

REVEALING THE HOST: IMAGE AND SPACE IN ITALIAN CLARISSAN CHURCHES,  
13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

By

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To my mom: you are my sunshine.

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The order of the Poor Clares was instituted by Saint Clare of Assisi to be the sister organization to the Franciscans. The nuns were subject to two mandates of enclosure: the first from Clare at the establishment of the order and the second from Pope Boniface VIII in 1298. As a result of these mandates, Clarissan churches needed to facilitate the separation of the nuns' private area and the laity's public area while still maintaining an overall spatial unity. The appropriation and modification of existing buildings was a common feature of Clarissan structures and has hindered scholars' ability to understand their use of space and architectural features.

The churches Santa Chiara of Assisi, Santa Maria Donna Regina, and Santa Chiara of Naples were all built expressly for the Poor Clares and maintain the necessary separation. Contemporaneous with the establishment of these churches, religious trends emphasized the sacrament of the Eucharist, specifically the role of the Host. The doctrine of Transubstantiation confirmed the presence of the body of Christ in the consecrated Host, and as a result, the Host became the primary image of the church. Visual restrictions limited the nuns' access to the ritual surrounding the Host, but the prevalence of Passion narratives in the nuns' choir suggests an

attempt to reconcile their visual handicap. An analysis of image and space will elucidate how the nuns interacted with their space as opposed to the experience of the laity and how the Host became the unifying element between the two audiences.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Order of the Poor Clares was created by Clare of Assisi to be the sister organization of the Franciscans.<sup>1</sup> The Poor Clares struggled to maintain their connection to the Franciscan order, and their dedication to these traditions can be seen through the Clares' adherence to the accepted practices of the order and writings which were created specifically for them. One of the mandates set forward from the beginning of foundation of the order was enclosure, which originated with the proclamation of clausura mandated by Clare and solidified by the papal bull of *Periculoso* in 1298. This statute of enclosure dictated that the spaces of the convent and church maintain strict separation between the public space of the laity and the personal space of the sisters. Clarissan convent space was articulated in such a way as to maintain both public and private spaces, yet retain a spatial unity. The analysis of both devotional images and architectural space clearly illustrates how this was accomplished. In addition, it can be seen how these spaces were designed to ensure that the religious needs of the nuns could be facilitated despite the nuns' segregation. The churches Santa Chiara of Assisi, Santa Maria Donna Regina of Naples, and Santa Chiara of Naples all provide fundamental examples of Clarissan structures that were built with the express purpose of providing for both public and private audiences.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the works of several scholars, without whose research, this thesis would not have been possible. Jeryldene Wood and Carolyn Bruzelius have largely contributed to the areas of Clarissan art and architecture and serve as the primary sources for descriptions of the buildings and works; of particular note are Wood's work with San Damiano and Santa Chiara of Assisi and Bruzelius's work with Santa Maria Donna Regina and Santa Chiara of Naples. Elizabeth Makowski has provided the first in depth study of *Periculoso*, and as such will provide most information in regard to the strictures and emergence of the mandate. Samantha Kelly, Catherine Fleck, and Adrian Hoch have provided detailed readings and analysis of the frescoes of Santa Maria Donna Regina that serve to inform discussion of function and relation to the Host. Carolyn Walker Bynum provides a gendered reading of the Host that allows the relationship between the nuns and the Eucharist to be viewed more clearly. Bynum, as well as, Pelikan and Duffy, have provided insight into the change in Eucharistic practices of the middle ages that will be considered in relation to the nuns' experience of the Host. The writings of Clare and Francis, as translated by Marco Bartoli and others, were essential to understanding of Franciscan ideas of faith and poverty. These readings provide a fundamental core the understanding of Clarissan images and space.

Scholars are only now beginning to research female monastic structures.<sup>2</sup> While the Poor Clares have been represented in this research, insight into their buildings and art is still considerably lacking. The work of Caroline Bruzelius has provided much of our understanding of architectural features consistently used in the women's structures, such as the nuns' choir. Working mostly in Italy and more specifically in Naples, she has been able to trace the architectural developments of several key examples of Clarissan churches, including Santa Maria Donna Regina and Santa Chiara of Naples.<sup>3</sup> Scholarship regarding the art of the Poor Clares has been taken up largely by Jeryldene Wood. Wood has provided a comprehensive overview of Clarissan churches within Italy and the artworks found therein.<sup>4</sup> She draws parallels to possible sources of the art, including writings like *Meditations on the Life of Christ* and established Franciscan philosophies. Her scholarship consistently traces her findings back to the practices established by Clare and earlier examples of similar works.

Cathleen Fleck has also considered the possible literary sources of Clarissan works of art, specifically in Santa Maria Donna Regina, but applicable to most Clarissan institutions. Based on her research, she has formed an argument for the established visual literacy of the nuns and their ability to read and interpret images.<sup>5</sup> This theory proves useful in evaluating the meditative

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of sources dealing with the development of research on the Poor Clares and other female monastic orders see, Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, & Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture ca. 1213–1340," *Gesta* 31.2 (1992): 83–91; Caroline Bruzelius, "The Architectural Context of Santa Maria Donna Regina," in James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 78–92; Caroline Bruzelis, *The Stones of Naples: Church Building in Angevin Italy* (Connecticut: Yale University Press), 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, & Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Cathleen Fleck, "To Exercise Yourself in These Things by Continued Contemplation: Visual and Textual Literacy in the Frescoes at Santa Maria Donna Regina," in Adrian S James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 109–128.

effectiveness of the decorative narratives found in the nuns' personal spaces. Samantha Kelly and Adrian Hoch have also provided valuable insights into the general decorative schemes of Clarissan spaces, considering both the influence of patronage and Franciscan models of meditation.<sup>6</sup> Ann Derbes and Hans Belting have both provided insights on the emergence and development of Passion imagery. Belting, focusing on the Man of Sorrows more than crucifixion images, has tracked the emotional developments in depictions of Christ's death<sup>7</sup>, while Derbes has taken Belting's readings a step further by linking them to the emergence of the Franciscan order and the newly formed focus on Christ's suffering and the viewer's personal engagement.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Caroline Bynam has provided the most comprehensive reading of the meaning of the Host for religious women, arguing that women's gendered role in society made them more susceptible to the meaning of the Host, due to its association with food.<sup>9</sup> By synthesizing the material provided by these authors, in addition to many others, a comprehensive view of the interaction between the images and space of the Poor Clares can be formed.

The study of late medieval Clarissan architecture has been hindered, especially in Italy, due to the fact that most Clarissan churches were not built specifically for the Poor Clares.<sup>10</sup>

Rather, the Order had a tendency to appropriate earlier, preexisting religious structures and alter

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<sup>6</sup> Adrian S. Hoch, "The 'Passion' Cycle: Images to Contemplate and Imitate Amid Clarissan Clausura," in Adrian S. James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 129–154; Samantha Kelly, "Religious Patronage and Royal Propaganda in Angevin Naples: Santa Maria Donna Regina in Context" in James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 27–44.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (California: University of California Press), 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Bruzelius and Constance H. Berman, "Monastic Architecture for Women: Introduction," *Gesta* 31.2 (1992): 73–74.

them as needed to accommodate the nuns' needs and strict rules of enclosure. Three of the most prominent exceptions to this trend are the churches of Santa Chiara, of Assisi, and Santa Maria Donna Regina and Santa Chiara, both of Naples. All of these churches are unique in the fact that they were built specifically for the Poor Clares and as such can give the clearest idea of how space was considered and used by the order.

Of particular interest in these structures is the placement and accessibility of the nuns' choir in relation to the public worship space. The purpose of the choir was to provide an area in which the sisters were in proximity to the mass but out of the view of the laity. The placement of a choir would have allowed the nuns to hear and be present for liturgical ceremonies, but would have obscured their view with the use of grates and strategic architectural planning. With the sisters kept from fully participating in the rituals, the narrative cycles and decorative elements found in the choirs would have played a fundamental role in the nuns' religious experience. While the church would have provided the laity with images during ceremonies, the images in the nuns' choir would have been selected specifically for their meditative purposes. It has been shown that when these churches were being designed, male members of the order and patrons were consulted to ensure that each space conveyed the appropriate information in an accessible way.<sup>11</sup>

Differences that occur in the representations between the public space of the church and the private spaces of the nuns will be examined. Those narrative cycles meant to be viewed solely by the sisters carry certain connotations which would have been relevant only to them, increasing their spiritual interactions and experiences within the space. Targeting a female

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<sup>11</sup> Bruzelius, Caroline, "The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Naples," in Adrian S James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 78.

contingency with imagery is particularly evident in the Passion narratives of the nuns' choir. Their placement can be traced to the increased significance of the Eucharist in the late medieval period.<sup>12</sup> Earlier associations of the Eucharist as a reenactment of the Last Supper were displaced by the understanding that the rite recreated the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. Increased importance was placed on the Host, and the idea of transubstantiation was recognized and accepted by the Latin Church.<sup>13</sup> The Host took on the role of primary image for the Church by displaying the physical body of Christ, thereby superceding all other images.

An analysis of the nuns' private decorative cycles will show that those images were to be viewed as supplemental to the Host and meant to increase their understanding and appreciation for it and its meaning. In looking at these cycles, Franciscan texts will be taken into consideration, specifically the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, which was written for the Poor Clares and addressed which episodes and figures would lead them to a better understanding of Christ. These texts illuminate the values and goals embraced by the order at the time, which were illustrated in their art.

Larger narrative cycles of the public space of the church and the different emphases that are found there will then be considered, for instance, the reliance on more Old Testament scenes rather than on the death and resurrection of Christ. The differences in visual imagery reinforce the idea that the Host was becoming central to Christian worship. The Host would have been visible to the laity, making visual reminders of the sacrifice less important. Instead, decorative elements focused on other episodes from the life of Christ to create a narrative context for the

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<sup>12</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 51.

<sup>13</sup> *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>, (Paul Halsall: March, 1996). Accessed March 2008.

Host. The nuns, however, would not have been able to see the Host and therefore would have needed Passion images to reinforce the idea of Christ's sacrifice.

The Host then becomes central to both the public and private spaces of the church. As will be shown with an analysis of the architectural developments of the nuns' choir in the three churches, there is a consistent attempt to improve the Clarisses' interactions with the Host. Santa Chiara of Naples, the latest of the three churches, provides the clearest example of how accommodations for viewing the Host were made. It is also in this structure that the centrality of the Host to the church and its occupants is made apparent by acting as a link between the two audiences and focusing all attention on one perfect symbol. It will then be shown that for both areas, public and private, the Host served the role of primary image and was used symbolically and physically to connect the two spaces.

## CHAPTER 2 FRANCIS AND CLARE AND ROLE OF ENCLOSURE

### **Francis of Assisi**

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, monasticism experienced a surge of spiritual growth and experimentation. Many new religious sects were being initiated while at the same time masses of individuals were hoping to join already established orders. In the city of Assisi, the end of the twelfth century marked a time of political and social upheaval. Located in the Spoleto Valley and marking the principal route between Ravenna and Rome, Assisi held a crucial position sought simultaneously by the Normans, Germans, and Papal State for strategic advantage.<sup>1</sup> The Germans, to the North, felt that their succession of the Holy Roman Empire afforded them the right to power in the Italian Peninsula. The Normans, who at that time still maintained power over the Southern Sicilian States, were attempting to expand their influence. Meanwhile, the Papacy adamantly desired to maintain control of the central Italian states and prevent a union between the North and South.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the political pressure exerted by these outside forces, Assisi faced internal conflict. The Feudal system that was in place had never been fully realized and caused discontent between the classes, the Majores and the Minores. This conflict widened the social gaps in the city and cemented the staunch social hierarchies that governed the city.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of St. Francis in Assisi offered the community an alternative perspective on social relations and had a significant impact on those who heard his preaching. Despite the radicalism of his teachings and

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi* (Illinois: Franciscan Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 9..

<sup>3</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 9.

challenges by members of the church, his views gained currency because of the positive effect they had on the volatile society.

Francis of Assisi was the son of the wealthy textile merchant Pietro di Bernardone. On February 24, 1208, at the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Francis heard a sermon on the missionary aspects of Matthew's Gospel, chose to dedicate his life to God, and began his life as a traveling preacher.<sup>4</sup> Francis traveled alone for a period of time before returning to Assisi to repair three ruined churches: San Pietro, San Damiano, and the Portincula. He financed these repairs solely through funds procured through begging.<sup>5</sup> He spoke compassionately of despising the world and living a life of poverty and penance. Soon after his travels, Francis had acquired a group of followers whom he termed his "brothers." Francis' group gained popularity quickly because of his emphasis on poverty, humility, and patient suffering. Rather than focus on the typical social hierarchy of the church, Marco Bartoli says Francis "proposed the idea of brotherhood in a city that was divided and emerged as a peacemaker."<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that his preaching went against the foundations of the monastic and feudal structure, both engrained in strict hierarchical systems, it was accepted for its quelling effects on societal unrest.<sup>7</sup> Francis' preaching of poverty created equality among the social classes, and the term "brother" solidified that belief by creating a faux familial connection.

As Francis' following grew he created *Rules*, said to consist mainly of quotes from the Holy Gospel to which he wished his disciples to aspire, for his order and submitted them to Pope

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<sup>4</sup> Regis J Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian House, *Francis of Assisi* (New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2001), 64–66.

<sup>6</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 10.

Innocent III in 1221.<sup>8</sup> The original document that was submitted has been lost, but in contemporary biographies, such as that of Thomas of Celano, it is said that the Pope was uneasy about Francis' limitations. Pope Innocent III apparently felt the condition of the *Rules* to be too harsh and did not acquiesce readily to Francis' request.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it is possible that the Pope may have felt threatened by Francis' attempt to establish his brotherhood. The Pope and Francis had very different views on preaching and humanity. As Le Goff states:

Innocent III was imbued with the pessimistic spirituality of monastic tradition. He wrote *De Contemptu Mundi* (On the Misery of the Human Condition) the exact opposite of Francis' declaration of love for all creatures.<sup>10</sup>

It was the Pope's nature to persecute all threat of heresy and he was most likely close to denying Saint Francis' request, when as he was praying he was rewarded by a dream in which he saw Francis as savior of the church. After his dream the Pope approved Francis' request, but only verbally. Francis was placed in charge of the order and was given the authority to preach.<sup>11</sup>

Of the Stipulations which Saint Francis set forth, three primary vows emerged: obedience, poverty, and chastity. Followers of Francis were not permitted to maintain any personal finances, and any possessions that were owned had to be sold, with the proceeds given to the poor. It was not only personal poverty that was promoted by the Franciscans but also institutional poverty: funds were not to be used to provide for the order. Pope Honorius III attempted to create a more comprehensive and flexible constitution for the lay brothers, but Saint Francis reacted by producing, in 1226, his *Testament*, which maintained the restrictions he had originally set forth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> House, *Francis of Assisi*, 98-99; Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, Christine Rhone trans., (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 31-32.

<sup>10</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 41-42.

It was these three vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience that would be taken up later by their female contingent, the Poor Clares, and brought into even stricter focus.

### **Saint Francis' Views on Art and Poverty**

The *Testament* of Saint Francis did not only confirm the three vows but also addressed ideas of art and images of worship, which gained considerable importance as the female order developed and architectural and iconographical distinctions became necessary. The stance of Saint Francis on the issue of art is by no means definitive; the several statements that he did make are contradictory but do serve to highlight his reverence and respect for Eucharist, as well as for the vows he took. In regard to the Eucharist, he stated, "I want this most holy Sacrament to be honored and venerated and reserved in places which are richly ornamented."<sup>13</sup> This reverence for the Host, which will be considered in the following pages, is something seen through out the Franciscan order and more specifically in the Poor Clares. In the church of San Damiano, which was among the first that Saint Francis repaired and was later appropriated for the Poor Clares, measures were taken to provide for an area for the Eucharist to reside in. In addition to the Eucharist, Francis also stipulated that the writings of God must be venerated and well kept:

[Francis' brothers should] have the greatest possible reverence for the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with his holy name and the writings which contain his words, those words which consecrate his body. They should set the greatest value, too, on chalices, corporals, and all the ornaments of the altar that are related to the holy Sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

Both instances of veneration regard entities that could be viewed as perfect images of God, in that they were not visual representations formed by man but rather came directly from him. The purity of their meaning and their use as meditative aids afforded them the appropriate status for adornment.

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<sup>13</sup> Marion Alphonse Habig, ed., *St Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

Simultaneously, Saint Francis also maintained that friars were not to receive any goods for themselves, for it would break their vow of poverty. In particular, Francis warned friars against accepting “churches or poor dwellings for themselves, or anything built for them, unless they are in harmony with the poverty which we have promised in the *Rule*; they should occupy places only as strangers and pilgrims.”<sup>15</sup> This proclamation seems almost impossible, as the friars were meant to live off of those funds sustained through begging; however, it is important to recognize that while friars could not accept items or handouts for the betterment of themselves they were able to use funds to further their outreach to the community. Essentially, contributions could be made to churches for the benefit of the public but not for the areas of use to the brothers. In the same vein, the brothers could not use funds for personal gain, but they could use them to sustain themselves to be able to physically carry out their tasks. While churches could depend on donations from the public to provide for their maintenance and decoration, friars were forbidden to “take money as alms, or have it accepted for them; so too they cannot ask for it themselves, or have others ask for it, for their houses or dwelling places.”<sup>16</sup>

The abstinence of solicitation for churches gave outsiders assurance of the friars’ dedication and adherence to the primary vows outlined by Saint Francis, encouraging support for their cause.

Saint Francis and his brothers were dedicated to an evangelist lifestyle and traveled frequently throughout Italy caring for lepers, carrying out manual labor, and preaching. A Benedictine abbot provided Francis with the small chapel of Portiuncula, where he and his followers developed their order.<sup>17</sup> The brothers continued their preaching, and it was while on a trip to Assisi that Francis would encounter one of his most devoted pupils, Clare of Assisi.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup> House, *Francis of Assisi*, 82.

Twelve years his junior, Clare was largely responsible for perpetuating those Franciscan ideals which St. Francis had set forth early in his career. From the time in which she joined with Francis until her death in 1253, Clare fought for the right to live in poverty to maintain a close relationship between the Franciscan “brothers” and the “sisters” of the Poor Ladies, and to live a life of enclosure. These precedents she set forth during her own time endured over the years and later influenced the lives of female monastics throughout Europe.

### **Clare of Assisi**

Clare was born around 1194 to Ortolana and Favarone Offreduccio, members of an aristocratic Assisian family, and was the third of five children. *The Acts of the Process of Canonization* and *The Legend of Saint Clare* both give accounts of Clare’s birth; both emphasize that Clare’s mother Ortolana became very apprehensive before her birth:

She frequently visited a nearby church and one day heard a response to her prayer for the safe delivery of her child. “O lady do not be afraid, for you will joyfully bring forth a clear light that will illumine the world.” Within a short time Ortolana and her husband Favarone had the baby and named her Chiara or Clare, the clear or bright one.<sup>18</sup>

The clarity and light with which her name is associated are two traits that have been used to characterize her spirituality, both literarily and pictorially.

Clare’s lineage was noble, with several knights in the family, and her ability to marry would have been used to create an alliance with another influential family and to bolster the family name. It is recorded that Clare’s uncle Monaldo had arranged a marriage for Clare the same year she took her vows, serving as a catalyst for her decision to dedicate herself to spiritual pursuits.<sup>19</sup> Clare refused the marriage and made arrangements with her servant, Bona di Guelfuccio, to meet with St. Francis and receive his advice. How Clare first heard of St. Francis

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<sup>18</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 10–11. Armstrong, *Francis and Clare*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Joan Muller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 8; Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 12.

has not been determined, but it is assumed that she may have heard him preaching at the nearby church of San Rufino.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Clare traveled by night to Santa Maria della Porziuncola, where, Jeryldene Wood relates, the friars “who were keeping vigil at the little altar of God received the virgin Clare with lighted torches.”<sup>21</sup>

Typically the reasons why women entered into the monastic world varied: they may have sought refuge from unwanted betrothal; their families may not be able to provide a substantial dowry; they may have been taken in as orphans; and they may have chosen to retire there as widows and divorcees.<sup>22</sup> Probably the least common and most noteworthy reason was a true yearning to devote one’s life to God. Clare was one of those women who truly felt a calling and escaped her family to enter into the monastic life. Women actively seeking spiritual vocations were limited in options for accommodations; most orders refused to place them as they put a strain on resources and pastoral availability. Typically they needed to rely on smaller scale communities of recluses or on less expensive and informal arrangements, such as communal houses run by individual groups of mainly urban women who devoted their lives to social work and religion.<sup>23</sup> Clare was fortunate in that she was able to meet with St. Francis and gain his support, which assisted her throughout her life as a nun and provided a space for her within the community.

The Legend of Saint Clare states:

The Father Francis encouraged her to despise the world, showing her by his living speech how dry the hope of the world was and how deceptive is beauty. He whispered in her ears

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<sup>20</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, & Spirituality*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Vera Morton, *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Morton, *Guidance for Women*, 6.

of sweet espousal with Christ, persuading her to preserve the pearl of her virginal purity for that blessed Spouse Whom Love made man.<sup>24</sup>

It was these words of wisdom that solidified Clare's decision to enter into Francis' world of poverty and drove her to uphold it until her death. Her acceptance of his vows was extremely significant, given the era and her aristocratic Assisian family. As the eighteenth witness in *The Acts of the Process of Canonization*, Lord Rainerio de Bernardo of Assisi states that Clare was beautiful and admits to having asked her many times to consent to marriage.<sup>25</sup> At a time when the social gaps between the wealthy and the poor were very large, a willing sacrifice such as Clare's turning her back on her origins to embrace poverty would have garnered much attention, in the same way that Francis' gesture had.

After her vows were taken with St. Francis, Clare was moved to the Benedictine monastery of San Paolo delle Abbadesse in Bastia, a short distance from Portiuncula. She remained at San Paolo until further arrangements could be made, at which time she was moved to San Angelo di Panzo, a monastery of Beguine recluses, and finally to San Damiano, the first of the churches Francis had repaired when he began his preaching.<sup>26</sup> It was at San Damiano where Clare remained until her death in 1253 and where she developed the Order of Poor Ladies of San Damiano, which would become known as the Poor Clares.

Saint Francis was adamant that his brothers should care for and minister to the sisters of San Damiano.<sup>27</sup> In addition, it was common practice for the brothers to collect alms on their behalf, as Clare had wanted them to live without material support. Concurrently, Clare sent

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<sup>24</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Lezlie Knox, "Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare," *Church History*, 69.1 (March 2000): 42.

members of the Poor Ladies to develop additional sections of the order. However, as Leslie Knox addresses in her research, it seems as though Saint Francis meant for the help of the brothers to extend only to those ladies of San Damiano and not to additional chapters. Francis did not express an interest in becoming the head of an entire order of enclosed women, due to his frustrations with the continually growing male contingent of the order.<sup>28</sup> In response to his aversion to leading the group of women, Clare accepted the role of abbess in 1215.<sup>29</sup> Despite her wishes for living a simple solitary life, she consented to the position of power out of respect for Saint Francis.

After Saint Francis' death in 1226, Clare fought for two decades to have the sisters fully incorporated into the Franciscan order. The brothers of the order had fiercely rejected their obligations to the Poor Clares after their founder's death; the brothers felt that the nuns' care placed a strain on the order's resources, and that counseling the nuns took the brothers away from other actions.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately for the women, the Pope's nephew Cardinal Rainald dei Segni became the cardinal protector for the Poor Ladies and held the belief that the friars should take responsibility for the sisters. Thus, the Cardinal frequently assigned friars to minister to the sisters.<sup>31</sup> In 1227 Pope Gregory IX issued a bull commanding the Franciscan Minister General to provide pastoral care to the Order of Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Despite this help, tensions remained between the orders, and in 1230 Pope Gregory XII commanded, in response to Francis' original proclamation, that the friars were not to enter convents without papal sanction. This was

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<sup>28</sup> During the later half of his life the Franciscans grew tremendously and Francis wrote several additional rules for the order to maintain consistency, although at the end the changes in the Rule are said to have shown little reflection of Francis. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Muller, *Privilege of Poverty*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Knox, *Audacious Nuns*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

interpreted by the Franciscan community as a reprieve from offering care to the sisters, and they removed themselves from the convents.<sup>32</sup> The women threatened a hunger strike, and under the command of the Pope the brothers returned to their posts. However, no new convents were added to the order between 1228 and 1245.<sup>33</sup>

In 1250 a bull was finally passed which stated that the friars were exempt from their duties to care for the Poor Clares. While they were not legally bound, most maintained the traditional precedent continued their duties.<sup>34</sup> On October 18, 1263 Pope Urban IV published a new constitution for the Clarissan nuns. Before this time, because of the uncertainty of their position within the Franciscan order, most Clarissan orders were living by various sets of rules which had been adapted over time, creating confusion among the orders.<sup>35</sup>

Also, following Francis' death there was a shift in the views of the Franciscan brothers in regard to poverty. As Mueller states, "they struggled to redefine their institutional poverty to make it easier to use and access money for the promotion of their order."<sup>36</sup> This went against the principle Clare believed to be the fundamental core of Franciscan faith, and she fought for the right to poverty until her death. Clarissan houses were forced to face the question of whether to maintain their connection to the Franciscan order, which was contrary to the wishes of Saint Francis, or to uphold the original goals of Francis and reject the new constitution set down by Urban, which favored changing views of the brothers. Clare lived in seclusion in San Damiano

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<sup>32</sup> Knox, *Audacious Nuns*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> "Some houses had adopted Hugolino's constitution of 1218, while others followed Pope Innocent IV's rule of 1247, and a few convents with close ties to San Damiano had been allowed to profess Clare's rule of 1253." *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Muller, *The Privilege of Poverty*, 2.

for forty-three years, leaving very few sources to directly testify to her beliefs and wishes. Among those sources that remain are her *Testament, Rule*, and the spiritual advice in her letters to Agnes of Prague. Through examination of the themes of each of these sources, it is evident that above all Clare was dedicated to poverty and seclusion, and this was the direction the Clarissan order chose to uphold.

Shortly before her death, Clare wrote her Rules for the “Poor Ladies,” not wanting to die without her sisters being legitimated as an order that was devoted to poverty and enclosure. During the period before she received word from the Pope of his decision about their validity and her proposal, Clare received her most well-known vision, in which she saw the Virgin Mary surrounded by crowned virginal saints.<sup>37</sup> In her vision the Virgin Mary legitimated Clare’s leadership of the “Poor Ladies” but covering her with an ornately brocaded cloth of honor.<sup>38</sup> This vision has also been interpreted as the realization of a prophecy given by St. Francis in his Canticle of Exhortation to Saint Clare and her Sisters, which stated, “Those who are weighed down by Sickness and others who are wearied because of them, all of you: bear it in peace. For you will sell this fatigue at a very high price and each one will be crowned queen in heaven with the Virgin Mary.”<sup>39</sup> It is poignant that Clare received this vision of the Virgin when she was on her death bed, after she had weathered years of poverty and sickness without complaint, and it was part of the reason many of her followers likened her presence to that of the Virgin, just as Francis had been seen as a Christ figure. Her kinship with the Virgin was passed on to the Clarisse, and it became their goal to emulate her through meditation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Armstrong, *Francis and Clare*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Regis J. Armstrong, ed., *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 13.

On the day before her death, Clare received the news that her *Rules*, in which she detailed the form of poverty to be performed by the sisters, had been accepted by Pope Innocent the IV.<sup>41</sup> It is telling, however, that in addition to her stipulations for poverty Clare also mandated strict enclosure, or clausura, on her sisters.<sup>42</sup> What is even more significant, perhaps, is the order in which the rules were set down. The statute of enclosure is included in the first of the twenty-six chapters of rules which Clare set forth, emphasizing the importance this mandate held for her. To begin with, she states that the sisters must conform to “living in obedience, without property, and in chastity, under enclosure.”<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Makowski notes that by stating her *Rules* in this manner, Clare added a fourth vow to the traditional three; obedience, poverty, and chastity, emphasizing once again the added importance of enclosure for her order.<sup>44</sup> The Poor Clares would be the first female order whose enclosure was observed by the papacy.<sup>45</sup>

The enclosure Clare had in mind was everlasting and was not to be violated unless of an extreme emergency, such as fire or attack. In any other case it was necessary to obtain permission from the Cardinal Protector, who would have been appointed by the Pope.<sup>46</sup> Even when obtaining permission, an exception to the rule had to be from extreme cause, such as contagious illness. Permission to enter the monastery had to be given either by the Apostolic See or the Cardinal Protector, despite religious status. The only exception was similar to that of a monastery, in that physicians were allowed to enter when emergency called for it. However, they

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<sup>41</sup> Muller, *The Privilege of Poverty*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> “...vivendo in obedientia, sine proprio, et in castitate, sub clausura.” Ibid., 35.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 35–36.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 37.

were only allowed in with the presence of two other members of the clergy as added protection.<sup>47</sup>

In order to have the ability to carry out functions that necessitated outside interaction and travel, the sisters took in several servant girls to carry out these duties. As Makowski relates, “they were to observe all obligations of profession, save cloister regulations, since these sisters, with the license of the abbess, were permitted to leave the monastery on convent business.”<sup>48</sup> Most Clarissian orders owned land that was cultivated for grains, olives, grapes, and it was these lay sisters, tenants, and outside workers who were hired to carry out these duties.<sup>49</sup> Their presence thus ensured that the sisters would have the ability to maintain the land and function as an order without breaking one of their most important vows. In addition to restrictions on who could enter and exit the monastery, Clare also outlined elaborate architectural precautions to be taken.<sup>50</sup> Specific building features would ensure that even while visitors were present within the convent, face-to-face exposure would be avoided until completely necessary. As Caroline Bruzelius puts it, the sisters were to be “dead to the world.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Periculoso and Implications of Enclosure**

The enclosure of the Poor Clares and the declaration of Urban IV set a precedent that would inspire the later decree of *Periculoso* set forth by Pope Boniface VIII.<sup>52</sup> The *Periculoso* was implemented in 1298 and expanded the ideas set forth by Saint Clare in her *Rules*. The

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>51</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> For an in-depth study of the *Periculoso*, see Elizabeth Makowski’s *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298–1545*. Makowski has provided the only detailed study on the *Periculoso* and its significance to date.

particular significance of the *Periculoso* is that it did not just address the Poor Clares, as Urban IV's constitution did, it was also the first universal mandate that all female monastic orders under the Catholic Church should adhere to a permanent rule of enclosure.<sup>53</sup> Before this time enclosure had been common, but had been followed as tradition and preference of a particular order, not as a universal diktat. What is also significant about the decree is that no such mandate was created for the male population of monastic orders, which caused their female counterparts to limit the number of members which they accepted—thereby avoiding a drain on their resources and distinctly articulating impenetrable boundaries within their structures.<sup>54</sup>

The *Periculoso* was not created solely in response to the values of enclosure established by earlier by groups such as the Poor Clares. It was also enacted as a response to the fears of fiduciary constraint that the maintenance of the women posed, as well as the nuns' threat to the long established Church hierarchy. As Caroline Walker Bynum relates, the number of opportunities for women grew substantially in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> Concurrently with the birth of the Poor Clares, many other religious organizations were taking form. In England emerged the double monastery, which held both male and female communities and coincided with a surge of female recluses. Cistercians and premonstratsians' female numbers grew exorbitantly; both passed internal legislation limiting the number of new chapters that could be formed.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the growth of accepted orders, there was a new trend of modern fledgling groups establishing themselves. Most of these groups were viewed as heretical by the church and

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<sup>53</sup> Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

posed a threat to the already established church hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> The new orders provided outlets to women not available in established tradition, thus presenting an attractive spiritual outlet. It was because of these new-found opportunities that the new orders were viewed as heretical, rather than due to their ecclesiastical beliefs. As Bynum states, most developed the same orthodox themes as existing orders, such as “a concern for affective religious response, an extreme form of penitential asceticism, an emphasis both on Christ’s humanity and on the inspiration of the spirit, and a bypassing of clerical authority.”<sup>58</sup> It was this move away from church hierarchy that presented the largest fear for leaders of the Church, for within these heretical groups women were able to establish themselves within an opposing hierarchy and maintain authority.

Groups such as the Beguines in northern Europe (in areas such as France and Switzerland) and the Tertiaries, who were well represented in Italy, posed the main concern because they were not relegated to any conventual space. Like most heresies the Beguines maintained the values common in the established orders, such as poverty and chastity, but they didn’t have any unifying rules, houses, or leaders, which left a considerable amount of room for unprecedented female leadership.<sup>59</sup> The Tertiaries, while associated with groups such as the Franciscans or the Dominicans, also lived outside monastic walls, making it difficult to impose strict guidelines and hierarchy within the group.<sup>60</sup> These groups were supportive to women because enclosure was not necessary and lodging was difficult to obtain. The mandate of *Periculoso* ensured that the threat that these groups posed was considerably lessened by requiring their observance of the ordinance of enclosure, which removed the flexibility and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 15-17.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 15-17.

accessibility the new orders once offered. Those who did not comply would be subject to the prescribed punishments, in addition to not being recognized by the Church.<sup>61</sup>

The *Periculoso* was published as a section, Chapter 16, in the third portion of Pope Boniface VIII's book *Liber Sextus*, so named because of its beginning words.<sup>62</sup> The book formed part of a compilation of papal law entitled *Corpus Iuris Canonici*. The mandate of enclosure is written in a way very similar to those produced by Clare and Urban IV. First and foremost the rule states that "thenceforth all nuns, no matter what rule they observed and no matter where their monasteries were located, were to be perpetually cloistered."<sup>63</sup> By stating there would be no exemptions from order or location, the *Periculoso* establishes the universality of the proclamation. In addition, by using the term "perpetually cloistered," the Pope removed all possibility of movement to and from the convent, therefore limiting those orders which had previously had the ability to sustain themselves through labor or ministry.<sup>64</sup>

Also in accordance with the earlier restrictions of enclosure, certain exceptions were made for extreme cases, such as illness or emergency. In those cases only nuns who possessed a health threat to those around them were to be removed from the convent.<sup>65</sup> These rules applied to all members of the order, including the abbess, as Elizabeth Makowski explains:

Once enclosed, nuns, even abbesses, were not to risk exposure to worldly temptations. Boniface commanded temporal lords, as well as bishops and other prelates, to permit abbesses and prioresses to do homage, swear fealty and conduct any other legal

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<sup>61</sup> Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

transactions on behalf of their monasteries through the agency of a proctor whenever possible.<sup>66</sup>

Again, Boniface seemed to be depending on those methods which had been implemented by the Poor Clares earlier to ensure that sisters were allowed to maintain their order; just as the Clares appointed lay sisters to carry out their public duties.

Whereas the Clares applied sanctions to those sisters who violated their rule of enclosure, Boniface ensured obedience by promoting harsher punishments for violation. Permission was given to bishops and other members of the clergy to uphold the restrictions and to report any inappropriateness. Those who failed to uphold the limitations of enclosure were subject not only to excommunication from the church but to secular penalties as well.<sup>67</sup> Before the universal decree was placed, a certain amount of flexibility had been allowed to maintain the economic functions of the convent, even with the aid of lay sisters.<sup>68</sup> Boniface's proposed sanctions severely endangered the economic well-being of many convents and served to severely limit their influence in the Christian community.

Not only were the activities of the sisters limited in regard to the labor they could perform for economic means due to their inability to leave, but the law also affected those coming into the institutions. This posed an even larger implication, in that the most important economic resource for many of the orders was the charitable donations of affluent family members and friends of the sisters. By barring visitation and contact between the women and their families, the amount of economic support offered through these previously generous relationships was largely

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 3.

limited.<sup>69</sup> A poignant example of their importance can be seen through the status of Agnes of Prague.

Agnes of Prague was a princess who had been betrothed to the German Emperor Frederick II but declined his proposal to found a monastery of the Poor Clares in Prague.<sup>70</sup> Agnes was perhaps Clare's most loyal follower and promoted the latter's efforts to uphold the Franciscan ideals of poverty. In recognition of Agnes' devotion to the ideals of poverty, Clare took particular care to document her dedication in her Vita.<sup>71</sup> It is essential to recognize, however, that while personal poverty was maintained, the Clares did accept donations for the good of the order in general, and for this reason Agnes proved an important asset. Due to her royal status she was the recipient of numerous royal gifts from family and friends, and she was known to have always divided their value into three parts. With the first portion she bought reliquaries, vessels, and ornaments for the church; with the second she took care of the needs of her sisters; and the third she spent on widows, orphans, lepers, and other needy persons.<sup>72</sup>

It was with the generosity of those associated with the sisters, such as Agnes of Prague, that the nuns were for the large part able to remain financially sound prior to the *Periculoso*. Clare herself, having come from an aristocratic family, would have been a recipient of similar gifts as she maintained the support of her mother and sister, who both joined her at later periods of her enclosure.<sup>73</sup> It can be seen then that a tradition of giving had been well established from the beginning for the Clares and would have proved a severe strain on most communities. It was

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>70</sup> Muller, *Privilege of Poverty*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 10-12.

those communities benefiting from royal interest that proved the most successful in maintaining themselves as an order, as will be shown with Santa Maria Donna Regina in Naples, due to its relationships with Maria of Hungary and Santa Chiara of Naples and the patronage of Queen Sancia. Without this special interest the financial future of most convents was put into question.

While the similarities between the *Periculoso* and the earlier forms of enclosure set forth by Urban and Clare have been established, it must also be considered why Pope Boniface VIII believed it was necessary to create such an addition to the papal law. It has been suggested by Makowski that by mandating a universal enclosure, Pope Boniface VIII was attempting to quell threats to both his authority as well as religious hierarchy as a whole. As she explains:

Strict enclosure, the absolute (and therefore novel) observance of ancient and revered ideal, was the pope's prescription for maintaining discipline among religious women who sought the highest palm that Christianity could offer them: recognized religious status within a monastic community.<sup>74</sup>

This statement, while bold, is supported by the lack of parallel mandates for male monastics. At no point was a similar decree of enclosure created for the male population. As a result those orders not affected by the enclosure were able to accept larger numbers of followers and sustain themselves better economically.

As Makowski states, the pope's aversion was not just to "untraditional female behavior" that was being practiced by certain female orders, such as itinerant preaching, but to the efforts of communities like the Poor Clares to be recognized in the same capacity as their brother communities.<sup>75</sup> To obtain equal footing within the church hierarchy would have allowed for additional movement throughout the church, which for most would have been deemed unacceptable. By mandating such restrictions, the church was ensuring a smaller contingent of

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<sup>74</sup>Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 40.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

female members and limiting their mobility in such a way that they would not have been able to function more broadly within the church system. Therefore, while at first appearance the directive seems to have only been solidifying an already established practice, it served in fact to cement the place of women within the broader church hierarchy.

### CHAPTER 3 HOST AS IMAGE: OBSERVANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

In understanding the extremity of the limitations that were placed on the female order, it can be surmised that the measures taken in the construction of their buildings become much more important. Before enclosure was self-mandated certain exceptions were made, and the repercussions were not as severe if indulgences were allowed. However, with the threat of excommunication and secular sanctions, it became vital to make sure that the spaces were in fact capable of maintaining the separation needed from the public and male members of the clergy, especially for convents that were associated with a public church in which the nuns were also supposed to bear witness to the service. As previously stated, the sisters were to be “dead to the world,” and that was especially true in terms of the laity. Not only did structures need to accommodate the mandated physical separations, but they also needed to allow for the fulfillment of the nuns’ spiritual needs. Allowances had to be made so that those ideas and aspects of the service that were of the most value to the sisters could be accessed, despite the nuns’ physical separation from the public at large.

The Poor Clares embodied the Franciscan ideals set forth by Saint Francis since the beginning of his preaching. The Franciscan approach to spirituality was to emphasize personal devotion and interaction with the divine; one’s personal connection with God was fostered through prayer.<sup>1</sup> Along with this heightened emotionality and personal engagement came a stronger demand for images to elicit these emotions and act as aids of memory. Their use within the Franciscan order would have been in line with the goals of the most predominant religious sects in Italy at the time. Prevailing images of the time were icons and narrative frescos, which

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Neff, “Byzantium Westernized, Byzantium Marginalized: Two Icons in the *Supplicationes Variæ*” *Gesta* 38 (1999): 2.

were utilized by the Franciscans, but they were used in a much broader sense than is usually thought. For the Franciscans, as for most sects of the Latin Church, it was not a painted or sculpted creation that was most revered, but instead the body of Christ in the form of the Host. While other images were mere representations of an imagined Christ, the Host was the perfect and true image of Christ, in that it was his body. This differentiation alone made it the most valuable image of Christ and one of the most important aspects of the ritual of the mass.

Saint Francis explicitly stated his approval of adornment for the holding place of the Eucharist. This setting apart of the Eucharist from other types of images and forms of decorations shows the importance of the Host as an image and acknowledges it as being the primary image to the brothers. As Clare was a close follower of the guidelines and values established by Saint Francis, it follows that she too would show particular reverence to the Eucharist, the Host in particular. As proof of her fondness for the meaning and presence of the Host, Clare is depicted most often holding a monstrance, a container used for displaying the Host for adoration. The adoration felt by Clare was in turn instilled in the Poor Ladies, and the Host continued to be viewed as the primary image within the female order.

### **The Role of the Host**

The attention that was given to the Host by the women of the order is not unusual for religious women of the time, and was quite the norm for Franciscans in general. The symbolism of the Host as the crucified and resurrected body of Christ was central to Franciscan piety and was highly emphasized by both Francis and Clare. During the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 it was declared that Christ was physically present at the altar during the consecration of the Host. Canon 1 of the Council stated:

There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine;

the bread being changed (transubstantiation) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time in church history it was made certain that those partaking in communion were in fact sharing in the physical body of Christ, not just acting in remembrance of his sacrifice.

Furthermore, they propagated the idea of concomitance, which Bynum describes as “the idea that both the body and blood of Christ are present in each element.”<sup>3</sup> This idea proved essential as

laity became concerned that as the bread was broken, pieces were lost and the body was

desecrated. In addition, a main reason for the solidifying of transubstantiation dogma was, as

Pelikan notes, that “late medieval Eucharistic piety was underscored by the problem of doubt.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem of “seeing and not seeing” was one that was extremely prevalent, as is shown by

the number of anecdotes that circulated during the period addressing the issue.<sup>5</sup> To view the Host

was to obtain the Grace of God, but for members of the laity the distinction between the bread

and the body of the Host was unclear. Duffy adds, “[T]he appearance of the bread in the Host

cloaked the divine reality which was the true source of blessing.”<sup>6</sup> Clarification in the dogma

served as an attempt to solidify what the laity was seeing. The problem seems to have remained

even after the doctrine was set down; images of the Mass of St. Gregory became extremely

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<sup>2</sup> *Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>, (Paul Halsall: March, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars :Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Duffy offers numerous examples of contemporary tales and fables that address the issue of doubt in the Host. *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

prevalent in the 1500s and played the same didactic role.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of these ideas would have been particularly important to those participating in the consecration ritual because literally linking the bread and body of Christ to the altar alludes to several poignant metaphors. Just as one hungers for the bread and its ability to fulfill that yearning, one also hungers for spiritual fulfillment.<sup>8</sup> By taking the body of Christ, Christ is fulfilling the worshiper's spiritual needs. However, as Bynum points out, hunger is also associated with suffering, and by ingesting the Host that is synonymous with Christ's wounded flesh (and, in essence, his suffering), one is able to achieve true empathy with Christ and to understand his sacrifice.<sup>9</sup> Bynum's main thesis is that women in particular show an affinity to the use of food in the worship of Christ as it appeals to their prescribed duties as creators and servers of food. The Franciscan veneration of the Host would have made this idea especially true for the Clarisse women.

For the Poor Clares this affective response to the Host would have been extremely poignant because of their adherence to the Franciscan ideals. For despite their inability to fully achieve the *Imitatio Christi*, it was the goal of the Franciscans to engage personally with Christ and to create a personal relationship with God. By drawing such emotional parallels with the Host they were able to achieve a more personal connection with Christ. While the nuns' gender would never allow them to fully comprehend his spirituality in the same male terms, suffering is universal and can be understood by all.<sup>10</sup> In addition, if the Clarissan view of Mary and their goal of emulation is taken into consideration, the nuns' emotional response can be seen as being even

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<sup>7</sup> Images of the Mass of Saint Gregory usually depict Saint Gregory at the altar performing the consecration of the Host as he is confronted by an image of Christ emerging from the altar, as if it was his tomb, surrounded with implements of the Passion. As Pelikan states, "This was a highly compressed image, teaching the real presence and unity of Christ's suffering with the daily sacrifice in every church in Christendom." *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>8</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

stronger than most. For, according to the theology, not only did they experience the suffering of Christ through the Host, they were also fully aware of the simultaneous sacrifice by the Virgin Mary as her son stood dying. The emotional response of the female members of the order would have been substantially different from their male contemporaries, particularly because they were subject to the gendered spirituality that was set forth for them by their male leaders.

### **History of the Eucharist**

While the Eucharist held a central role in the piety of the Poor Clares, it is essential to understand how the Eucharist came to be such a pivotal moment in the mass and how it gained even greater prominence through subtle changes that took place in its use and observance. The ritualistic function and importance of the Host changed throughout the course of the Middle Ages, gaining more significance as the symbolic body of Christ rather than as the bread of heaven and symbol of the church.<sup>11</sup> This change took place gradually, and can be seen as both a reason for, or, depending on how it is viewed, as a result of the changing role that it took during the consecration that took place in mass. During the early Middle Ages the altar of a church was set in the front of the apse with the Eucharistic accoutrements placed atop it. At the time of consecration the priest faced the liturgy and proceeded with the ritual within their full view.<sup>12</sup>

As the Middle Ages advanced, the ceremony of the Eucharistic consecration evolved. During the twelfth century the placement of the altar changed: It was moved back from the laity, creating a more pronounced spatial barrier between the rite and its audience.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the placement of the officiating priest changed: Rather than facing the laity, the priest was moved to the front of the altar and performed the consecration with his back to the laity, resulting in the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 56.

further obstruction of the latter's view of the Host.<sup>14</sup> The progressive removal of the Host from public view served to increase the importance and value of the moments when the Host was made visible. Beginning in the twelfth century, it became common practice for the priest to elevate the Host at the moment of consecration.<sup>15</sup> Before the raising took place a bell was rung to alert the laity, who may have been engaged in prayer, of the upcoming event. Once the bell was rung, the priest would perform the sacring, which would induce the transubstantiation.<sup>16</sup> The Host was then allowed to be seen by the laity, forcibly marking the exact moment when transubstantiation of the Host took place. The laity, then, at the moment of consecration was literally viewing the body of Christ, making the Host the perfect image.

Communion was something that existed simultaneously with the consecration of the Eucharist early in the medieval period. It was seen as the communal meal, much like the last supper, in which Christ offered his body and blood. Thus the laity was brought together over the act of communion as the Host served as the focus of the mass. At this time communion was not taken frequently but was taken following the consecration, maintaining a connection between the two activities.<sup>17</sup> However, as the Eucharist's place in the apse was changed, the connection between the act of communion and the consecration also changed; by the thirteenth century the two practices were completely separated. Communion was taken before or after the service, or

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<sup>14</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 95-97.

<sup>16</sup> The sacring was the words of institution spoken several times by the priest to induce transubstantiation, "Hoc est enim Corpus Meum." Ibid., 95-97.

<sup>17</sup> Ancrene Wisse records taking communion twelve times a year. Ann Savage and Nicholas Watson, eds., *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 199.

not at all.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis shifted from the actual receiving of the Eucharist to simply viewing it, promulgating the idea of the Host as image.

The Host as image advanced certain ways of viewing the Host. In the fourteenth century the monstrance was introduced to hold the consecrated Host.<sup>19</sup> The monstrance provided an ornamented office for the Host, which was able to be incorporated into church processions, and provided a suitable area in which the Host could be viewed when mass was not occurring. Oculus windows were built into the walls of the apse so that those outside of the church could peer inside and see the Host.<sup>20</sup> Such measures attest to the importance of the Host as image and illustrate how the laity would in turn be more concerned with obtaining a glimpse of the wafer than of tasting it.

The newfound prominence of the Host as image can be seen in the provisions that were made in San Damiano. For the majority of her time within the Franciscan order Clare stayed in the church of San Damiano. San Damiano was among the first churches Saint Francis repaired upon his return to Assisi and was where he created a place for Clare and her Poor Ladies. Even within their first location, which was not built with the intention of housing a female order, special accommodations were made for the placement of the Host. In the oratory next to the dormitory of the sisters, a niche was created to hold a reserved Host. As Caroline Bruzelius asserts, its purpose as an object of veneration for the sisters can be confirmed by “the still preserved wall painting representing Clare and the sisters kneeling in adoration below the niche in the oratory, which seems to have been that used for the night offices and private devotion of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 54.

the sisters.”<sup>21</sup> Similar niches were common in or near the cells of monks since the ninth century, allowing them to worship the Host privately.<sup>22</sup> The architectural placement of the niche (directly above the sanctuary) not only reflects the use of the sisters for private worship, but also symbolically connects the women to the church. This served as a reminder of the ritual that accompanied the transubstantiation of the Host, as well as the simultaneous viewing by the laity. As will be seen, great lengths were taken to remove the sisters from the presence of the laity and of the officiating clergy as well, but the presence of the Host and its status as the central image were the link between the public world of the laity and the private world of the Poor Clares. This ensured that while no contact was made between the two, they were connected through their mutual desire to know, and imitate, Christ.

### **San Damiano**

As Saint Clare laid down her law of enclosure, she set forth very specific stipulations about how the sisters were to be secluded and what architectural precautions should be made. Among the specifications listed by Clare were the number of locks on the doors, curtains that concealed all doors (with grilles should contact become necessary), one interior and one exterior entrance, a portress of an advanced age, and guards to maintain watch at all entrances.<sup>23</sup> All of these precautions guarded against the exposure of the nuns to the outside world and ensured that their presence would not be felt unless entirely necessary. Such precautions were necessary on a larger scale to guarantee that the integrity of the sisters and their vow of enclosure was maintained.

Before Clare established the Clarissian order at San Damiano, the church had been intended for parish use and was meant to be open to the public for worship (Fig. 1). The arrival

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<sup>21</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 37. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 37.

of Clare necessitated several alterations to the architectural space to provide separation of the female inhabitants. The sanctuary existed as the central space from which the areas created for the nuns radiated (Fig. 2-3).<sup>24</sup> The walls of the area above the nave were extended, creating a second level with a dormitory and, directly above the altar of the sanctuary, a space for a small oratory (Fig. 4).<sup>25</sup> By overlaying the altar space with the oratory, which was used for contemplation and personal devotion, a physical link was created, since no visual connection was made between the spaces. The oratory maintained a domed ceiling similar to that of the altar below, establishing not only a relation to the physical proximity, but also a visual echo to inspire meditation on the significance of the altar and its relation to the Host. Placed to the left of the center of the oratory, a small niche with the consecrated Host further reinforced the importance of the connection between the two spaces and placed focus on both the laity's and the nuns' devotion on the Host.

In addition to the dormitory area, two other spaces were created for the sisters. A refectory took the place of stables perpendicular to the main sanctuary area, again maintaining proximity to the primary area of worship. The third space, which may be the most significant in regard to later architecture of the Poor Clares, was the nuns' choir. The choir was constructed to abut the apse, so that the nuns faced the adjoining wall.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of the nuns' choir was to provide a space for the sisters while the mass was occurring, so they could take part in the ritual. But due to the strict enclosure enforced by Clare, the only avenue made available for this purpose was a small window placed in the adjoining wall.<sup>27</sup> This placement, in the curvilinear wall of the apse,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

did not allow for any visualization of the Eucharist or the ceremony surrounding it; the only prospect of sight would have been an oblique view of the altar and the opposite side of the apse wall. It will also be seen that the placement of the window in relation to the iconographical program will also be important. The window itself was fitted with a grille to further obscure any view, and was presumably covered with some type of curtain, as Clare mandated. It is possible, as hypothesized by Bruzelius, that the window may also have served the purpose of allowing the priest to administer the Host to the sisters.<sup>28</sup> This particular act would have presented a distinct problem for the nuns, as practice at this time limited the physical interaction with the Host. No one beside the priest—no members of the laity or other members of the church—was to lay hands on the Host during the act of communion; rather, the priest would place the wafer directly in the mouth of the communicant.<sup>29</sup> Whether exceptions were made in this case is not known; however, the presence of both the curtain and the grille on the opening would have ensured as much seclusion as possible while still allowing the act to take place.

The inability to observe the Host from the nuns' choir during the service makes the placement and function of the oratory even more essential. As has been shown, the raising of the consecrated Host became the most significant portion of the mass and was precisely what the nuns were being excluded from. How, then, did these churches maintain the seclusion of the sisters, while still allowing them to participate in the ritual and interact with the Host? In the case of San Damiano, the oratory can be seen as a possible solution to this problem, as it provided a personal altar for the nuns in which they were able to contemplate the Host, by providing both a similar architectural setting as well as the unconsecrated Host. But the problem of witnessing the

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<sup>28</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 54.

transubstantiation, the actual changing from bread to body of Christ, still remained. As the importance of the Host persisted, particular measures were taken to accommodate both needs of the Clarissan sisters.

Unlike the stipulations that were set forth by Saint Francis, Clare did not record her feelings on images and their value as meditative objects. Her adherence to the other guidelines set forth by Saint Francis would suggest that she held similar views and did not reject images. She most likely did not spend money on adornments, as that would have been in conflict with her order's vow of poverty. While images currently adorn the walls of the nuns' spaces in San Damiano, during the time when Clare lived there the walls were most likely whitewashed.<sup>30</sup> The absence of visual imagery suggests that the members of the order relied on the Host as their primary image and source of meditative inspiration.

The only recorded images from this time existed in the public realm of the church and were supplemental images to the Host, didactic tools serving as visual reminders of the meaning of the Host. Among those images present were a *Crucifix* and a *Madonna and Child with Saints* (Fig. 5).<sup>31</sup> Both images would have been appropriate subjects for the Eucharistic rite, as they both served as reminders of the Passion. The *Madonna and Child with Saints* were a reminder of the humanity of Christ, as he was born of Mary, and foreshadowed of his later death. The *Crucifix* was a poignant reminder of the sacrifice of Christ and the significance of partaking of his body and blood. By including both images an evident contrast was made, forcing the viewer to consider the two most important episodes of Christ's life: his birth (he was born of the flesh and made man), and his death (he absolved humanity of their sin). The *Crucifix* is also the same

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<sup>30</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

image in front of which Francis experienced his epiphany. In addition to the surface meaning of its iconography, the image also served of a reminder of Francis' perfect piety and act of commitment.

In addition, the physical placement of the *Madonna and Child with Saints* is important to consider. The image was created on the wall of the apse in the area behind the altar. Jeryldene Wood has suggested that the image was present before Saint Francis was canonized in 1228, which would indicate that the image was present before the sisters took up residence in the structure.<sup>32</sup> It is within this decorative cycle that the grille connecting the nuns' choir to the apse is located, meaning the only minor indication of the sisters' presence in the church within the vicinity of the Virgin. Parallels between the Virgin and the Poor Clares, as well as between the Virgin and Saint Clare, were well established and would have been recognized by the laity. This placement, in turn, not only allowed the sisters to partake in the mass by listening to it, but also aligned them iconographically with the Virgin and her role as mother.

Franciscan woman strove to imitate the Virgin; she provided for them an example of perfect piety much like what Saint Francis provided for the men. In depictions of the Virgin, her figure gradually became much more emotionally involved in the episodes of Christ's death, displaying effusive sadness.<sup>33</sup> This new psychological aspect of Mary provided for the nuns a perfect form of empathy to emulate in their meditations.

The figure of the Virgin closely paralleled Clare. It was said of Saint Francis and Christ that they were so alike in their lives that their stories could be interchanged; any aspects missing from one's life could be filled with the aspect of another because of their connection to one

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<sup>32</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian S. Hoch, "The 'Passion' Cycle: Images to Contemplate and Imitate Amid Clarissan Clausura," in James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 133.

another.<sup>34</sup> Clare was viewed in a similar regard to the Virgin, taking on the mothering role to Francis that the Virgin had to Christ.<sup>35</sup> It was through this emulation of the Virgin that the sisters were able to form a connection to both Christ and Saint Francis. While their gender hindered them from a complete imitation of their male masters, the female figures in their lives provided a link through which a connection could be made. With the placement of the opening of the nuns' choir in proximity to the Virgin, the link between them was acknowledged.

### **Franciscan View of Art and Architecture**

While their precise views on the usefulness of images were not recorded by either Saint Francis or Saint Clare, it is evident from Francis' experience with the San Damiano *Crucifix* that images were viewed favorably by the order. Most scholars agree that the Franciscans were among the most significant patrons of images in thirteenth-century Italy—more so than any other order.<sup>36</sup> Franciscan images of this period are generally of a narrative format and primarily depict the Passion of Christ. In the early thirteenth century the depiction of the *Christus Patiens* (or Suffering Christ) gradually displaced the previously used type of the *Christus Triumphans* (or Triumphant Christ).<sup>37</sup> The Triumphant Christ transcended suffering and was shown with head erect and eyes open, displaying no pain while on the Cross. The Suffering Christ was depicted with head slumped to one side with eyes closed, clearly suffering on the Cross or already in death. Such a dramatic change in depictions shows the desire of the patrons to emphasize the

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<sup>34</sup> Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985), 132.

<sup>35</sup> Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Derbes and Hayden Maginnis have both written on the use of images within the medieval period in Italy and adhere to this scholarly opinion. The proliferation of Franciscan images has even outnumbered those commissioned by the Dominicans, who were also large patrons of religious images. Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

psychological and emotional effect of the image, something which was of great importance to the Franciscans.<sup>38</sup>

As previously noted, both Francis and Clare expressed a strong affinity with the Eucharist, and this devotion to the sacrifice of Christ became an integral function of Franciscan piety and to their images.<sup>39</sup> The doctrine of Transubstantiation of the Fourth Lateran Council placed more emphasis on the visual presence of the Host, as it coincided with the raising of the Host during the mass. This emphasis on imagery of Christ's suffering translated to the supporting images, which were located in close proximity to the altar. Images of suffering were appropriate, due to the change in meaning of the Host that had taken place. Rather than the consecration of the Host being a reenactment of the last supper, as it was previously, it now represented the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In Francis' description of the Host at the moment of transubstantiation he says the wounded and bloodied body of Christ was present at the altar. Such a shift in meaning was mirrored in the images produced at the time.

The prevalence of Franciscan images makes sense when one considers that their founder was the only figure among the religious leaders of the time who was given the gift of the stigmata. Saint Francis was able to experience the suffering of Christ so completely that he was rewarded with the wounds of Christ.<sup>40</sup> This perfect imitation of Christ was central to the Franciscan belief system and served as reminder to their followers of what to strive for. As well as his perfect piety, the figure of Saint Francis was accessible to most everyone in Assisi at the time: Francis' aristocratic background appealed to the higher class, while his devotion to poverty

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>39</sup> Derbes points out that the term "Franciscan Spirituality" becomes synonymous with the veneration of the suffering of Christ. Ibid., 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 18.

allowed him to connect with the poor. His appeal to most people was that he came from a secular, non-pious background, yet was still able to achieve perfect piety. It was for this reason that images of the life of Saint Francis were among the most prevalent depictions beside the Passion—not only was there a parallel between his life and suffering and Christ's, but he was also a symbol of everyman.<sup>41</sup>

It can be hypothesized, then, that since the Host was given prominence as an image above other narrative scenes that adorned church spaces, the Poor Clares would have in turn also privileged it in both their public and private spaces, while using additional decorative cycles as supplemental images and didactic tools to impress its importance and meaning. Research about the structures used by the Poor Clares, particularly in Italy, has been slightly hindered by the fact that many of their structures were appropriated from earlier buildings. In terms of architecture, then, it is difficult to strictly determine how the Poor Clares intended their buildings to function and what features were viewed as being more essential than others. In general, the appearance of a nuns' choir has been incorporated into most known examples, but the meaning of its placement, function, and accessibility have been difficult to determine. In order to really understand the builders' intentions, therefore, it is necessary to look at those institutions which were built for the express purpose of housing the Poor Clares, and not those that were appropriated. Among those which fall into the former category are Santa Chiara of Assisi, which has been viewed as the sister institution to San Francesco of Assisi, and Santa Maria Donna Regina and Santa Chiara in Naples. Each of these structures was built with the intent of housing the female order and therefore adhered to the needs and specifications set forth by them.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

## CHAPTER 4 DEVELOPMENT OF CLARISSIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

### **Santa Chiara, Assisi**

Consecrated in 1265, Santa Chiara of Assisi is the location of the body of Saint Clare and was built as the sister building to San Francesco, also located in Assisi, which holds the tomb of Saint Francis. Santa Chiara, the first institution created specifically for the women of the Poor Clares, was created on the site of San Giorgio and was available for habitation by 1260.<sup>1</sup>

Outwardly, the woman's church is distinctly reminiscent of San Francesco; this visual similarity reinforces the sibling relationship of the two churches (Fig. 6).<sup>2</sup> Both facades are broken into three horizontal bands, with the bottom band divided into two equal sections and including the entrance portal. Between the windows is an imposing rose window, which aligns perfectly with the entrance and is topped off with an oculus window in the remaining third level. The point of the roof merges directly above the visual trifecta, leading the eye of a visitor up the building to the heavens. Both structures have an accompanying campanile. That of San Francesco is located to the side flanking the main building, while Santa Chiara's Campanile is located directly behind the peaked roof. The most significant architectural difference between the exteriors of the two buildings is the presence of the flying buttresses supporting the side of Santa Chiara.

The architectural plans of the two buildings also share similarities (Fig. 7). Both buildings were built in the form of a Latin cross and have one main aisle for the nave, with no side aisles. Both naves are four bays long with similar groined cross vaults.<sup>3</sup> The presence of flying buttresses supporting the nave hints at a possible gothic influence, which differs from overall

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

architectural style of San Francesco.<sup>4</sup> There are several discrepancies in terms of the size of particular features, such as the apse and the arms of the transept, but this is probably due to the different functions of the spaces. As Jeryldene Wood points out, the church of San Francesco served four functions, while Santa Chiara only served two. San Francesco “is the shrine and pilgrimage church of Saint Francis, and it is the monks’ church as well as the papal seat,” while Santa Chiara “is the shrine to Saint Clare and the church of her nuns.”<sup>5</sup> The influx of people in San Francesco would have been larger due to pilgrimages, and the building therefore required more space, as well as additional room in the apse to accommodate papal proceedings. Certain more significant differences were present in the Santa Chiara architectural plans that were specific to the wishes of the sisters.<sup>6</sup>

The most significant of these differences is the location of *Saint Clare’s Tomb*, the existence of a nuns’ choir, and the convent. *Saint Clare’s Tomb* is one of the most poignant reflections of the women’s vow of enclosure. Clare’s body and tomb are not actually visible to the public; her tomb is located beneath the stairs leading up to the main altar (Fig. 8). Rather than viewing her sarcophagus, visitors are presented with an iron grate, behind which is a lamp with a lit flame, burning in her memory.<sup>7</sup> This representation of her presence as a bright light concealed behind a grate strikingly symbolizes her role within the Franciscan community as a leader in woman’s spirituality and foundress of the Poor Clares while simultaneously respecting her vow

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4 For more information regarding the gothic features of Santa Chiara see Jeryldene Wood’s *Women, Art, and Spirituality*.

5 Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 49.

6 It is of the opinion of Wood and Casolini that Santa Chiara was acceptable for the needs of the nuns in terms of privacy and daily life. *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

of seclusion until death and thereafter.<sup>8</sup> Clare's resistance to becoming the abbess of the Poor Ladies was outweighed by her dedication to the wishes of Saint Francis, propelling her into a role of distinction which she did not want. The flame, then, represents Clare's passion and dedication to the order that allowed it to maintain its primary goals of poverty and seclusion. From the beginning of her life, Clare was associated with light; her name, "Chiara, or Clare, the clear or bright one" foretold the inner warmth which she would project out to others. The idea of clarity and light was also present throughout Clarissan convents, emphasizing the idea of light as God's presence; the most sacred areas were surrounded with immense amounts of illumination.<sup>9</sup> The flame representing Clare thus also shows her strong relationship to God and the spiritual clarity which she was privileged. This remembrance of Clare attests to the continued efforts of the nuns to maintain those values Clare had set forth and the recognition of her exceptional spiritual presence.

In accordance with the value of their vows of enclosure, provisions were made for a nuns' choir. Alterations have been made to the church over time, but it is believed that the nuns' choir would have existed where the Chapel of the Sacrament and the Chapel of the Crucifix are located, on the south side of the church (Fig. 9-10).<sup>10</sup> Today the two rooms are divided by a modern glass door, but they may have once been one room in which the nuns congregated for mass.<sup>11</sup> The chapels open to the nave via a pair of double doors; however, it cannot be determined whether a grille or some other type of screen may have once existed so the nuns could hear or observe the mass. The Chapel of the Sacrament connects to the convent via a two-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 50.

bay corridor that would have provided secluded yet accessible access to the church. Windows on the east side of the Chapel of the Sacrament suggest that an indirect visual line may have once existed for the observation of the Host, but it is more likely that the presence of a window would have only facilitated the nuns' ability to hear the sermon rather than their ability to see the Host.

As Caroline Bruzelius states:

With the explosion of Eucharistic piety in the 14th c the inability to see the elevation of the host during the mass might have come to have been perceived as such a deprivation (spiritual). But for the 13th c it is important to recall that Christianity has always contained a tradition that especially blessed are those who can believe without seeing, touching, or tasting.<sup>12</sup>

As this building comes from the early architectural period of Clarissan architecture, it is likely that the measures of seclusion in Santa Chiara of Assisi precluded all likely aspects of visual interaction between the nuns and the public, including the raising of the Host.

It is interesting to note that while the nuns may or may not have been able to see the Eucharist, the laity's view of it would have been completely unobscured.<sup>13</sup> Since there were no side aisles in the nave, there were no columns to obscure one's view, and additionally, the placement of windows above the altar would have served to highlight the action taking place at the altar. Wood makes the observation that "the luminous vaults of the crossing above the softly lit, privileged space of the high altar placed over the saint's secret tomb—gives palpable form to Saint Clare's mediation between the earthly and divine."<sup>14</sup> The lighting and placement of the tomb not only places the focus on the altar and the actions taking place there, but also highlights Clare's own shift from the human to the divine. The latter emphasis draws a parallel between her

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<sup>12</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

character and the double nature of Christ (human and divine) that is emphasized through the Eucharist.

An analysis of the art of Santa Chiara has been hindered by the fact that the nave and the transepts were all whitewashed in the eighteenth century by order of Bishop Ottavio Spader.<sup>15</sup> But although a complete idea of what the laity viewed during the mass cannot be known, other elements do remain and can offer some insight into the decorative motif of the church. Images that remain on the left transept intimate that it once held Old Testament scenes, while those on the right transept suggest New Testament scenes. Jeryldene Wood proposes that these frescoes duplicate those found in the upper church of San Francesco.<sup>16</sup> This similarity intimates an attempt to maintain a connection between the two institutions beyond their architectural framework. The frescoes of the choir were destroyed except for small fragments of sheep; however, because of the similarity between the decorative cycles of the two churches, it can be assumed that these frescoes followed the same pattern as San Francesco.<sup>17</sup> If this were the case, the lower wall behind the altar would have once illustrated episodes from the infancy of Christ. The narrative would have provided the congregation with a complete recitation of the life of Christ, beginning with the prophetic episodes of the Old Testament in the left transept and extending into images leading up to his birth in the right transept. Finally, images of Christ's birth and infancy would have been located behind the altar. This continual narrative would have

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>16</sup> The dating of the frescoes from Santa Chiara has been complicated by questions of chronology, but the majority of the work seems to date from the fourteenth century, including those works adorning the nave and crossing as well as the Chapels of the Sacrament and Crucifixion. Works dating from the thirteenth century are scarce decoration seems to have been extremely minimal. The dating on the frescoes from San Francesco have similar problems with dating but generally date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, leaving the possibility that some of the depictions may have been created simultaneously but has not been shown. Ibid., 172.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 172.

come to a climax when the eyes of the audience were drawn up from the frescoes to the center of the apse where the Eucharist takes place, showing the sacrifice of Christ as the Host is raised.

There is evidence that a *Crucifix* by the Santa Chiara Master was located above the high altar, showing the Christus Patiens with Saint Francis holding his feet, with the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist by either hand (Fig. 11).<sup>18</sup> The existence of the *Crucifix* would have served to reinforce the idea the sacrifice by aligning the Host with such a clear depiction of his death.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it would have created a very clear juxtaposition of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. On the wall behind the altar would have presumably been the Nativity, showing Christ's birth and the beginning of his humanity, while the *Crucifix* would have displayed his death. The Host would then not only be a reminder of Christ's death but also of his resurrection, for through the Host Christ becomes human once more. The entire narrative can be seen as a continuous cycle of Christ's incarnation, with his first incarnation being his birth in the nativity, and his last in the moment of transubstantiation.

The *Crucifix* found in Santa Chiara is also significant, in that it features Mary slightly more prominently than is normally seen in crucifixes of this nature. The figure of Mary held particular significance to the Poor Clares in their goal of *Imitatio Mariae*, but she was also closely related to Clare, as Clare was often viewed as the incarnate of Mary, much as Francis was viewed as the incarnate of Christ. The link between Clare and Mary was perpetuated in imagery, but may also have influenced texts such as the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, which featured Mary prominently and emphasized the goal that the nuns' should imitate her. The *Crucifix* features Mary on the right hand of Christ as she mourns his wound, but she is also

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 5.

shown a second time, which is unusual: She appears again above Christ's head in an Orans, or praying, pose flanked by two angels. The Virgin is then situated beneath a small roundel of Christ as Pantokrator, placing her between the two images of Christ. Her placement serves to emphasize her status and calls attention to her place in Franciscan imagery.<sup>20</sup> The highlighting of Mary in the Crucifixion is given more weight when other images of the church are considered. Two images found in the transept crossing particularly bolster this theory. Located side by side are images of the *Madonna and Child* and the *Santa Chiara Dossal* (Fig. 12). It has already been established that Clare was regarded by many as a foil of Mary, so the juxtaposition of these images highlights the association between the two women and the importance that was in turn transferred to Mary by the Clares. Subtly maintaining the Virgin's presence within the public space of the church acknowledges the nuns' presence without their overt display. The iconography of the *Santa Chiara Crucifix* may have been based loosely on the *Talking Crucifix* brought from San Damiano, but the meaning and importance of this crucifix mostly likely relegated it to private use, as many of the most important images typically were.

While not much of the decorative narrative from the public worship space remains, it is possible to observe that two themes were emphasized. The first was an overall link to San Francesco. After many turbulent years in which the relationship between the Poor Clares and the Franciscans was continuously questioned, the Clares maintained a clear connection between the burial place of their foundress and that of their brother's founder. Because of similar structures and decorative programs, the laity were able to observe a clear connection between the two spaces, as well as recognize the additional sacrifices made by the women in the differences between the two. The maintenance of a clear connection between the two institutions would have

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<sup>20</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 52.

been essential to the acceptance of Santa Chiara as a Franciscan institution. While the Clares were recognized as the second order of the Franciscans, they were not able to travel and preach as their brothers did. Since their preaching was commonly what the Franciscans were identified with and not established churches, it was increasingly important to establish a clear visual connection to one of their most well known institutions.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, it is clear that the decorative program would have supported the vision of the Host during the Eucharist by allowing the action to complete the surrounding narrative. The placement of the decorative themes allowed the altar to become the core of the decorative cycle and, as a result, focused the attention of the laity; the Host then becomes the most emphasized and sought imagery in the church.

While the laity focused their attention on the altar, the nuns' view would have been enclosed by their choir. It has been put forward by Jeryldene Wood that the original nuns' choir would have been placed in a room combining what are now the chapels of the Sacrament and the Crucifix.<sup>22</sup> It is plausible that to surmise that these two chapels would have been used by the nuns for worship, when the decorative narratives of both rooms are considered together. The nuns' ability to view the Eucharist would have depended on an opening in the wall, and if no opening existed, they would have been left to contemplate the images surrounding them. Located on the walls of the Chapel of the Sacrament are as follows: (entrance wall, upper register) *The Annunciation*, (lower register) *Saint George and the Princess*, *The Nativity*, and *The Adoration*; (left wall, upper register) *Descent from the Cross*, *Entombment*, and *Resurrection of Christ*,

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<sup>21</sup> As Le Goff relates, as of the "13<sup>th</sup> century Minors still considered Portincola their ideal location." Franciscans took little interest in creating church buildings as their primary function was to travel and preach. Their preaching "tended to occur outside of the church, to take place out of doors in the town square, in homes, by the roadsides, wherever there were people. It created its own space for itself or changed the public space into the space of the word of salvation." Such attitudes meant a lack of institutions with which the Clares could associate themselves and thus increased the importance that San Francesco had for them. Le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, 168.

(lower register) *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Clare, John the Baptist, Michael, Francis and a nun*; (altar wall) *Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Mary Magdalene, Saint Clare, Saint Francis, and Saint Agnes of Assisi*; (right wall) *Saint Lucy*, which is now lost. Located in the Chapel of the Crucifix are at the entrance, depictions of *Clare as Misericordia, Madonna and Child with Saints Anne, Jerome, Roch, and Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*. In addition there is a dossal which depicts an icon of Saint Clare surrounded by episodes of her life.

These particular scenes would have served several purposes for the Clarisse enclosed there. Primarily they were surrounded by images of devout Franciscan saints, many of whom were female (Clare, Catherine, Agnes, and Lucy). The presence of these particular Saints would have provided the woman with examples upon which they could model their spirituality: women who exemplify sacrifice through martyrdom (Catherine and Lucy) or enclosure (Clare and Agnes). In addition to the women there are several images of Francis, serving as reminder of the nuns' link to their Franciscan brothers as well as to Francis' achievement of the goal of perfect identification with Christ.

Even more significant is the presence of scenes from the Passion and their absence from the public area where the Host would have been viewed. The presence of the scenes in the choir may suggest that woman may not have been able to view the Eucharist and would have only heard the ceremony. However, there is the absence of an actual crucifixion scene, which should be kept in mind; An image depicting the moment of Christ's sacrifice would have been crucial for the nuns' meditation. Rather than seeing the Host and, in effect, the body and resurrection of Christ, they could view the crucifixion and visualize themselves being present. Excluded from the public's experience of Christ, the nuns were forced to envision the event on their own, and the absence of a crucifixion scene would have hindered the process. A solution may have been

the presence of an additional icon or panel depicting the crucifixion that was more central to the area of worship for the nuns, rather than a fresco. It has been reported that the *Talking Crucifix* from San Damiano was brought to Santa Chiara, and it is possible that it resided in the choir with the nuns.<sup>23</sup> The *Talking Crucifix* was the same crucifix before which Saint Francis received his epiphany. Its presence in the nuns' area would have been profound: It would have served as a reminder not only of Christ's death, but also the perfect devotion of Saint Francis that provided him with the wounds of Christ. The cross too, would have been surrounded by images of other, mainly female, saints that also displayed extreme devotion to Christ. Visually, the experience of the choir would have stimulated intense emotion and reverence as the mass was heard.

It is evident that the frescoes in the room were meant to allow for a contemplation of the life of Christ, and the absence of a scene depicting the exact moment of his crucifixion suggests that an emphasis was placed on it in some other form, judging from the remainder of the narrative episodes and their chronology. While the laity was experiencing the divine image that was the Host, the nuns would have been contemplating the meaning of the sacrifice and observing how their own spirituality reflected that of their predecessors in obtaining an intimate knowledge of Christ.

### **Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples**

Santa Maria Donna Regina, located in Naples, was like most Poor Clare institutions in that it was once a Benedictine house; however, in 1293 an earthquake damaged most of the conventual buildings, rendering it useless. It is for this reason that it is not being looked at as an appropriated structure. In 1298 Queen Maria of Hungary took an interest in the building and became part of a major reconstruction plan which would transform the structure into a Clarissan

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 51.

convent.<sup>24</sup> The finished structure was consecrated in 1320 and allows for the observance of changes that took place in Clarissan architecture as the order expanded and developed after Clare's death.<sup>25</sup>

Particularly important to the understanding of this building is the influence and effect of the patronage, especially what aspects were dictated by the Clares and which came from Maria of Hungary. This consideration will be crucial in looking at decorative motifs and architecture in order to show which aspects were important enough to be specified by the Clares and were central to their spiritual well being. Specific attention will be paid to the availability of the Eucharistic rite to the sisters and the significance of images in both the public and private areas of the complex.

Queen Maria of Hungary played a very instrumental role in the realization of Santa Maria Donna Regina as a Clarissan institution; it was of great importance to her personally and is probably the location of her tomb. The funds for the construction of the convent were taken from the Queen's personal funds. As Rosa Anna Genovese reports, she "ordered her treasurer, Anselotto de Lumiriaco, to pay 40 ounces of gold for the construction of the dormitory in 1298 and added to this in the following years."<sup>26</sup> The reason for the Queen's interest in the Franciscan order and in particular the Poor Clares has been open to debate, as not much has been written on the Queen specifically. Maria of Hungary was born in 1257 to Stephen V of Hungary and in

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<sup>24</sup> Caroline Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples: Church Building in Angevin Italy 1266-1343* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Rosa Anna Genovese, "History of the Building and Restoration of the Trecento Church," in James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 14.

1270 she traveled to the Kingdom of Naples, where she married Charles of Anjou, placing her within the Angevin monarchy.<sup>27</sup>

In general, scholars agree that because the Angevin monarchy was a large supporter of the Franciscan order, Maria was in turn a supporter. However, as Samantha Kelly has shown, though numerous Franciscan establishments were created as a result of the Angevin's royal patronage, for the most part the family was very diplomatic in regard to the distribution of their funds.<sup>28</sup> While Maria did commission several institutions, her husband, Charles II, was instrumental in commissioning a number of Dominican buildings, giving equal attention to both of the rivals. These contributions were in addition to those made by Charles I, who did not distinguish between orders in his patronage.

It seems, then, that the interest that Queen Maria of Hungary took in the Franciscans was from personal interests, rather than due to familial devotion to the order. In addition to Santa Maria Donna Regina, she commissioned San Giovanni a Nido, which was also Franciscan, as well as San Pietro a Castello, a Dominican convent where her sister became the abbess.<sup>29</sup> Her patronage alone shows that there was not an overwhelming sense that she favored the Franciscans. Rather, it was her final decision in life to be buried at Santa Maria Donna Regina

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>28</sup> Samantha Kelly, "Religious Patronage and Royal Propaganda in Angevin Naples: Santa Maria Donna Regina in Context" in James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 32–33. Previous scholarship has speculated that the Angevin monarchy was partial to the Franciscans because of the defense of them during the Pope's condemnation of Franciscan poverty in the 1310s and 1320s. It was at this point that the Franciscans were divided over the principle of absolute apostolic poverty and divided into two opposing wings, the Spiritual and the Conventual; the Spiritual favoring physical poverty and living as Christ and the Apostles did, while the Conventuals favored a theoretical poverty in which their belongings were owned by the papacy but were available for their use. The King's son was tutored by the Spiritual Franciscans and the Queen harbored several Spiritual Franciscans during tense times with the papacy, which is what garnered their reputation as supporters; however, Samantha Kelly offers supporting evidence to show that additional factors should be taken into consideration and that they may not have been as dedicated to the order as previously suggested. Kelly, *Religious Patronage and Royal Propaganda*, 1–40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 32.

that truly showed where her loyalty lay, as she could have chosen from several religious institutions to bequeath her body.

The architectural plan of the church is consistent with the restrictions set forth by Clare regarding enclosure, while maintaining a functioning space for the laity (Fig. 13-14). While much of the church was constructed as a result of the influence of Maria of Hungary, she also employed Fra Ubertino de Cremona, a Franciscan praepositus or supervisor, to oversee the project and address any concerns regarding the spiritual necessities of the structure.<sup>30</sup> The increasing strictness of the rules of enclosure at the time made it necessary that members of the clergy participate in the planning of the building so that no flaws could be found with the nuns. In addition to architectural precautions, Caroline Bruzeilus points out the necessity of efficient construction, so that the woman would be moved as quickly as possible to the complex and risk the least amount of exposure to the public as possible.<sup>31</sup>

The church is two stories tall, with the lower level reserved for the public and the upper portion used solely by the nuns. The basilica style plan consists of a nave, which is six bays long and divided into three sections with one main aisle and two side aisles. The ceiling is composed of Gothic ribbed vaults and supports the second story by transferring the weight into the octagonal columns that articulate the separation of the side aisles.<sup>32</sup> Small windows located beneath the nuns' choir illuminate the nave but, because of their size, leave the interior fairly dim.<sup>33</sup> The nave leads to a polygonal apse that extends up to the second story, opening up the space as one approaches the altar and placing emphasis on this end of the sanctuary.

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<sup>30</sup> Bruzeilus, *Architectural Context*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

The nuns' choir is located on the second story of the nave and was planned to be only three bays long but was extended during construction to accommodate the growing number of nuns.<sup>34</sup> The choir then extends two-thirds of the way down the nave before the space is opened up (Fig. 15). The choir would have experienced considerably more light than the nave (Fig. 16). The nave was illuminated by only three small windows, while the choir absorbed light from both the back and front of the church; there were two lancet windows and an oculus window on the west wall over the entrance, three lancet windows on each of both of the side walls of the sanctuary space (between the choir and the apse), and six illuminating the apse.<sup>35</sup> The lighting in the building would have created a subtle architectural hierarchy. Whereas the earthly area of the nave would have been the dimmest, the more spiritual area of the nuns would have been dramatically lighter, while the most important area, the apse, would have been completely illuminated by the six large lancet windows; as the lighting became brighter, so did the spiritual clarity.

As seen in Santa Chiara in Assisi, the aspect of light within Clarissan churches was an important theme, and this is especially true of Santa Maria Donna Regina. Just as the light in *Clare's Tomb* related to both her character and the spiritual light of God, the illumination of the apse served to brighten the physical space where Christ became incarnate, as well as clarify the laity's understanding of his sacrifice. The light was a visual metaphor for the laity; as they moved from darkness to light, they left their earthly experience for the divine and achieved spiritual clarity. The meaning of Chiara as light would have made this transition even more

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<sup>34</sup> James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Bruzelius, *Architectural Context*, 83.

prominent; as one entered the church, one would have entered the light, allowing multiple layers of meaning to be extracted.

The view of the choir from the apse today shows no separating walls or grilles, but this would not have been the case when it was built. In most instances metal grilles are not found in their original locations, and it is probable that there would have been some sort of enclosure confining the sisters.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, Santa Maria Donna Regina was consecrated within a short proximity of Boniface VIII's mandate of *Periculoso*, which would have made the nuns' enclosure essential. In addition, very close to Santa Maria Donna Regina is the Cathedral of Naples, which was run at the time of the Santa Maria Donna Regina's construction by the Augustinian Giacomo da Viterbo, who was known for his strict adherence to papal law and therefore would not have tolerated any laxness in the sisters' enclosure.<sup>37</sup>

The location of the choir above the altar would have allowed for the partial viewing and hearing of the service but it would have limited the ability of the nuns to take communion when it was given (Fig. 17). It is likely that the room adjacent to the apse was used as a sacristy, as Bruzelius and G. Chierici have noted.<sup>38</sup> At one point partitions may have existed to facilitate areas for confession and an environment in which communion for the nuns could take place.<sup>39</sup> The space was accessible via two entrances, one from the apse, for the clergy to administer the rites, and the other from the convent area, allowed for a discreet entrance for the nuns.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>38</sup> Bruzelius, *Architectural Context*, 83. See also G. Chierici, *Il Restauro della Chiesa Santa Maria Donnaregina a Napoli*, (Naples: Francesco Giannini e Figli, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 83.

The only architectural element that interferes with the walls in the nuns' choir is the overlap of a lancet window as a result of the extension of its length, which was covered in order to avoid any exposure of the sisters, as well as to provide additional flat surfaces.<sup>40</sup> The remaining walls of the nuns' choir are completely smooth and rectangular, which, Bruzelius suggests, shows an intention to decorate the interior with frescoes from its very inception.<sup>41</sup> The decorative narratives would have provided images upon which the nuns could meditate while listening to the mass. Decorative frescoes such as these have been seen in other Clarissian convents and so would not have been viewed as unusual; however, because the Queen was personally financing the endeavor, all decorations were more detailed than was usual.<sup>42</sup>

The visual representations in Santa Maria Donna Regina offer a variety of images to consider in relation to the spiritual needs of the nuns versus those of the laity. While the images present in both areas would have related back to the larger narrative approach taken by the Franciscans in the decoration, particular narratives would have been more beneficial to the nuns, whereas others would have been more poignant to the public. It will be shown, however, that both groups strongly related to the celebration of the Eucharist and placed emphasis on Jesus' Sacrifice, using the Host as the primary image and the decorative narratives as supplemental imagery. Of particular interest are those frescos found on the walls of the nuns' choir, in the nave, and on the triumphal arch of the church.

Probably the most predominant of the decorative cycles in Santa Maria Donna Regina is the Passion narrative located on the north wall of the nuns' choir. The cycle consists of three

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>42</sup> Other Clarissian churches with similar decorative cycles include San Pietro in Vineis in Anagni, Santa Maria Iacobi in Nola, and San Sebastiano in Alatri. Ibid., 81.

horizontal registers that are each divided into five compartments. The frescoes date from the same period of the structure, which attests to the initial intention of adorning the space. Each of the compartment details one or more scenes of the Passion narrative as dictated mainly from *The Meditations on the Life of Christ* (Fig. 18). *The Meditations on the Life of Christ* was composed by a Franciscan friar for the express benefit of the Poor Clares. The writing addresses the topic of meditation, namely which images and scenarios would be beneficial for the Franciscan woman to contemplate and which figures they should strive to imitate.<sup>43</sup> Many of the scenes represented in the frescoes are those highlighted within the *Meditations* or address key themes emphasized in the reading.

The scenes in the narrative were read starting from the top left scene across to the right and down to the bottom right, and ending with a vertical reading (top to bottom) of the two final scenes located in the patched lancet window. The first row deals with the events leading up to the judgment of Christ, the second deals with the judgment and sacrifice of Christ, the third offers a series of appearances of Christ followed by scenes of doubt, and the final two scenes serve as closure with the *Ascension* and *Pentecost* (Figs. 19-20).<sup>44</sup> The top row of scenes was damaged during later alterations, causing the top of most of the scenes to be rendered indecipherable. The bottom of the register, however, remains partially intact, allowing for a partial reading of the scenes. As Adrian Hoch points out, the top row is the only grouping of scenes dedicated to individual events in each bay, which suggests that additional narrative scenes may have been present in the uppermost halves of the bays before the damage.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Adrian S. Hoch, "The 'Passion' Cycle: Images to Contemplate and Imitate Amid Clarissan Clausura," in Adrian S. James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 129.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Proceeding from left to right, the scenes of the top register depict the following: *The Last Supper*, *Communion of the Apostles*, *Washing of the Feet*, *Agony in the Garden*, and *The Betrayal of Christ* (Figs. 21-25). It is interesting to note that the register begins with the last supper and serves to immediately draw the attention of the viewer to Eucharistic rites, which would be occurring simultaneously with viewing.<sup>46</sup> The next register contains images that are more complex in their treatment. Unlike the first register, where single scenes were depicted, the second register contains bays that contain multiple narrative events occurring within a single context. The individual events of the scenes are not arranged in chronological order, nor are they separated from each other in an easily distinguishable way.<sup>47</sup> This arrangement causes the viewer to really invest him- or herself in the images to decipher what is occurring, in a way making the meditative process occur more naturally through the initial contemplation.

The sixth scene, and the first in the second register of the program, offers the most visual information but increasingly difficult to understand. In the space are episodes of *Christ before the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas*, the *Denial of Saint Peter*, the *Denision* and first *Stripping of Christ*, and *The Flagellation* (Fig. 26). All of the scenes are extricable even when bound to one another by the compaction of figures, but it takes a discerning eye to place them.<sup>48</sup> The intent of meditation would have made these scenes more appropriate, as their function was to evoke thought—discerning the scenes would have stimulated the nuns' interest and aided in the process of meditation. The seventh scene shows the beginning of the judgment of Christ with the first *Judgment of Pilate and Christ before Herod* (Fig. 27). The eighth continues with his judgment and humiliation, with the incorporation of the second *Judgment of Pilate*, *Crowning of*

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 130.

*Thorns*, the second *Stripping of Christ*, and *The Way to Calvary* (Fig. 28). The ninth scene leads to the climax of the narrative by depicting the third *Stripping of Christ* and the *Ascent to the Cross* (Fig. 29). The tenth and final scene of the register ends with the *Crucifixion*, emphasizing Christ's sacrifice (Fig. 30).<sup>49</sup>

The final register deals with Christ's existence after death, highlighting his appearances to his followers and their doubt.<sup>50</sup> Scene eleven begins the series with episodes from the *Deposition, Lamentation, and Burial* (Fig. 31). The next bay represents *Christ's Descent to Limbo and Resurrection*.<sup>51</sup> Sections thirteen and fourteen illustrate the various apparitions of Christ. Scene thirteen depicts the *Three Mary's Before the Empty Tomb, Noli me Tangere*, and (partially on the top, which has been obscured due to damage) *Christ Appearing to Joseph of Arimathea in Prison* and *Christ Appearing to the Virgin* (Fig. 32).<sup>52</sup> The next scene depicts *Christ Appearing to the Two Marys Returning from the Tomb, Christ Appearing to James Son of Alphaeus*, and *Christ's Appearance to Saint Peter* on the top, and *Christ's Appearance to the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus* and *Christ's Appearance to the Disciples Behind Closed Doors with Supper at Emmaus* on the bottom (Fig. 33).<sup>53</sup> The fifteenth and final section of the bottom register depicts scenes dealing with doubt in Christ's resurrection. The images illustrated are *Incredulity of Thomas* and *Christ Appearing to the Disciples at Supper* (Fig. 34).<sup>54</sup> The top of this image has also been obscured because of damage; it may have provided additional episodes,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 130.

but it is now impossible to tell. Finally, the last two narratives appear in the filled lancet window; read top to bottom they serve to conclude the narrative with the *Ascension* and *Pentecost*.<sup>55</sup>

While the scenes were meant to be read horizontally, a vertical reading is possible. By viewing the images in small groupings of three, abbreviated narratives can be seen. All sections when read from top to bottom convey a transition from Christ's physical to spiritual being. Typically the top and bottom scenes serve to create a link between the three while the center expounds acts of suffering endured in the Passion. The first grouping consists of the *Last Supper*, *Christ before the High Priests*, *Stripping of Christ*, *Flagellation*, *Deposition*, and *Lamentation*. This grouping acts as a symbolic beginning and ending of Christ's trial. The *Last Supper* announces his imminent death, as well as its necessity; the second portion of scenes solidifies his claims of suffering, while the *Deposition* and *Lamentation* bring it to fruition.

The second grouping consists of the *Communion of the Apostles*, the *First Judgment of Christ before Pilate*, *Christ before Herod*, *Descent into Limbo*, and *Resurrection*. These episodes thematically depict Christ's sacrifice for humanity as represented by the apostles. In the *Communion of the Apostles* Christ provides his apostles with his symbolic body to foreshadow their redemption. In the *Descent to Limbo* and *Resurrection* Christ has then given his body and is shown in the act of redeeming humanity. The third section brings together *Washing of Feet*, *Second Judgment before Herod*, *Crowning of Thorns*, *Stripping of Christ*, *Noli me Tangere*, and apparitions of Christ. This particular grouping focuses on those tactile episodes of Christ's Passion. The *Washing of Feet*, in which Christ provides the humble act for his disciples, the *Crowning of Thorns*, which depicts one of several scenes in which the physical mutilation of Christ takes place, and lastly *Noli me Tangere*, in which Mary Magdalene is denied the

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55 Ibid., 130–131.

capability to experience Christ's physical presence through touch. This particular segment, it seems, would have been poignant to the nuns, who were denied the ability to physically experience the Host as the laity was.

The fourth portion brings together the *Agony in the Garden*, *Stripping of Christ*, and various apparitions of Christ. This grouping asserts Christ's own trial and triumph. The *Agony of the Garden* would have served as a primary scene for understanding the emotional trials of Christ; the resolution in the apparitions, however, serves to provide the justification for his acts. The fourth and final grouping serves to highlight the idea of doubt. By combining the *Betrayal of Christ*, *Crucifixion*, and the *Incredulity of Thomas* the narrative serves to show human's tendency to doubt and to highlight the consequences of doubt and betrayal as it was played out in the Crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. While a connection can be drawn in many of the scenes, it can easily be seen that some work better in a grouping than others, and while all depict images of the Passion narrative, viewing them in alternative ways does provide interesting parallels. Whether or not the artist intended for them to be read vertically as well as horizontally cannot be known.

While the overall theme of the Passion and Resurrection would suggest an affiliation with the Eucharist, which, it has been shown, had particular importance to the Franciscans, other aspects of the narrative show its specific appropriateness for the Clarisse woman. The use of the *Meditations* as a source for the scenes is significant because of its intended use by the sisters.<sup>56</sup> Evidence for the use of the *Meditations* in the creation of the narratives can be attested to in several ways. First and foremost, the *Meditations* was intended to aid in interactive devotion,

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<sup>56</sup> Fleck, *Visual and Textual Literacy*, 111.

making its use in the space extremely appropriate.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, as Cathleen Fleck points out, certain scenes “such as *Christ Appearing to the Virgin Mary...and Christ Appearing to his Disciples on the Road to Emmaus...combine the same biblical and non-biblical narratives found in the Meditations.*”<sup>58</sup> Other scenes, such as the *Descent into Limbo*, appear in the *Meditations* and not in the Bible. Furthermore, remnants of text have been found throughout the frescoes that relate to passages found in the *Meditations*.<sup>59</sup> Due to the choir’s intended audience, there was a need for figures that would be relatable to female viewers. Mary, who had already been seen as an established role model for religious women, was then emphasized to a higher degree. As Hoch notes, “The *Meditations* mention Mary so much as to be characterized as ‘*imitatio Mariae*’ rather than ‘*imitatio Christi*.’”<sup>60</sup> This emphasis on Mary also appears in the frescoes, with Mary appearing fourteen times throughout the course of the narrative.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of nuns modeling their actions on those of Mary would have been extremely poignant when they viewed her progress through the narrative. While Mary is able to travel through the narrative and witness the events leading up to Christ’s death, the Clarisse are subject to the enclosure of the nuns’ choir.<sup>62</sup> Since the Franciscans were known for their dedication to itinerant preaching, this would have allowed the nuns to mentally participate by “focusing on

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<sup>57</sup> The author of the *Meditations*, referred to by scholars as Pseudo-Bonaventure, states at the beginning of his writing, “if you wish to profit you must be present at the same things that it is related that Christ did and said, joyfully and rightly, leaving behind all other cares and anxieties.” As quoted by Cathleen Fleck, “To Exercise Yourself in These Things by Continued Contemplation: Visual and Textual Literacy in the Frescoes at Santa Maria Donna Regina,” in Adrian S James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 109.

<sup>58</sup> Fleck, *Visual and Textual Literacy*, 111.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>60</sup> Hoch, *The ‘Passion’ Cycle*, 133.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Mary's Vita Activa while they were restricted to vita contemplative."<sup>63</sup> Just as there was a shift, between the eleventh century and the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, from depictions of the Triumphant Christ to the Dead Christ, resulting in an increased emotionality, the same held true for images of Mary. Whereas the figure of Mary was previously shown without an overt sense of emotion, usually looking straight out at the viewer rather than fully engaging with her environment, she now becomes psychologically invested in the events which occur. Throughout the narrative Mary is shown twice fainting, as well as attempting to cover her nude son and support his weight as he ascends the cross.<sup>64</sup> This increased emotionality would have allowed the nuns to experience a more natural reaction to the sacrifice as they were able to witness the pain shown in Mary's face. Increased emotionality in her depiction allowed a fuller understanding of her emotions and would have provided for an accessible way to achieve *imitate Mariae*.<sup>65</sup>

The images would also have shown her strength through her actions. This strength in her character is shown in her noticeable absence from those scenes dealing with doubt; her abundant presence throughout makes her absence from these particular episodes stand out.<sup>66</sup> The simple reason for this may have been that Mary didn't doubt and thus was not included. As the nuns contemplated the scenes and their relationship to the Virgin, they would have been reminded that the Virgin never questioned the resurrection and meaning of Christ. Hoch points out that John 21:29 states, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed," which would have been known to the sisters.<sup>67</sup> While it would have had resonance with their faith to believe in

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 142.

Christ's sacrifice in general, it would have held even more meaning when one considers that in the choir their view of the body of Christ was obscured, preventing them from the visual confirmation of his sacrifice.

While the nuns were not able to either see or physically take part in the Eucharist as it occurred in the mass below, measures were taken so that they could visualize the experience. As noted, the first scene in the first register of the narrative was the *Last Supper*, which provided them with a visual representation of the meal in which Christ enacted the first Eucharistic rite. In addition, Hoch has pointed out that three more supper scenes were added to supply ample imagery for the sisters to meditate upon as the rite takes place: *The Last Supper*, *Communion of the Apostles*, *Supper at Emmaus*, and *Christ Appearing to His Disciples at Supper*.<sup>68</sup> The prevalence of supper images placed an emphasis on the Eucharist, but the impact of these images can't be fully understood until other factors are taken into account.<sup>69</sup> The use of the *Meditations* as a source testifies to the fact that the images were used for meditation. For a viewer to fully immerse herself in an episode there needed to be detailed descriptions for her to visualize.

Catheleen Fleck has suggested that this idea has been translated into the supper scenes:

The Last Supper, for example, is expanded into three scenes to allow the viewer to prolong her consideration of the event. The initial scene is the *Last Supper* with Christ and the apostles around a table. Frame P2 [the following frame] of the 'Passion' cycle depicts the *Communion of the Apostles*. Frame P3 [the third frame] shows Christ washing the apostles' feet. This progression follows the instructions in the *Meditations* relating to the Last Supper to contemplate each narrative detail and consider its implication.<sup>70</sup>

The choice to provide such a detailed account of the Last Supper events suggests that it was a main focus for the nuns. As the viewer progresses through the scenes, she then encounters other

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>70</sup> Fleck, *Visual and Textual Literacy*, 118.

supper scenes to remind her of the initial scenes and to reinforce her experience with them. A further reminder of the Eucharist can be found in the formal qualities of the supper scenes. Each of the tables represented in the episodes are depicted as being circular, rather than rectangular. The actual surface from which the figures are dining mimics the shape of the wafer and serves as a visual reminder of the importance of the Host. In addition, as seen previously, Bynum has made a clear connection between religious women's affinities for food. This is particularly true with the Eucharist, as it was a woman's function to create and serve the meal; here Christ is serving his followers, thus allowing the sisters in this instance to imitate Christ.<sup>71</sup>

The role of the Queen Mary also needs to be taken into consideration when viewing the decoration of the nuns' choir. The scenes which have been selected would have been known to her, as she was aware of the *Mediations*, which could suggest her involvement in their selection.<sup>72</sup> The Queen was meant to spend the later years of her life within Santa Maria Donna Regina as a Poor Clare; although this never happened, it might explain the incorporation of these female based scenes, as she would have been aware of her own need for meditation once she entered the order. In addition, the Angevins had a history of venerating the Virgin, which may or may not have played a part in her abundant presence in the scenes.<sup>73</sup> Is it most likely, though, that her inclusion was more a result of her role in the *Meditations* than because of familial worship. More likely is that familial influence can be seen in the *Life of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia-Hungary*, which appears on the opposite wall of the nuns' choir along with the lives of other female saints, including Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Agatha. Saint Elizabeth of

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<sup>71</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Hoch, *The 'Passion' Cycle*, 147-149.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Thuringia-Hungary was Maria's great aunt and as such would have served as a family reference within the choir.<sup>74</sup>

The remainder of the church offers an insight into the devotional images that would have been accessible to the laity. Exclusion is often thought of solely in terms of the nuns, but the general public would not have had access to the images in the choir. Rather, they were able to observe only those in the nave and altar area of the church. Santa Maria Donna Regina is rare in that a good portion of the frescoes in the main church have been preserved. Those images that remain exist mainly in the area between where the nuns' choir ends and the triumphal arch which frames the opening to the altar (Fig. 35). Located on the side walls of the nave are depictions of pairs of *Prophets and Apostles*, while the triumphal arch is outlined with *Angelic Choirs* (Figs. 36–37).

As Hisashi Yakou points out in his analysis of the church's interior, the appearance of a pair of painted figures such as the *Prophets and Apostles* is fairly rare.<sup>75</sup> Most instances of similar treatments of saints are found in mosaics and are typically found over doorways.<sup>76</sup> Yakou suggests these figures are acting as guardians for the sacred interior space of the church and in the same manner the *Prophets and the Apostles* "can be viewed as sentinels guarding the gateway leading to the apse."<sup>77</sup> However, it may be more likely that their presence is serving as a reminder and guide to the laity, showing them the way to the apse where they are then meant with a chorus of angels and the body of Christ. Of the sets of figures, one is usually shown

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<sup>74</sup> Kelly, *Religious Patronage and Royal Propaganda*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Hisachi Yakou, "Contemplating Angels and the Madonna of the Apocalypse," in Adrian S James Elliott and Cordelia Warr, eds., *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art Iconography and Patronage* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 98.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

holding a book while the other gestures toward it—indicating to the viewer the Word and possibly, since those shown are prophets, indicating those episodes which foretold his sacrifice.

As one proceeds further into the nave a triumphal arch, which frames the entrance to the apse, is encountered. Located around the arch are *Angelic Choirs* singing joyfully as they peer inward toward the altar. The presence of the lancet windows lining the polygonal apse fills the space with light, almost dissolving the walls and making it seem as though the angels are presenting the light, which in most cases is symbolic of God's presence.<sup>78</sup> The uppermost portion of the frescos of both the nave and the arch are obscured because of the sixteenth-century addition of a false ceiling. As both Bruzelius and Yakou have pointed out, an oculus window also existed at the apex of the triumphal arch and, in turn, would have been the area around which the angels were gathered.<sup>79</sup> The round window would have created a separate and specific ray of light which may have symbolized the presence of God in the church as the sacrifice of his son took place below. The presence of angels surrounding the light is common due to the belief that angels were able to contemplate God without being blinded by his glory; no others could contemplate God unless they did so via the body and blood of Christ.<sup>80</sup>

The effect that the entire scene would have had on the laity would have been very dramatic. As the public traveled down the dark corridor of the nave, the space suddenly opened up in to an airy illuminated area covered with *Prophets and Apostles* showing them the word of God and leading them to the apse where they are greeted by *Angelic Choirs* and an interior filled with light, separating the earthly area of the nave from the spiritual space of the altar. Above all of this was the oculus window admitting the light of God surrounded by angels, while below the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 101.

Priest carries out the rituals of the mass. All of this leads up to the final moment in which the Host is raised and the body of Christ is shown and becomes the perfect image.

The laity was not presented with the specific episodes of the Passion leading to Christ's sacrifice, as the nuns were. It is significant to note that the laity was the audience that was able to view the raising of the Host while the nuns were not. Those that were presented with the physical body of Christ didn't need to be reminded of the Passion episodes; they were viewing its result. The nuns, unable to view the resurrected Christ, were provided with a detailed account of the events leading to the Christ's death, showing the need for images to allow them to fully incorporate themselves into the Eucharistic proceedings. The laity was visually directed to the core area, while being presented to it by those who predicted and witnessed the importance of Christ's sacrifice. Just as the nuns were encouraged not to doubt Christ with the absence of Mary from certain scenes in the narrative, the laity was also persuaded not to doubt by the verification of Christ's sacrifice by the *Prophets and Apostles*. While both populations were presented with different visual experiences, both culminated with the image of the Host, whether physically or mentally, and served to link the experiences of the two.

### **Santa Chiara, Naples**

The final church to be considered is the latest in date and shows particularly well how the architecture of Clarisse structures developed in such a way as to accommodate both the seclusion of the nuns and their ability to take part in the Eucharistic rite. All of the previous churches exemplified the primacy of sound over sight but in Santa Chiara of Naples sight takes on much more meaning. However, as the fourteenth century progressed, it became more and more important to view the Host as the body of Christ, and that growing need can be seen in the establishment of the church of Santa Chiara in Naples. The church was begun in 1310 by Queen Sancia and Robert the Wise of the Angevin monarchy. Sancia was the daughter-in-law of Queen

Maria of Hungary and shared her passion for the Poor Ladies of the Franciscan order. The majority of the church was completed by 1328, but final additions are recorded as not being made until 1340.<sup>81</sup> Erected within a short time of Santa Maria Donna Regina, Santa Chiara was the second Clairissan church in Naples and the largest ever built for the Poor Clares, which allowed for its use in state ceremonies.<sup>82</sup>

Modeled after San Damiano, Santa Chiara is among the first Clarissian churches with spaces that allowed for the visualization of the Eucharist by the nuns. The layout of the church is bifurcated, meaning that two populations faced each other (Fig. 38)<sup>83</sup>. As opposed to in other churches, where the nuns are above the laity in a gallery or to the side of them in a converted chapel area, the nuns' choir in Santa Chiara is located directly behind the altar (Fig. 39). Meanwhile, the laity would have been directly across from the sisters, with only the altar wall separating them (Fig. 40)<sup>84</sup>. This is significant in that the altar now becomes the core area of the building. Previously, while there was a strict division between public and private sections of the church, both audiences were still focused on the same sermon which served as a link between the two spheres. However, in this case the altar took on an entirely different role in bringing the two spheres together: Whereas before it was only the common factor, here it is the physical link between the two.

Not only is a physical relationship formed by the centering of the altar between the nuns' choir and the laity, but the wall that separates the two parties was fitted with three openings that

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<sup>81</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 140.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>83</sup> Carola Jäggi, "Eastern 'Choir or Western Gallery? The Problem of the Places of the Nuns' Choir in Königsfelden and Other Early Mendicant Nunneries," *Gesta* 40.1 (2001), 86; Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 88.

<sup>84</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 88.

provided the sisters with a partial view of the proceedings (Fig. 41).<sup>85</sup> The windows were grated and placed directly above the altar. The view that this allowed was not of the entire ritual but rather of one specific moment, the raising of the Host.<sup>86</sup> Thus, particular effort was made in allowing the sisters to witness the most important act of the mass, the transubstantiation. In turn, the sisters were also presented with the most important image in the church as they viewed the body of Christ. The danger of allowing such openings did not go unnoticed. So as to discourage curiosity by the public, eight-inch spikes pointed out from the grates toward the nave, creating a threatening barrier.<sup>87</sup> In addition, it is plausible that some sort of curtain may have been placed over the opening from the interior and drawn back at the moment of the transubstantiation to further guard against the possibility of the nuns being seen.

Such a commitment to the viewing of the Eucharist was not surprising, considering the patron of the church. As Bruzelius states, “Queen Sancia who intended to enter the convent upon the demise of her husband had a particular devotion to the Eucharist.”<sup>88</sup> The fact that the sisters could now view the Host is an interesting development of its own, but the action of the priest is an additional point to consider. At this point in time, as the Eucharistic rite dictated, the priest would have had to put his back to the laity while he prepared the Host. In turn he would then be facing toward the sisters, which would place them in a position of honor.<sup>89</sup> From the nuns’ point of view, the priest would then be presenting them with the Host, rather than the laity. The

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<sup>85</sup> Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples*, 145.

<sup>86</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 87.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

placement of the choir thus moved them from a position in which they could not take part in any of the service to one of honor, as they were presented with the most important element.

This realization is particularly important considering the time in which the church was begun, in 1310; this is only twelve years after the papal law of *Periculoso* was implemented by Boniface VIII. So why was such thought put into the placement of the nuns' choir in Santa Chiara? As already noted, the location of Santa Maria Donna Regina was incredibly close to the Cathedral of Naples, which also would have been close to Santa Chiara. In addition, the role of Santa Chiara as a location for state ceremony would have meant even harsher demands for full adherence to the *Periculoso* mandate.<sup>90</sup> By placing the nuns in a gallery choir, as was done in Santa Maria Donna Regina, there would have been a significant visual reminder of the nuns' presence, simply by the low ceiling of the nave. However, by completely secluding the nuns of Santa Chiara in Naples behind the wall of the altar, the only way the laity would have known of their presence would have through their singing of hymns as their voices filtered through the grates.

Essentially, by moving the nuns' choir behind the altar, the church removed the visual reminder of their presence. However, by allowing the sisters to be presented with the Eucharist, the church ensured that their act of piety was continuously honored—for while their physical presence was erased, their devotion was not. Not only would the nuns' hymns have added to the mysterious and divine atmosphere of the ceremony, but the raising of the Host would have served as a reminder to the laity of the type of religious life to aspire to by pointing the Host toward the Poor Clares.<sup>91</sup> Just as Clare's tomb in Santa Chiara of Assisi served as a reminder of

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 88.

the vow of enclosure that the sisters took, the Eucharistic rite of Santa Chiara of Naples would have accomplished a similar task. Both churches presented the laity with a grate that obscured the light of the nuns located behind it.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The churches that have been considered in the previous pages were created with the intention of providing worship spaces for both the public and the secluded nuns who dwelled there. Their creation dictated that particular features be included to facilitate their accessibility, as well as limitations. From the beginning, as seen in San Damiano, there was clearly a privileging of the Host as a primary image. Despite being unable to observe the Host during the Eucharist, the sisters were able to view it in several different locations and times within their confines. This additional viewing illustrates its importance as an object of veneration as well as an image, particularly in a space devoid of any other type of adornment. As the churches developed from the plan at San Damiano, images became more integral to the nuns' contemplation of the Eucharist. While still unable to view the Host, the images provided a tool through which its presence could be visualized.

After Clare's death the focus on the Host did not lessen but rather increased, causing further developments to allow the nuns access to it during the mass. Both Santa Chiara in Assisi and Santa Maria Donna Regina surrounded the nuns with scenes of the Passion, emphasizing the sacrifice of Christ. The *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, written for the nuns, emphasized the Passion above all and provided multiple episodes of Mary's witnessing of the suffering of her son to allow for a more affective response.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that both the nuns and Maria of Hungary were aware of this text and that it was used in determining which images were represented for them. These scenes would have been useful as didactic tools for meditation and in order to focus the sisters' understanding of the sacrifice of Christ, which was simultaneously represented through the Host.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoch, *The 'Passion' Cycle*, 133.

Concurrent with the images being viewed in the nuns' choir, the laity was also experiencing images, but in a substantially different way. Rather than being surrounded by images of the Passion and the events leading up to Christ's death, they were confronted with images foretelling his death and providing a context for its importance. They were led by way of decorative cycles to the apse to witness the sacrifice of Christ as his body was raised in the form of the Host. Passion images were less important for the public because they were able to witness the perfect image of the passion when the Host was shown during the mass. Instead, the combination of architectural and artistic features served to highlight the apse and altar area, making it clear where the laity should be directing their attention to view the image. The images of Santa Chiara of Assisi served to frame the apse by drawing the narrative into the center toward the altar, where the climax of Christ's story would take place. Santa Maria Donna Regina framed the altar with intense light from the lancet windows lining the apse, symbolically filling the space with the divine, while Biblical and angelic figures guided the laity's attention to the altar.

The presence of the Host and its importance within these two churches is clearly evident in the iconic representation that surrounded it. But it was in Santa Chiara of Naples that the role of the Host as the central image to both public and private was reconciled. By implementing the bifurcated floor plan, the church allowed the Host to take the most central role in the church: physically, by being placed directly between the laity and the sisters, and symbolically, by bringing the two groups together by way of the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup> While the churches maintained the separation dictated by both Clare and the Pope, the Franciscan goal of a connection to Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Bruzelius, *Hearing is Believing*, 87.

as well as to the laity was achieved through the combination of architectural means and the utilization of the Host as image.

APPENDIX  
LIST OF ART WORKS CITED

1. San Damiano, *Exterior*, Assisi, Italy. Accessed March 2008  
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2. Plan, San Damiano, Assisi, Italy. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 38.)
3. Cross Sections, San Damiano, Assisi, Italy. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 43.)
4. Nave, San Damiano, Assisi, Italy (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 40.)
5. Anonymous, *Talking Crucifix*, Santa Chiara, Assisi, late 12<sup>th</sup> century (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 44.)
6. Santa Chiara of Assisi, Exterior, Assisi, Italy. Accessed March 2008  
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8. Nave, Santa Chiara, Assisi, Italy. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 47.)
9. *Frescoes*, Chapel of the Sacrament, Santa Chiara, Assisi, Italy. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 56.)
10. *Frescoes*, Chapel of the Sacrament, Santa Chiara, Assisi, Italy. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 56.)
11. Anonymous (Santa Chiara Master), *Santa Chiara Crucifix*, Santa Chiara, Assisi, ca. 1260 – 1270. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 54.)
12. Anonymous, *Saint Clare and the Madonna and Child*, Detail of vault above the high altar in Santa Chiara, Assisi, 14<sup>th</sup> century. (From Wood, *Art, Women, and Spirituality*, page 27.)
13. Section, ground plan, and diagram, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page xviii.)
14. Transverse and longitudinal section, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page xix.)

15. View of the nave from the apse, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 109.)
16. View of nuns' choir from the nave, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 107.)
17. View of the apse from the nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 109.)
18. Diagram of church frescoes, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page xx-xxi.)
19. *Ascension*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 146.)
20. *Pentecost*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 147.)
21. *Last Supper*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 131.)
22. *Communion of the Apostles*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 132.)
23. *Washing of the Feet*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 133.)
24. *Agony in the Garden*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 134.)
25. *Betrayal of Christ*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 135.)
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27. *Judgment of Christ before Pilate and Herod*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 136.)
28. *Second Judgment before Pilate, Crowning of Thorns, Second Stripping of Christ, Way to Calvary*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 137.)

29. *Third Stripping of Christ, Christ's Ascent to the Cross*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 139.)
30. *Crucifixion*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 140.)
31. *Deposition, Lamentation, and Burial*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 141.)
32. *Noli me Tangere, Christ Appearing to Joseph of Arimathea in Prison, and Christ Appearing to the Virgin Mary*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 143.)
33. *Apparitions of Christ*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 144.)
34. *Incredulity of Thomas, Christ Appearing to his Disciples at Supper*, from the Passion Cycle, nuns' choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 145.)
35. View of the apse from the choir, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 108.)
36. View of the north wall showing paired *Prophets and Apostles* and *Angelic Choirs*, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 100.)
37. *Angelic Choir*, on the left side of the triumphal arch, Santa Maria Donna Regina, Naples, Italy. (From Elliott, *Church of Santa Maria*, page 113.)
38. Plan, Santa Chiara, Naples, Italy. (From Bruzelius, *Stones of Naples*, page 135.)
39. View of nuns' choir, Santa Chiara, Naples, Italy. (From Bruzelius, *Stones of Naples*, page 143.)
40. Nave, Santa Chiara, Naples, Italy. (From Bruzelius, *Stones of Naples*, page 132.)
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Emily Pfeiffer was born and raised in Rochester, New York where she graduated from Honeoye Falls Lima High School in 2001. She attended Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York where she earned her Bachelor of Arts. Ms. Pfeiffer majored in Art History, focusing on the Italian Renaissance, and minored in the sacred in a cross cultural perspective. While at Hobart and William Smith, Pfeiffer contributed to the organization of two of the college's exhibitions and interned with the Memorial Art Gallery of Rochester. She graduated cum laude in May 2005, receiving the Martha Monser Justice Prize in Art History. Pfeiffer remained in Rochester working with the Memorial Art Gallery's Curatorial Department until her enrollment in the University of Florida's graduate program in art history in 2006. Working under the guidance of Professors Elizabeth Ross, Robert Westin, and Paroma Chatterjee, she completed her master's degree in May 2008.