, ‘I knew a little while ago, but now I cannot remember.’” For Salimbene, confession was a way of reclaiming control of oneself and the demonic fruits of one’s actions. It was for this reason that confession and penance were so often associated with peacemaking, healing social and factional divisions, and charity.\footnote{See, for example, his account of preaching after an eclipse in Lucca in 1239. Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 253; Baird, 156. His description of the flagellant movement provides another good example. Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 703. Baird, 474.} Likewise, the Eucharist was a symbol of community. In another \textit{exemplum}, Salimbene tells of a demon who charged a friar with idolatry for worshipping the Eucharist. The demon asked him, “Tell me where the \textit{corpus Domini} is named in the Creed.” The brother responded, “The communion of saints.” The devil blushed and went away in confusion.\footnote{Salimbene, \textit{Cronaca}, 852-853; Baird, 574.} As we have seen, St. Francis saw in the Eucharist the
sign *par excellence* of the humility upon which community could be built. Moreover, the Eucharist reminds the partaker that beneath the surface of the many goods of the physical world, there is a more substantial spiritual unity.\textsuperscript{125}

All of this lends a truly distinctive feature to Salimbene’s chronicle. This comes through in an intriguing fashion in Salimbene’s story about Albert, the saintly wine porter. In 1279, as Guelf dominance began to weaken throughout Italy, the Parmese laity and clergy began to venerate Albert, a local wine porter, as a saint. Salimbene notes contemptuously that Albert was a *vini portator simul et potator*, and *peccator* (both a carrier and drinker of wine, and a sinner). After his death, his cult spread to Reggio and Cremona as people throughout the region reported miracles. Citizens organized processions and priests incorporated his cult into the liturgy. When Franciscans and Dominicans challenged his cult, Salimbene tells us that the people responded angrily, “You think that nobody can work miracles but your own saints, but you are clearly deceived, as has been made clear through Albert.”\textsuperscript{126} Concerning the charge of mendicant prejudice against local saints, they were right, and Salimbene acknowledges this. After noting examples of other cities that had been misled in their desire to promote local saints (“the Paduans through Antonio Peregrino and the Ferrarese through Armanno Punzilovo”), Salimbene writes, “Truly the Lord came not only in his own person, but in the blessed Francis, the blessed Anthony, St. Dominic, and their sons. And sinners should believe in them in order to merit salvation.”\textsuperscript{127} A partisan wrangling over saints? Perhaps, but there is something more. In his search to explain the enthusiasm among the Parmese laity and clergy for promoting Albert’s cult,

\textsuperscript{125} For example, Salimbene’s reflections on the blindness of the Cremonese and the partisans of the imperial party led him through a series of associations culminating in the blindness of those who fail to see that in when the priest performs the Eucharist, [quoting Gregory’s *Dialogues*] “that a chorus of angels is present at the mystery of Jesus Christ, that the depths are joined to the heights, that heaven and earth are joined, that invisible things are made visible.” Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 515; Baird, 337.

\textsuperscript{126} Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 761-762; Baird, 513.

\textsuperscript{127} Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 763; Baird, 514.
he writes, “… the exiled of the Imperial party hoped to arrive at a peace settlement with their fellow citizens, through which they might be brought in to regain their small possessions, and so that they would not have to travel through the world as vagabonds.”128 However justified his suspicions may have been in this particular case, he knew all too well how quickly a community’s clergy and laity could create a saint to sanctify their political and economic interests (i.e., their possessive instincts). For him, local saints would always be suspect as sanctifications of *singularitas*. True saints and true community must transcend the singularity of local interests.

**Mendicants as Inside-Outsiders**

There are two ways of looking at the relation between the mendicants and communes, both of which are true. Luigi Pellegrini and others have carefully examined the settlement of mendicants in and around the Italian cities. Augustine Thompson, drawing upon a rich body of literature on lay confraternities and penitential movements, describes the Franciscans as “the most successful offshoots” of lay penitent movements.129 They came to the cities, and yet they were from the cities. There is something of a feedback loop at work. For this reason I have described St. Francis as a prophetic figure from and for the troubled politics of the communes. He was a product of a process by which civic culture generated its own ideals and struggled to assimilate them into norms to guide communal life. Salimbene, a member of the ruling class who converted to the friars minor, quite naturally wrestled with the implications of St. Francis’ spirituality for his fellow ruling elites. He came to them with a set of ideals by which to critique of their exercise of power, yet he too was from them.

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128 Salimbene, *Cronaca*, 764; Baird, 514.
129 Thompson, *Cities of God*, 100.
In a previous study of the Orvietan bishopric I argued that the ruling elite of the communes learned to measure their exercise of power against ecclesiastical ideals – with varying degrees of enthusiasm – in part, because of the role of Italian bishoprics in early communal formation.\textsuperscript{130} Canon law and evangelical ideals became deeply embedded in communal culture, part of the rules of the game, so to speak, because ruling elites sought to leverage their power through ecclesiastical offices and wealth, both of which came with rules and ideals attached to them. These rules and ideals may have been honored more in the breach, but they were experienced as obligations and constraints nonetheless. This helps explain, for example, why groups within the commune, especially the ruling elite, felt the need to create political theologies.

To recognize that ecclesiastical norms were embedded in communal culture is not to say that most citizens of the communes were striving for sainthood, but it does help explain why a few of them, like St. Francis, did. In a wonderful article about the relation between church and laity in the Middle Ages, Norman Tanner writes that there “was a broad spectrum of responses to the medieval church, from the extravagant, intense and devout on the one end, to the distracted, apathetic, dismissive or hostile on the other.”\textsuperscript{131} Much the same could be said for responses to evangelical ideals embedded in communal culture. On the one end, there were minimalists, merely playing by the rules in a self-aggrandizing fashion. On the other end were a few people like St. Francis, whose life exemplified in a dramatic fashion the understanding of the human condition underlying ecclesiastical ideals, and the potential of these ideals for creating community. Because these ideals called for a heroic struggle against one’s instinct to control and

\textsuperscript{130} Foote, \textit{Lordship}, 1-7, 187-192. Thompson’s \textit{Cities of God} provides a more global description of this process, carefully examining the many avenues through which the average layperson could assimilate ecclesiastical ideals, both within and beyond the political arena.

possess, the vast majority of citizens, and the political theologies that they created and held, existed in a continuum at varying distances from the ideal. Movement along the continuum depended on a variety of factors, not the least of which was political and social conflict.

This leads to the question of chronological horizons. Typically the mendicants are examined within the context of the defining political, economic, and social transformations of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as the commercial revolution, urbanization, and state building. Because these developments often created social and political environments in which power was deeply contested – and there were few places where power was more deeply and violently contested than the communes – such developments go a long way toward explaining why so many people, like St. Francis and Salimbene, reflected so deeply on ideals that ought to guide the exercise of power. There is, however, another chronological horizon that is too easily forgotten: the longue durée of religion, without which one is helpless to account for the remarkable continuity between the story of the mendicants and communes, on the one hand, and the larger story of medieval religion and society, on the other. Salimbene’s extensive citations of patristic sources, especially the writings of St. Gregory, serve to remind us that the drama and intensity of St. Francis’ life should not be mistaken for novelty.

Concerning Gregory’s vision of the unity and continuity of all reality, Carole Straw writes, “here Gregory anticipates the physicality so characteristic of the later Middle Ages in figures as diverse as Anselm and St. Francis.¹³² In describing the relation between Gregory and Francis, we can go further than “anticipates.” Gregory was in Francis’ cultural DNA. There are few medieval authors whose works were more widely disseminated than those of Gregory. As one glances at Manitius’ chapter on Gregory the Great, one cannot help but be impressed by the

¹³² Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 12
number of monastic libraries in which his works are found. Medieval writers were fascinated with Gregory because they found in his writings “an encyclopedia of spiritual experience,” to use the words of Carole Straw. He represents the culmination of a process of centuries of distillation whereby the Greek and Latin Fathers assimilated the incomparably rich philosophical-religious speculation and spirituality of Eurasia – what we know as Hellenism. For medieval writers, he offered a doorway back into the world of Hellenistic speculation, a way to rediscover its richness, without losing coherence. Over the course of six centuries, Gregory’s thoughts about the human condition, as well as his ecclesiology and social-political theology were released into the bloodstream of European culture in much the same way as Italian bishoprics infused ecclesiastical ideals into communal culture – that is, as part of the rules and ideals attached to ecclesiastical offices and resources with which kings, dukes, counts, and castle lords leveraged their power. Indeed, the role of bishoprics in communal formation was simply a particular case of this broader phenomenon that had been going on since late antiquity, a phenomenon that we could justifiably call “the conversion of the barbarians,” if we are willing to abandon the overly narrow way in which the term “conversion” is typically used. In any case, I think it is reasonable to ascribe to the mendicants the task that Leclercq ascribed to the Benedictines – to rediscover Gregory and to think him anew.

134 Straw, *Gregory the Great*, 16.