Dante and the Friars Minor: Aesthetics of the Apocalypse

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This is an interdisciplinary study that aims to reassess Dante’s use of Franciscan sources in the *Divine Comedy*. Particularly, I focus on two important, yet marginalized, theologians: the Provençal friar Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, and his disciple, Ubertino da Casale. Both are coeval of Dante Alighieri, and served as lectores in Florence. In particular, I examine the eschatological aspects of their works, in an attempt to understand how they contribute to Dante's own eschatological vision. Ubertino and Olivi were extremely interested in understanding history through the dense symbolism of the *Apocalypse*. Therefore, I inspected their works, particularly Olivi’s *Lectura Super Apocalipsim* (a commentary on the *Apocalypse* written in 1298, of which there exist no modern editions), and Ubertino’s *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, “The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus,” a massive work on the life of Christ, composed in 1305, in which the author incorporates and develops large parts of Olivi’s commentary.

I attempt to disentangle the crossed references that link these two books with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. I aim to revise our knowledge of Dante’s appropriation of these sources, for I believe that scholars have unjustly dismissed Ubertino as an unoriginal mediator, on the ground of his ideological dependence on Olivi. Therefore I propose an amendment in Ubertino’s favor. Upon a redefinition of Dante’s ideological genealogy, I hope to improve our comprehension of how Dante incorporates the eschatology debate of his time in the sacred poem.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status Quaestionis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ubertino and the “Problem of Discordance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Who has the “Gift of the Prophetic Spirit?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ubertino’s (Exuberant) Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pietro di Giovanni Olivi in Dante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ubertino and Olivi in the <em>Commedia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. “Parole ancor più gravi”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter II**

“*Habita re In Aliquo Ramo Huius Arboris:*

**Ubertino and Pietro di Giovanni Olivi**

| 1. Insipido stilo scribere | p. 59 |
| 2. Dormitat Homerus | p. 65 |
| 3. Practical Teachers | p. 69 |
| 4. *Ego audivi.* Ubertino and the Word of Mouth | p. 73 |
| 5. The Time of the Antichrist | p. 83 |
| 6. Apocalypse Now | p. 90 |
| 7. Eschatological Time and Narrative Time: The Image of the Tree | p. 102 |

**Chapter III**

“*Facio Tibi Unam Arborem Imaginativam.*”

**The *Arbor Vitae* in Dante’s *Commedia***

| 1. An Imaginative Tree | p. 117 |
| 2. “Esto legno dolce al gusto” | p. 130 |
| 3. Dante’s partition of History | p. 140 |
| 4. “Et miror si iam non est” | p. 146 |
| 5. “Anciderà la fuia” | p. 153 |
| 6. Antichrist | p. 161 |
| 7. “Uno la fugge e altro la coarta” | p. 167 |
| 8. Dante’s censure of Ubertino | p. 173 |

**Conclusions**

|  | p. 185 |

**Works Cited**

|  | p. 187 |
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Per Lauro e Anna
Introduction

The main protagonists of my work are the Franciscan friar Ubertino da Casale, and the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri. The first had been a lecturer at the studium generale of the Franciscan Order in Florence during the time, or soon before, Dante had started to attend the “school of the religious.” The routes of the friar and the poet meet again later, at the dawn of fourteenth century, when the latter is sent to perpetual exile, and the former is forced to retire on Mount Alverna because of his dangerous preaching in the center of Italy. In that span of years Dante starts writing his famous poetic masterpiece, the Divine Comedy (along with other important works, such as the De Vulgari Eloquentia and the Convivio), and his name spreads all throughout the courts of the north of Italy. Ubertino writes an obscure semi-clandestine massive volume on the life of Christ, the Arbor Vitae Crucifixe Iesu, which ends with an exaltation of St. Francis as the Angel of the sixth seal of the Apocalypse, and a violent attack against the popes Boniface VIII and Benedict XI, who are associated with the mystical Antichrist. Dante mentions and quotes Ubertino in the Heaven of the Sun, that of the spiriti sapienti, by the mouth of St. Bonaventure. But I argue in the third chapter of this work that the influence of Ubertino is not limited to this part of Paradiso, considering that Ubertino is in fact the ideological and aesthetical filter through which Dante absorbs, in some parts of his poem, the ideas of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, a Franciscan theologian whose commentary on the Apocalypse (1297) had become highly controversial.

In the first part of this work I address the question of how Ubertino has been perceived by Dante’s scholars, and I show how Ubertino, far from being studied and considered in his specificity, first tended to disappear under the large umbrella of Joachism (during the first part of the twentieth century), and was then dragged, especially thanks to the relentless work of Raoul Manselli, under the
equally suffocating aegis of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi. Non-Italian scholars, such as Charles Davis, Stan Benfell, and Nick Havely, while recognizing a larger independence of thought to Ubertino, find it, however problematic, to draw a connection between him and Dante Alighieri, because the apparent condemnation of the friar in *Paradiso* 12, by the mouth of St. Bonaventure, seemed to leave no room for searching for connections beyond (what Umberto Bosco called) the “human sympathy” that the poet had for the friar. Some, such as Manselli, even thought that Dante had in fact no sympathy at all. My goal, however, is to move as much as possible away from moral considerations.

In my second chapter I try to acknowledge Ubertino’s independence in an attempt to free him from the overwhelming shade of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi. The result of my inquiry is two-fold. On the one hand, I show that Ubertino was moving within a spiritual quest whose contours were defined as much by Olivi as by some “practical teachers,” with whom he shares not only speculative and exegetical concerns, but strongly historicized and down-to-earth considerations, which led him to read the history of the Church with a pragmatic and militant perspective, and in which his private personal experience plays a role as fundamental as in Dante’s pilgrimage to God in the *Divine Comedy*. Furthermore, I underline how Ubertino’s spirituality is often expressed by means of literary ambitions, as love, and I dare say, courtly language, not little times replaces academic formalisms. In fact Ubertino’s multilingualism is as stunning as it is naive, and displays theological technicalities along with poetic expressions. In terms of literary source features, for example, next to Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysus, one can find a classical author such as Horace, whose presence is signaled by a couple of quotation from the *Ars Poetica*. I also try to distinguish Ubertino from his closer and most direct sources, especially Bonaventure and Pietro di Giovanni Olivi. While not rejecting their teaching, it is interesting that Ubertino is most eager to take his distance from them, as he violently attacks both Olivi and Bonaventure. The former, while abundantly used as a source for the fifth
book, is accused of not having understood many things (which the readers should thus infer as having been, by contrast, well understood by Ubertino, such as the identification of Boniface VIII with the Antichrist). The second is accused of having disregarded, and thus implicitly of having caused the loss, of important sources to reconstruct the true Francis. Ultimately Bonaventure is accused of having provided a partial, and thus false, portrait of the founder. Ubertino of course justifies himself in relying on heterodox as well as oral sources, as much as on Bonaventure’ official Legenda.

In the third chapter I show how Dante integrates some of Ubertino’s major points as expressed in his Arbor Vitae in the Commedia, such as the use of the metaphor of Tree, the characterization of Boniface as illegitimate pastor, fraudulent deceiver, and usurper of the papal throne, and finally, the bending of eschatology into ideology, and vice versa. I argue, at the end of my dissertation, that St. Bonaventure’s condemnation of Ubertino should be correctly read as intentio operis rather than intentio auctoris, and actually works as an ideological screen that eventually allows Dante to more easily smuggle under the counter some of Ubertino’s most controversial theses.
Promitto tibi quod si te vincas et continues tristitia tua vertetur in gaudium.
(UBERTINO DA CASALE, ARBOR VITAE, PROLOGUS)
Chapter I

Status Quaestionis

1. Ubertino and the “Problem of Discordance”

The present study aims to clarify the ideological and literary connections between the Franciscan theologian Ubertino da Casale and Dante Alighieri, with particular reference to the making of the *Divine Comedy*, where the friar is mentioned and cited at various points.

Ubertino was born in Casale Monferrato, Piedmont, in 1259. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1273 or 1274. Not much is known about his biography, except for what he says in his book *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, which he wrote in 1305. Before then, Ubertino had attended the *studium generale* of the Order in Paris for nine years, and was then appointed as *lector* in Florence, probably around 1285. In the following years not much is known about his life, but he was probably in Tuscany and in Center Italy where he carried on a fervent preaching activity, and where he comes to know Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, Pier Pettinaio, Angela of Foligno, and other protagonists of the religious life of his time. In 1305, during the pontificate of Pope Benedict XI, Ubertino is summoned to Rome and then forced to a period of spiritual retreat on the Mount Alverna. On this occasion, after being insistently asked by other friars, he writes the *Arbor Vitae* between March 9 and September 28 (or so he says in the Prologue). From 1306 onwards he becomes a collaborator and protégé of Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, pontifical legate in Tuscany. In 1307 he is commissioned by

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1 UBERTINO DA CASALE, in Ch. T. DAVIS (ed.), *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* (Torino: Bottega di Erasmo, 1961); it is an anastatic reprint of *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* (Venezia: Andreas de Bonetis da Pavia, 1485). I will henceforth refer to this edition as AV. See also —, F. CASOLINI (ed.), *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, (Lanciano: Gino Carabba, 1937).
the cardinal to conduct the trial against the sect of the *Libero Spirito* in Arezzo; he also tries to negotiate, unsuccessfully, the return of the white Guelfs to Florence. On this occasion he might have met Dante Alighieri, had he not met him already in Florence during the years of his lectureship.

We find Ubertino again later in Avignon, where he takes up the role of the spokesman of the Spirituals during the *magna disceptatio* (1309-1311), a preliminary conference on poverty and on the observance of the Franciscan Rule, held in preparation of the Council of Vienne (1311-1312). In his capacity of leader of the Spirituals he was able to convince Pope Clement V of the orthodoxy of the controversial theologian, Provençal Franciscan Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, and of the legitimacy of the doctrine of the *usus pauper*. After the death of Clement V, and during the pontificate of John XXII, the ideas and work of Giovanni Olivi, which had been spread widely and quickly in Provence and Italy, attracted once more the attention of the Inquisition. After the trial, Olivi’s body was exhumed and burnt, his tomb destroyed, and his followers prosecuted; four friars refused to recant their ideas on *usus pauper*, and to submit to the pope; they were burnt at stake in 1218. Many of their lay followers in Provence met the same destiny. By then, Ubertino seems to have been induced (or allowed?) to leave the Franciscan Order and the Curia, to become a Benedictine monk, and retire with a safe-conduct to the abbacy of Gembloux, but he might have never made it there. We find him again at the papal curia in 1322 where he is protagonist of a new dispute on apostolic poverty. In 1325 a trail for heresy is launched against him, but he finds a way to escape the arrest, probably

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2 A dispute on the Franciscan Rule was held before and during the Council of Vienne. For the first time two “parties” – then called Spirituals and Conventuals – oppose one another in a public and dialectical confrontation, in front of the papal legates. On this subject see R. MANSELLI, *Spirituali e beghini di Provenza* (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1959); and D. BURR, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).


seeking protection at the Imperial Court. On April 18 1328, Ubertino is apparently in Rome, where he delivers a speech against the pope in the presence of the emperor Louis of Bavaria, on the occasion of the election of the anti-pope Pietro Corvario. Thereafter his traces are lost.⁵

Dante mentions Ubertino explicitly in *Paradiso* 12, a canto probably written during the pontificate of John XXII, around the years 1317-1318. Here we are in the Heaven of the Sun, the heaven in which the poet attempts to recompose in harmonic unity, through the rhetorical device of chiasmus, the ideological differences that had divided on earth the characters whom the pilgrim meets. This is the canto of wisdom in which apparently all contradictions are resolved, and it is on this occasion that he mentions Ubertino. A contraction that is not resolved is the internal struggle that was tearing apart the Franciscan Order on the issue of poverty, of the Rule, and of the obedience due to the pope. To this fight Dante proposes no solutions, and in fact underscores it by having St. Bonaventure (former minister general of the Order) say that only a few friars follow the Rule; but he numbers neither Ubertino da Casale nor Matteo d’Acquasparta among them. This is the passage:

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‘Ben dico, chi cercasse a foglio a foglio
nostro volume, ancor troveria carta
u’ leggerebbe ‘I’ mi sono quel ch’i’ soglio;
ma non fia da Casal né d’Acquasparta,
là onde vegnon tali a la scrittura,
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ch’uno la fugge e altro la coarta.
Io son la vita di Bonaventura.’” (Par. 12.121-127)

I do admit that, if one were to search our volume leaf by leaf, he might still read one page with, ‘I am as I always was’; but those of Acquasparta or Casale who read our Rule are either given to escaping it or making it too strict...

Ubertino and Matteo are here chosen to represent two antithetical approaches to the Rule. Whether or not representative of the two striving factions of the Spirituals and the Conventuals, Dante’s Bonaventure shows his loathing for both (Casal/Acquasparta). Bonaventure thus repudiates Ubertino as legitimate follower of the Rule of St. Francis, implying that his attitude towards the Rule constitutes a deflection from its genuine sense. Dante here resorts, interestingly enough, to another chiasmus. If this interpretation is correct (Casal/Acquasparta: fugge/coarta), Bonaventure accuses Ubertino of coercing the Rule (coarta), and Matteo of fleeing it. According to another interpretation, coarta should be instead linked to Matteo d’Acquasparta, while fugge is connected to Ubertino. But

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6 D. ALIGHIERI, in the translation of A. MANDELBAUM (ed.), The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. A Verse Translation, (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1980-1982). The Italian text of the Commedia is that of G. PETROCCHI, La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1966-67). Mandelbaum, surprisingly, does not preserve in his translation the original order Casale/Acquasparta, thus breaking the chiasmus with the couple fugge/coarta, a rhetorical device that in these cantos plays a fundamental role. In all quotations from now on the use of italics is mine, unless otherwise specified.

7 See V.S. BENFELL III, “Dante, Peter of John Olivi, and the Franciscan Apocalypse,” in S. CASCIANI (ed.), Dante and the Franciscans (Brill: Leiden-Boston, 2006): 9-50. Benfell explains that, as an hypothesis, “it is possible to read ‘fugge’ as referring to Ubertino, who was criticized by some Franciscan leaders for ‘fleeing’ the rule by first entering the service of his patron, Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, and then by becoming a Benedictine in 1317 when he feared that were he to return to the Franciscan his life would be in danger. Matthew of Acquasparta would be then understood as “restricting” the rule by limiting its requirements of poverty to a simple lack of ownership without further including usus pauper.” A propos it is interesting to read how Olivi describes the diverse exegetical approaches to written texts: “Sciendum [est] quod sicut significatio unius dictionis sumitur aliquando large et aliquando stricte et proprie, et sicut manum vel vestem aliquando coartamus et aliando in totam suam quantitatem explicamus, et aliquando quasi ultra proportionem sui status excessive extendimus, sic scripturas sacras et earum figuras aliquando coartamus a suo pleno sensu et aliquando ultra exigentiam litteralis proprietatis quasi extendimus, non quidem false sed propeter vim speciale et variam quam in se habent” (LSA, Notabile 9). There are no published editions of Olivi’s commentary. I was able to consult a manuscript of c. 1350 in Rome’s Biblioteca Angelica: P. DI GIOVANNI OLIVI, Lectura Super Apocalypsim. Ms. 382. Alberto Forni has made available on his website (http://www.danteolivi.com) Paolo Vian’s transcription of manuscript 713 of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (c. 1300-1320). The Inquisitors of the curia used this copy during the trial against Olivi.
textual evidence, such as the frequency of Ubertino’s use of the verb *artare* and *coartare* connected to the Rule, both in the *Arbor Vitae* and in the pamphlets produced during the *magna disceptatio*, suggests that the chiastic interpretation is most likely correct. Thus, the meaning of St. Bonaventure’s speech is that Ubertino restricted the Rule, while Matteo fled it.

St. Bonaventure’s disapproval of Ubertino has been largely assumed to be an unmistakable sign of Dante’s ideological rejection of the friar, despite the fact that many had noticed Dante’s “human sympathy” for the friar. Under the influence of an authoritative historian like Raoul Manselli, scholars have essentially assimilated Dante’s ideology with that of his fictional character, St. Bonaventure. Manselli summarized and illustrated his belief in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*.

Si avrebbe allora la condanna e della comunità e degli spirituali da parte di Dante, che sarebbe favorevole a quanti, ormai pochi, si mantenevano fedeli alla linea di Bonaventura. […] È allora questo estremismo e radicalismo che Dante condanna in nome della più pura e severa tradizione francescana, che non è quella certo della comunità, ma di quanti, come l’Olivi, continuavano le direttive di s. Bonaventura. È il lassismo come il radicalismo ribelle, che il poeta condanna. 

Dante condemns both the Community and the Spirituals, and he is faithful to those few who were still faithful to Bonaventure. […] It is extremism and radicalism that Dante condemns in the name of the most pure and severe Franciscan tradition, which is not that of the Community, but that of those, like Olivi, who continued along the lines indicated by St. Bonaventure. It is relaxation, as well as the rebellious radicalism, that the poet condemns.

Given that Ubertino is one of those “extreme” and “radical” friars that St. Bonaventure *condemns*, Manselli argues that the poet could not have endorsed his ideological vision (implying that a poet such as Dante must be orthodox). Of course, extremism and radicalism *per se* constitute no obstacle for the poet, as Charles Davis elsewhere reminds us; for example, Dante also “put in the mouth of

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8 The definition can be found in *U. Bosco*, *Canti Xi-XII*, in *U. Bosco, G. Reggio* (ed.), *La Divina Commedia. Paradiso*, (Firenze: Garzanti, 1980). Bosco talks about Dante’s “simpatia sul piano umano” with respect with Ubertino, p. 178.

Bonaventura, despite the fact that he was the inflexible curber of heterodox tendencies in his order,” the famous praise for Joachim of Flora, “…il calavrese abate Giovacchino / di spirito profetico dotato” (Par. 12.140-141). Joachim of Flora had seen the 1215 Council of Lyon condemn his notion of Trinity as heretical; his was a vision that informed a whole tradition of historical interpretation of the *Apocalypse* that was subsequently deemed dangerous and unorthodox, even though very popular. Davis notes that, “this commendation [of Joachim], no less than Aquinas’s eulogy of his opponent Siger of Brabant, has […] caused perplexity among the readers of Dante.”

This *perplexity* is rooted in the fact that Dante’s characters, including Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, are not *strictu sensu* historical, but fictional. Therefore, Dante is able to create literary short-circuits between our idea of determined characters, and the poetical rendering of them. With Ubertino, Dante performs the same operation, and seems to purposely design a literary paradox: on the one hand, he condemns the friar by the mouth of St. Bonaventure; on the other hand, he cites some of the most crucial passages of the *Arbor Vitae*. In so doing, Dante creates a gap between the fictional character, as mentioned by St. Bonaventure, and the historical and literary source that he cites. These quotations, not new but often forgotten, I am now going to list briefly.

The first quotation refers to the apocalyptic role of St. Francis and St. Dominic. This is an important passage in the *Arbor Vitae*, for it serves to distance the *Arbor Vitae* from Giovanni Olivi’s commentary on the *Apocalypse*, which Ubertino used as a guideline. Ubertino says that

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11 “Calabrian Abbot Joachim, who had the gift of the prophetic spirit.”

12 It is interesting to note, en passant, that John of Parma, minister general before Bonaventure, had to resign because of Joachist tendencies, and Bonaventure himself, once elected, had him prosecuted and punished.


Inter quos in typo Helie et Enoch Franciscus et Dominicus singulariter claruerunt, quorum primus seraphico calculo purgatus et ardore celico inflammatus totum mundum incidere videbatur. Secundus vero ut cherub extentus et protegens lumine sapientie clarus et verbo predicationis fecundus super mundi tenebras clarius radiavit.” (V, III, 421b)

In the figure of Elijah and Enoch, Francis and Dominic in a special way would shine; of which the first, cleansed with seraphim-like carbon, and inflamed with heavenly ardor, [in turn] inflamed the whole world; whereas the second, standing and protecting like a cherubim, bright with the light of wisdom, and fecund with the word of preaching, would shine even brighter on the darkness of the world.

Dante condenses the passage into one effective tercet:

“L’un fu tutto serafico in ardore;
 l’altro per sapientia in terra fue
di cherubica luce uno splendore.” (Par. 11.37-39)

One was all seraphic in his ardor;
the other, for his wisdom, had possessed
the splendor of cherubic light on earth.

Dante resorts to Ubertino again a few lines later: “Si che, dove Maria rimase giuso / ella [Povertà] con Cristo pianse in su la croce,” (Par. 11.71-72), “…when Mary stayed below, [Poverty] suffered with Christ upon the cross.”

As Chiavacci Leonardi comments “the comparison with Maria can be found only in Ubertino’s Arbor Vitae (V 3).”15 A third line taken from Ubertino follows soon afterwards: “…his limbs bore for two years,” “…che le sue membra due anni portarno” (Par. 12.108), which resembles closely Ubertino’s “quas biennio suo sacro corpore portavit.” (AV, V, 434b)

These quotations show that Dante had the Arbor Vitae opened on his desk while writing at least the cantos of the Heaven of the Sun. I would add to this list a verbal concord that again connects Dante to the friar, although not as specifically. I am referring to the use of the word sigillo, ‘seal,’ so crucial in Dante’s narrative of St. Francis.

Umberto Cosmo hinted already at the possibility that Dante might have taken the “final seal” from a passage of the fifth book of the *Arbor Vitae* when Ubertino uses the verb *sigillare*, “to seal,” although in a way that is only vaguely related to the stigmata. St. Bonaventure in the *Legenda Maior* talks about “signacula per modum sigilli corpori eius,” or, “signs impressed in his body like seals” (12.12). However, while Bonaventure seems to provide a physical description (*per modum*), Ubertino emphasizes, in the third book of the *Arbor Vitae*, the authorizing significance of the stigmata, by underlining St. Francis’ apocalyptic role in the content of a discussion over the Rule. Ubertino stresses openly that the stigmata are connected to the problem of authorizing the Rule and life of St. Francis. He explains that St. Francis devised his Rule according to a six-fold partition scheme taken from the Creation (*correspondeunt senarie productioni mundialis machine*). The first three days relate to structural subdivisions, the next three to the creation of what Ubertino calls “ornaments.” In the same way, Francis first gave to his brethren, through the Rule, the three precepts of the vow, and then three *consilia* as ornament:

In tribus primis vir perfectus crucifigitur mundo. In tribus sequentibus conformis efficitur Iesu Christo, ut quasi sex alis seraphicis tribus primis, quasi sinistris, a mundialibus elevatur, et tribus ultimis, quasi dextris, in divina feratur digne. Pro indehuc pauperculo Francisco qui perfectionem evangelii perfecte servavit et docuit apparens Christus in seraphica forma stigmata piissime passionis sue passionatus Christus tamquam sigillum signatum et appropriatum impressit. (AV, III, 230b)

In the first three, the perfect man crucifies himself to the world. In the next three he becomes similar to Christ, almost as if these were the six wings of a Seraphim. The first three—like the left ones—elevate [the man] from earthly things, the last three—the right ones—lead him worthy to the divine things. Therefore, the suffering Christ, appearing in form of a seraphim, gave to Francis—who perfectly preserved and taught the perfection of the Gospel—the stigmata of his most devote suffering, *like a seal* [*tamquam sigillum*] signed and appropriated.
It is very difficult to decide whether Dante had in mind a precise reference when writing about the episode of the stigmata (Par. 11.106-108). But we know for sure, as we already noticed, that the last line of the tercet (108) is an overt and literal quotation from the Arbor Vitae. This circumstance of course increases the chances that Dante was using this source for the whole tercet. Still, we cannot establish for sure to what degree Ubertino contributed to Dante’s invention of the “ultimo sigillo,” the “final seal.” Bonaventure describes the episode of the stigmata and the vision, which had then occurred to the Saint, as a vision of a “Seraph with six wings,” “Seraphim unum sex alas habentem.” Bonaventure says that “between the wings [of the Seraph] appeared the image of a crucified man,” “apparuit inter alas effigies hominis crucifixi.”¹⁶ In the Itinerarium, St. Bonaventure equally talks about “the vision of the winged Seraphim in the form of the Crucified.”¹⁷ Ubertino never talks about a Seraph with a cross, but he makes a constant effort to reverse the traditional description imposed by St. Bonaventure. The difference might look imperceptible, but it is nonetheless eloquent. According to Ubertino, St. Francis did not see a Seraph, but rather Christ in the form of a Seraph. The founder of the Franciscan order witnessed “the apparition of the beloved Jesus, in the form of a Seraph,” “apparitio dilecti Iesu crucifixi in specie Seraph” (AV, IV, 323a). In the aforementioned quotation, Ubertino again avers explicitly that “Christus tamquam sigillum signatum et appropriatum impressit”, that Christ impressed the stigmata like a seal on the body of the Saint, thus approving his Rule and life, which in its explicitness is extraordinarily similar to Dante’s remark that St. Francis “received the final seal from Christ.” Furthermore, Ubertino’s wording, *tamquam sigillum, tribus ultimis* (as referred to the *last three* wings of the Seraph those that

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¹⁷ **DOCTORIS SERAPHICI S. BONAVENTURAE, Opera omnia edita studio et cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura ad plurimos codices mss. emendata, anecdotis aucta, prolegomenis scholiis notisque illustrata, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), 1882-1902, 10 voll., V (1891): 295-313. “…de visione scilicet Seraph alati ad instar Crucifixi” (*Prolegos*, 2).
made the Saint reach divine heights) suggests a resemblance with Dante’s *ultimo sigillo*. Although not conclusive, the coincidence confirms our opinion that Ubertino played a role in Dante’s invention of the “final seal.”

Once established that Ubertino had been an important source for Dante in the making of these cantos, another problem arises. How could we explain the trenchant judgment of *Paradiso* 12.124 on the friar (*non fia da Casal…*)? How can Ubertino be important for Dante when St. Bonaventure so explicitly dismisses him? Recently, the short circuit of Dante’s appropriation and Dante’s simultaneous apparent rejection of Ubertino has been expressed in clear terms. Niccolò Mineo described the conundrum of *Paradiso* 12 as “the problem of what appears to be a *discordance* between [Dante’s] adherence to the qualifying points of Ubertino, and his condemnation.”

The solution to “the problem of discordance,” if we are to anticipate not so much our conclusions as a methodological conviction, is to be found at the level of literary exegesis. Attributing the words of St. Bonaventure’s persona to Dante-author is a methodological error. No author is ideologically committed to his/her characters’ words, or to the ideology of his/her literary work. The ideology of, say, a political treatise coincides *tout court* with that of the author because its final direction, its final end, is that of conveying one’s ideology; whereas the ratio of fictional or poetical work is aesthetical, or put more simply, self-referential. As Frye suggested, being the literary verbal structures not “assertive” but “imaginative,” they work only in one direction, *centripetally*. Thus

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19 N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (New York: Atheneum, 1966). “In descriptive or assertive writing the *final direction is outward*. Here the verbal structure is intended to represent things external to it, and it is valued in terms of the accuracy with which it does represent them. Correspondence between phenomenon and verbal sign is truth; lack of it is falsehood. […] In all literary verbal structure the *final direction is inward*. In literature the standards of outward meaning are secondary, for literary works do not pretend to describe or assert, and hence are not true, not false. […] Literary meaning may best be described, perhaps, as *hypothetical* and a hypothetical or assumed relation to the external word is part of what is usually meant by “imaginative,” p. 74.
Dante’s Bonaventure, although we call him historical—to distinguish him from mythological characters, such as Minos—is not “historical,” for it does not provide historical information, and does not represent the real Bonaventure. The very context of the Heaven of the Sun, in which Dante depicts an irenic and inclusive overcoming of ideologically irreducible differences, is in itself “imaginative,” “hypothetical” rather than historical. Here the reality-principle is completely subordinated to the pleasure-principle. From this perspective, St. Bonaventure’s condemnation of Ubertino is not incompatible with Dante’s endorsement of Ubertino’s unorthodox ideas, but scholars who have taken for granted Dante’s commitment to the reality-principle, fell into the intentional fallacy of assuming one-to-one correspondences between text and context; therefore they were dismayed at a paradox that is as illogical in the real world as it is perfectly logical in the virtual semiotic cosmology of the Commedia, and especially in the Heaven of the Sun.

As a corollary we must also notice that a character is but a small wheel of a big mechanism, and it is functional to the process of “theologizing” undertaken by the author. Teodolinda Barolini said that, “Our tendency has been to listen to what Dante says, accepting it as true […] rather than looking at, and learning from, the gap that exists between what he says and what he has actually wrought.” In the Heaven of the Sun, Dante shapes his own “theology,” and in the process of telling his heavenly vision, to build his poetical architecture, he equally employs St. Bonaventure and Ubertino da Casale. But if we look at these cantos from a narrative angle, Bonaventure occupies completely the stage with his name and fame; Ubertino shares but a line with another friar. Also Ubertino does not speak (but he is spoken of), and he is accused of having swayed from the Rule. He who had accused the leaders of the Community, in front of the pope, to sway from the Rule, is now accused of the same charges from a former leader of the Order. However, once we

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detheologize this narrative, at the level of semiotic, linguistic, and even ideological propositions, Ubertino stands next to St. Bonaventure and occupies the same space, if not more.

The “problem of discordance” went unacknowledged because the scholars who have worked on the set of issues around Franciscanism—primarily historians—have been treating the Divine Comedy as a theological text, not as a literary text. Writing before the various clarifications as to the anomalous nature of Dante’s textuality that were developed through the work of Auerbach, Singleton, Hollander, and Barolini, they were not equipped to explain apparently ideological contradictions. An example is Raoul Manselli, a word-class scholar in many respects, a great connoisseur of Franciscan sources, who however looked at the Divine Comedy with the eyes of a pure historian. His contribution to Franciscan literature was incredibly influential, but he worked on the Divine Comedy in terms of mere ideology rather than its aesthetics and diegesis. Of course, historicizing is fundamental, as Barolini has recently argued, and this dissertation will make good on the current challenge of Dante studies: to historicize in a context where we understand that, for instance, Dante’s St. Francis is a literary, imaginative and “hypothetical” character, not a historical one. For example, when Dante’s canto on St. Francis—Paradiso 11—is included in the Fonti Francescane (in the section that gathers the biographies of the Saint), one wonders whether the curators have considered the specificity of this literary text.

I will now examine how Dante scholars have been trying to overcome this “problem of discordance” outlined above.

21 T. BAROLINI, “Only Historicize: History, Material, Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies,” Dante Studies, 127 (2009): 37-53. Barolini stressed the importance of dismantling “the high-culture peak on which the Commedia has long stood, grand but isolated from the very history on which it so ceaselessly ruminates,” p. 48.

2. Who has the “Gift of the Prophetic Spirit?”

During the first part of the twentieth century, scholars were more inclined to acknowledge Dante’s ideological acceptance of Ubertino, in terms of a Joachist vision of history and society. The friar and the poet had in common a vehement disdain of greed and avarice: vices that in their opinion affected prelates and religious people, and ultimately caused the decline of the Order and of the whole Church. The lively description both Ubertino and Dante offered of the deterioration of these institutions, and (in the case of the poet) of the whole society, fitted well, in fact, into the frame of Joachim’s complicated philosophy of history. Joachim, we remember, is the 12th century abbot who, in the words of Dante’s St. Bonaventure’s, “had the gift of the prophetic spirit” (Par. 12.141).

Joachim had formulated a tripartite scheme of the world history, associating each age of the world with a figure of the Trinity. This model ran parallel to a seven-fold partition of Church history, on top of which Joachim also designed a binary scheme of biblical exegesis (which he called concordia), that distinguishes the time before Christ and the time after Christ. The ratio of concordia is that of a symmetrical description of the events of the Old and New Testament. The events of the Old Testament are connected with those of Jesus (and the following of Jesus) as told in the New Testament or obscurely described in the Book of Revelation. The history of the Church that follows Jesus’ preaching, as we said, is subdivided into seven periods. Joachim of Flora thought himself to be living in the fifth period, one of relaxation and hypocrisy, which was followed by a time of fight and renovation, the sixth period.23

Both Dante and Ubertino, whether they had direct access or not to Joachim of Flora’s theological materials, were convinced—or hoping—that they were living in this last period of the Church, the sixth one, which runs parallel to the third age of the World, that of the Holy Spirit.

The power of Joachim’s vision of history was such that scholars naturally pulled Ubertino and Dante within his sphere, although little was really known about the relationship between Dante and Ubertino themselves or of either of them with Joachim of Flora. Salimbene da Parma says in his chronicles that certain manuscripts containing the works of Joachim were brought to Pisa in 1241 by a monk fleeing from the abbacy of Flora; the monk was afraid that Frederick II, whom the founder of his abbey had identified as the Antichrist, would destroy the abbacy and the books. We know that Joachim had a great many followers in the Franciscan order, even among the leaders. But the reception of Joachim’s book is more complicated than this anecdote.

Joachist apocryphal texts were very common, and often misinterpreted Joachim’s real intentions, such as in the case of Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino’s Liber Introductorius. Others, such as Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, had read Joachim with more attention and critical suspicion than Gerardo. Olivi reviews Joachim’s ideas in his important, still unpublished, Lectura Super Apocalipsim, which he finished in 1298 just before dying.

Raoul Manselli in the Sixties attempted a general assessment of Olivi’s Joachism, thence making our reception of Ubertino’s and Dante’s Joachism more cautious. Before him, as I said, Dante and Ubertino were more easily numbered amongst the admirers of Joachim of Flora. A general account of the studies on Ubertino and Dante before Manselli would probably go under the rubric “followers of Joachim of Flora,” with few exceptions.
The first modern study on Ubertino could be considered that of Franz Ehrle, who published seminal works on Ubertino in the late 1880s.\textsuperscript{24} Father Ehrle made available to scholars the “documents produced by both parties before Pope Clemens V,”\textsuperscript{25} during the \textit{magna disceptatio} in Avignon. He published Ubertino’s literary production related to the years 1309-1311, and the responses of the leaders of the Community (Raymond of Fronsac and Bonagratia of Bergamo). The \textit{corpus} of documents he collected describes the attempt of Ubertino to chastise the relaxation of the Community in front of the Pope; to restate the spiritual—although not legally binding—value of St. Francis’ testament; to reassert the doctrine of \textit{usus pauper} as a fundamental part of the vow of poverty; to affirm Olivi’s orthodoxy with respect with the \textit{usus pauper} and his eschatological views.\textsuperscript{26} Ehrle was not interested in investigating the connections between Ubertino’s pamphlets in Avignon and the \textit{Arbor Vitae}, where many of these ideas were expressed in much stronger terms, without the diplomatic caution Ubertino showed in Avignon. In these circumstances the papal legates and the leaders of the Community seemed unaware of Ubertino’s opinions as expressed in the \textit{Arbor Vitae}; namely, that Boniface VIII and Benedict IX were the mystical Antichrist, and that the papal throne was still vacant. Had they known what he had said then, they would not have missed the chance to attack him. Also, Ubertino, in Avignon, used Nicholas III’s bull, \textit{Exiit qui seminat}, to capture the


\textsuperscript{25} Ms. 4350, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale): “acta pro utraque parte producta coram felicis recordationis domino Clemente papa.”

\textsuperscript{26} A detailed account of these documents could also be found in the precious volume of \textbf{F. TOCCO}, \textit{Studii Francescani} (Napoli: Francesco Perrella, 1909). See especially pp. 353-405.
favor of the papal legates, while in the *Arbor Vitae* he expressed harsh judgment on Nicholas and his bull, which he considered like “a stone tied to the waist of the Order.”

The attitude of Ubertino’s opponents in Avignon seems to suggest that the *Arbor Vitae* had a restricted readership, and was available only in controlled circles of friends. The book was certainly deemed dangerous, considering that the bishop of Reims Jean Gerson, one century after the death of the friar, still warned his interlocutors “that [Ubertino] should be read with prudence or avoided altogether.” The 1381 inventory of the Fondo Antico of the Biblioteca di San Francesco in Assisi avoids mention of a codex of the book, now manuscript 328, that was almost certainly there at that time, and whose time of composition, according to paleographical and codicological scrutiny, has been determined to be circa 1350. The fifth book in particular was considered dangerous. In the same manuscript, at the end of the fourth part, the scribe notes that, “I was not able to find the fifth book.” However, the book is actually there, after a few blank pages, fully transcribed (probably by a seemingly later, more humanistic hand, as if added after censorship had been lifted). In any case, the question of how Dante was able to get his hands on this book, and especially the fifth volume, is fascinating, and it seems to suggest—but not prove—that the poet was familiar with a social milieu of radical Italian Franciscans, whose readings were, to say the least, controversial. So controversial that “historians had hitherto [up to the end of nineteenth century] almost ignored it.”

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27 “Ac si lapis molaris fuisset appensus ad ventrem ordinis. Sic postea operibus relaxationis est quasi in maris profundum precipite se immersit.” (*AV*, V, 432a).


explain why Franz Ehrle does not touch upon the connections between the *Arbor Vitae* and Ubertino’s later production.

However, Franz Ehrle’s work has the merit of having attracted the attention of scholars to the Italian friar. The renewed attention on Ubertino bore fruit in the field of Dante studies. In his massive 1897 monographic volume on the poet, Franz Xaver Kraus sought for links between Ubertino and the *Divine Comedy* and he set off nine general points of convergence. According to Kraus, Dante and Ubertino agree in the following:

1) In the representation of the general decline of the Christian world;
2) In the fact that they trace the origin of decline back to desire (Avarice, Cupidity, Dante’s She-Wolf);
3) In condemning the abdication of Celestine V;
4) In their judgment on Boniface VIII;
5) In the contraposition of the triumph of the Babylonian Harlot to that of the true Church;
6) In the distinction, proper of the Spirituals, between *ecclesia carnalis* and *ecclesia spiritualis*;
7) In identifying the Harlot with the Church usurped by the Pope (Boniface VIII);
8) In representing the chastisement of the Harlot by the King of France;
9) In the awaiting of the *Veltro*, a spiritual personality.

Kraus subsequently underlines that Dante was deeply and vividly struck by Ubertino’s writing, but he was not “overwhelmed” by it; instead, he maintained a great degree of freedom, particularly with respect to the “unfair and exaggerated opinion of Ubertino on Benedict IX (whom Dante never mentions!), and the many eccentricities and overabundant exuberance one finds in the *Arbor Vitae.*”

Kraus, as Alberto Forni pointed out, “did not know about Olivi and he quotes [Olivi’s] Lectura super Apocalipsim through the *Arbor Vitae.*” This Forni says to implement his agenda


centered on Olivi and Dante, but it is nonetheless an important point, because the fact that Kraus was ignorant of Olivi, made him connect the Ubertino more strongly with Joachim of Flora. This association became even more explicit a few years later, when John Huck presented a study on Ubertino in which he emphasizes the Joachist ideological background shared by both Ubertino and Dante. In the attempt to achieve a general explanation of thirteenth century eschatology, he tried, in Gian Luca Potestà’s words, “to stress in a suggestive although superficial way, the boundaries between Joachim, Dante and Ubertino.”

Contrary to Kraus though, Huck believed that Dante’s *Veltro* was to be a political personality rather than a spiritual one; also he underlined the fact that Ubertino, while theological in the extreme, was rather conservative from the political point of view, which in fact constitutes a point of divergence between Ubertino and Dante.

Distinctions between the two were instead proposed by Ernest Knoth. Knoth first noticed that the extent and importance of Giovanni Olivi’s *Lectura Super Apocalipsim* in the fifth book of Ubertino’s *Arbor Vitae* was so vast that the question of Ubertino’s Joachism should have been posed in completely different terms, and one should actually wonder whether Ubertino was Joachist at all.

Knoth himself does not give an answer to this question but he paves the way for the future conjecture on Ubertino’s Joachism, which at this point became largely dependent of the issue of Olivi’s Joachism, and consequently affected the debate around Dante’s Joachism. Little by little it was becoming apparent that although an eschatological discourse of a certain kind was common in the Franciscan environment, nonetheless that did not prove a secure genealogy from Joachim. The same was true for Dante. To what point, for example, does the poet share his character’s opinion that Joachim “had the gift of the prophetic spirit” and through which sources did he have access to

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33 G. L. POTESTÀ, “Un secolo di studi” “...a ricercare, in maniera suggestiva ma necessariamente superficiale, il legame tra Gioacchino, Dante e Ubertino,” p. 222.

Joachim’s ideas? Knoth, in brief, set the basis for future scholars to reduce the importance of Joachim of Flora’s influence on Ubertino, showing Ubertino’s extensive use of Olivi’s Lectura, and St. Bonaventure’s Lignum Vitae.

During the same time, in Italy, Umberto Cosmo was contributing to our knowledge of the relationship between Dante and Ubertino, pointing to the quotations and textual borrowings aforementioned; but he also illustrated Ubertino’s extensive use of the anonymous Sacrum Commertium Sancti Francisci cum Domina Paupertate, rendering an image of the friar as an eclectic and all-inclusive author, able to smoothly blend together many and different sources to his purposes. On the other hand, Felice Tocco included a translation of Olivi’s chapter seventeen of the Lectura Super Apocalipsim in his commentary on canto 32 of Purgatorio, suggesting a special ideological affinity between Dante and Olivi that for the first time bypassed, ipso facto, Ubertino. Although the positions of Umberto Cosmo and Felice Tocco are not incompatible, the former suggesting a connection with Ubertino, the latter with Olivi, they represent a divergence at an embryonic stage that would in the following years become larger. Tocco’s direction would eventually prevail with Manselli, and the role attributed to Ubertino as Dante’s literary source will diminish progressively. But at this time, both the friars still share a generic space delimited by the predominating ideology of Joachim of Flora.


37 Ubertino probably also reproduced passages from the sermons of St. Bernard and from liturgical handbooks, as well as from authors such as St. Augustine, the Pseudo-Dionysus and Richard of St. Victor; but a modern edition, let alone a critical edition of the Arbor Vitae, has never been done.

38 F. TOCCO, Il canto XXXII del Purgatorio (Firenze: Sansoni, 1902).
Up until the studies of Manselli, the Joachist idea of the coming of a time of renovation, that of the Holy Spirit, which Salimbene and his contemporaries believed would start in 1260, was considered a shared acquisition of Olivi, Ubertino, and many others. Therefore, despite Tocco’s indication that Dante could have derived some of his eschatological stances from Olivi, rather than from Joachim, some scholars reaffirmed Dante’s fundamental Joachism, to the detriment of Ubertino and Olivi. Pietrobono, for example, established an explicit parallel between Dante and the heretic Franciscan friar Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino. Gerardo, a fervent Joachist and a Franciscan, was the author of the shocking *Liber Introductorius*, which caused great scandal in Paris in 1255. The book provoked the protests of the Parisian Masters, and caused the subsequent resignation of the minister general Giovanni da Parma, whose sympathy for Joachim was well-known. In his stead, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio was appointed the head of the Order, and remained minister general up until his death in 1274. According to Gerardo’s scheme, the Gospel was to be replaced by the new age of the Spirit, and an era of full spiritual understanding that would make the Sacred Scripture unnecessary. Luigi Pietrobono associates this concept with Dante in the attempt to make him the evangelist of the new era: “The *Divine Comedy* is […] the Bible of Italians.”

In response to this radical position Buonaiuti tried to reduce the influence of Joachim of Flora on Dante, and reevaluated the role played by the Franciscans for Dante. Buonaiuti ultimately refutes Pietrobono and his extreme Joachism. However, the strongest attempt to associate Joachim with Dante was that of Leone Tondelli, who suggested new evidences in favor of the poet’s direct knowledge of the abbot of Flora. On the wave of enthusiasm for his exceptional discovery of a manuscript of Joachim’s *Liber Figurarum*—hidden in the library of the seminary of Reggio Emilia—

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Tondelli suggested that the very manuscript he had found had been likely in Dante’s hand, and thought that some of the poet’s heavenly geometries and poetic inventions of his *Paradiso* had been taken therefrom. Marjorie Reeves also supported the notion that the image of the M/Eagle in the Heaven of Jupiter and the image of the Tree-Circle in *Paradiso* show a combination of features so unusual as to make Dante’s use of the Joachim’s figures “almost certain.”

Yet, some scholars objected strongly that Dante had been influenced to such degree by Joachim—let alone by Franciscan friars. Bruno Nardi rejected Pietrobono’s and Tondelli’s proposals with lively protests. But still unhappy with what he deemed an insufficient effort to rescale Dante’s Joachism, he also refutes any attempt to pull Dante within the range of Franciscan eschatology at all. In the same vein, Michele Barbi agreed that Dante had indeed taken much from the Bible, or in this case, from the *Book of Revelation*, but Dante bypassed the interpretative screen of more or less radical commentators. According to Barbi, Dante was reading directly from the Bible. Barbi also opposed the idea of Dante’s Joachism, and denies—according to Sergio Cristaldi, “with excessive intransigence”—that the poet had met either Ubertino or Olivi in Florence during the years of their lectureship. To summarize, on the one hand, Dante has been depicted as a follower of Joachim, and on the other hand, as a solitary intellectual who ground his poetical production on his sole inventiveness.


43 **B. NARDI**, *Pretese fonti della Divina Commedia*, in *Nuova Antologia*, 40 (1955): 383-398; –, *Dante profeta*, in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1942): 258-334. Nardi proposed a tripartition of Dante’s biographical and literary experience, pointing out a Cavalcanti-Guinizzelli phase, followed by a political phase, and then—in the last years of his life—a religious phase, which was not to be intended as a militant one, but more of a pious, devotional one.

44 **S. CRISTALDI**, *Dante di fronte al gioachimismo*, “…con eccessiva intransigenza,” p. 56.

45 **M. BARBI**, “Il Veltro, il DXV e il gioachimismo francescano...”
Manselli responded to these opinions by proposing a more balanced assessment of Dante’s ideology that attached greater attention to the role played by the Franciscans, thus retrieving some moderate positions of Tocco and Buonaiuti, but also supporting Barbi and Nardi. Manselli thought that Dante had in fact endorsed a certain kind of Franciscan-Joachist eschatological view, although he agreed with the opinions of Nardi, Barbi, and also Herbert Grundmann, who had “limited, if not excluded a direct influence of Joachim on Dante.”

But removing Dante from Joachim’s influence had, in Manselli’s view, a very precise raison d’être; that is, to prove the identification of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi as the exclusive ideological source for the poet. Manselli was as resolute in excluding Joachim of Flora from Dante’s list of sources as he comes to be later in excluding Ubertino da Casale; “to associate Dante and Olivi” was the key code of Manselli’s life work.

Actually, Manselli did indeed represent a turning point in Franciscan studies on the Divine Comedy. There is a time before Manselli, and a time after Manselli. Before Manselli, the whole dispute on Dante’s eschatological view was conducted within the frame of Joachism, in a positive or negative way, to confirm or to deny it. With Manselli and after Manselli, Olivi took Joachim’s place; the friar replaced the monk, and the role of Ubertino himself was drastically diminished. The merit of Manselli is that he freed Dante scholars from the binary dictated by the premise: for or against Joachim. Nonetheless he imposed a new, equally inescapable ideology, by affirming the overwhelming presence of Olivi. Manselli worked on Dante and the Franciscans for a period of almost three decades from the Fifties to the early Eighties (he died in 1984), and his contribution to the field could hardly be overlooked. With regard to the themes of Olivi’s apocalypticism and its

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47 S. Cristaldi, Dante di fronte al gioachinismo.
influence on Dante, we can trace three different steps in his long-term effort to prove his standing on the matter.

First, in his article on Olivi, published in 1955, Manselli emphasized the distance between the three main actors on the stage, “di Gioacchino da Fiore, dello Olivi, degli Spirituali.” He especially highlighted the distance between Olivi and Joachim of Flora. Manselli thought that Olivi distinguished himself from Joachim “particularly on the matter of the appropriation of one each of the three world ages to the persons of the Trinity.” But non-Italian scholars were suspicious of Manselli’s agenda on Olivi. Warren Lewis wrote that “Under the influence of Joachim of Flora, Olivi uses this standard exegetical tool [the doctrine of the three ages of the world] to gain a radical and positive historical understanding of the *Apocalypse,*” meaning that no matter how original Olivi was, he fully located himself within Joachim’s range, by fully accepting his partition of history. More authoritatively, Marjorie Reeves also refuted the opinion that Olivi was “innocent” of Joachism, for the Provençal friar also shared the idea that a new era of the Spirit would have soon started, and the synagogue of the carnal Church destroyed.

Manselli has argued that because Olivi, like Bonaventure, consciously disavowed Joachim’s Trinitarian doctrine as condemned by the Church, his conception of history was also cut loose from Joachim’s Trinitarian reading of it. I do not think this judgement is correct.

To these objections, Manselli replied that, “At the very core of Olivi’s ideology we do not find the Trinity, but Christ.” The whole debate hinged on the word *appropriatus,* a technicality

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50 *Ibidem*

51 M. Reeves, “The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages,” p. 196.

introduced by Joachim to describe his philosophy of history: there are three Ages of the world, that of the Father, that of the Son, and that of the Holy Spirit; every age of the world is *appropriatus* to a figure of the Trinity. According to Manselli, Reeves did not pay attention to the fact that the adjective *appropriatus*, in Joachim, indicates a precise and specific relation between one and each figure of the Trinity with an age of the world.

Whereas Olivi indicates only a relation *per quandam antonomasiam*. In other words, for the Calabrese abbot the third age is actually the age of the Holy Spirit, and it is really influenced by the action of the Third Person of the Trinity; while the Provençal friar just wanted to say that with the beginning of the sixth age [of the Church, i.e., the third age of the world] a spiritual age somehow begins.53

In fewer words, Olivi does not support the idea of an imminent age of the Spirit coming, but rather just a spiritual time. Edith Pásztor later proposed a mediation between these two standpoints. Olivi’s eschatological vision is “with no doubt Joachist,” but “Olivi derives from the peculiar characteristics that Joachim attributes to this new age some elements that allow him to emphasize the necessity of a spiritual renovation, […] which through poverty would make the image of Christ, given to the Church, revive.”54 However, Manselli’s attempt to introduce a larger gap between Olivi and Joachim was eventually successful, and on this ground he founded his commitment “to associate Dante and Olivi.”

53 *Ivi*, p. 49: “…è sfuggito alla studiosa inglese proprio il senso preciso dell’aggettivo *appropriatus*, che in Gioacchino da Fiore significa la relazione specifica e precisa esistente fra una persona della Trinità e l’epoca che le è propria, mentre in Olivi indica solo un rapporto *per quandam antonomasiam*; in altre parole, per l’abate calabrese la terza età è effettivamente l’età dello Spirito Santo e vi esercita realmente l’azione della terza Persona della Trinità, mentre il frate provenzale vuol solo dire che con l’inizio della sesta età incomincia un’epoca in qualche modo *spirituale*.”

According to Manselli, the only Joachist idea accepted by Dante was the notion of *ecclesia spiritualis*, as he explains in a dedicated article. But Dante could have endorsed this idea only upon a refusal of Joachim’s Trinitarian division of history, as we have mentioned earlier. This notion implied that the famous lines on “il calabrese abate Giovacchino, / di spirito profetico dotato” (*Par.* 12.140-141) could not be an argument for Dante’s sympathy for Joachim or his ideological stances. Guglielmo Gorni reminded us that the line is literally taken “from the antiphon of the vespers recited in the occasion of the holyday of the abbot, celebrated on May 29 in all the Florenses monasteries: ‘beatus Joachim, spiritu dotatus prophetico,’” but Manselli objected that, “Such expression is widely spread in the thirteenth century chronicles.” As for the “the pseudo-Joachist books, such the *Super Ieremiam* and *Super Isaiam* […] that identify the pope as the ‘princeps novorum phariseorum,’ as compared to *Inferno* 27.85 where we find a similar expression for Boniface VIII, ‘Lo principe de’ novi farisei,’” once more, Manselli stresses that verbal coincidences of this kind should simply be understood as a generic appropriation of vague wording circulating in the opaque “world of Joachist prophetism, and particularly of the Spirituals.”

In sum, Manselli thought that Olivi contributed to reshaping the Joachist notion of the third age of the Holy Spirit in a way that was eventually acceptable to Dante by limiting its heterodox

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tendencies. Olivi depicts a Christ-centered age of spiritual reformation, inaugurated by St. Francis. This constituted Olivi’s notion of *ecclesia spiritualis*, and within the larger frame of this concept he pulled together diverse issues: the notion of the poverty of Christ and the Apostles; the legal validity of St. Francis’ testament; the *usus pauper*; the eschatological identification of St. Francis with the Angel of the sixth seal; the reprimand against the papal Curia; the rebellion of the Spirituals against the Community; the disclosure of the prophecies contained in the Sacred Scriptures; and finally, the gift of full spiritual intelligence to the elects. Some of these ideas are not foreign to Dante, and in Manselli’s vision, became for the Florentine poet “the supreme inspiration of his art.” While it is clear that there is some ideological convergence between Dante and Olivi, Manselli’s final comment is interesting, for it belies a certain degree of scholarly discontent. Stirring from the ideological analysis he attempted in his essay, in the last but inconclusive note of the finale, Manselli reveals his awareness that the problem of Dante’s aesthetics is left untouched by ideological parallels. Still, he suggests no answer to the issue he raised.

3. Ubertino’s (Exuberant) Mediation

A few months after his work on the *ecclesia spiritualis*, Manselli wrote a second article, cited above, on Ubertino and Olivi, in which he developed conclusions that were only implicit in the previous essay. This represents the second step of his long-term verification of his ideas on Olivi. First he had widened the gap between Olivi and Joachim of Flora; now he makes Pietro di Giovanni Olivi stand out from the crowd of the vague “world of the Joachist prophetism,” and severs the ties between Olivi and his follower Ubertino—and, as a *corollario*, between Ubertino and Dante. There is no reference to the Florentine poet in the title of the essay; however, both the *incipit* and the *explicit*

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60 Irí, p. 128: “Ispirazione suprema della sua arte.”

61 R. Manselli, “Pietro di Giovanni Olivi ed Ubertino da Casale...”
of the article refer directly to Dante, as if a discourse on Olivi and Ubertino could have been carried on only between brackets, in the context of a more general stream of thought on Dante.

Manselli’s point is that Ubertino is unoriginal; therefore his influence on Dante is eventually denied. Nonetheless, in the opening statement of his article Manselli recognizes that some scholars before him had a different view on the subject: “Scholars have often times noticed Dante’s knowledge of Ubertino’s major work, the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu.*”62 Convinced, as he was, that the emphasis on Ubertino is prejudicial of our appreciation of Olivi as the ultimate ideological reference for Dante, Manselli thought that by attributing too much importance to Ubertino his predecessors gave way to a fundamental misunderstanding.

That which […] in my opinion has not been sufficiently pointed out is that, through Ubertino da Casale, Dante was connected with one of the highest and controversial personalities of the religious life of the end of thirteenth century: Pietro di Giovanni Olivi.63

In Manselli’s vision, the unspecified insertion “through Ubertino,” really means that Ubertino is but a neutral lens between Olivi and Dante: “Original and personal thoughts of Ubertino with respect to the history of the Church and the Franciscan Order simply do not exist.”64 Actually it is true that Ubertino, in the fifth book of the *Arbor Vitae*, copies, often literally, from Olivi’s *Lectura Super Apocalipsim*, but whenever he diverges from Olivi, he also proves to be aware of his deviation. For example, when he comes to the famous passage on St. Francis-Seraph and St. Dominic-Cherub (which Dante reproduces in *Paradiso* 11), his point comes forward so strikingly that Manselli has to admit that Ubertino “seems to express here personal opinions,” and “Olivi did not say such.”65

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62 Ivi, p. 95.

63 Ibidem.

64 Ivi, p. 109.

65 Ivi, pp. 110-111.
Olivi had in fact a different view on the matter. Commenting on the eleventh chapter of the *Apocalypse*, the friar first reports some opinions that identify the two appearing angels, *ad litteram*, with the prophets Elijah and Enoch. Then he draws a parallel between them and St. Peter and St. John, who represent respectively the *ecclesia militans* and the *ecclesia triumphans*—active and contemplative life. But Olivi also suggests that the two angels might possibly be two orders of preachers, *ordines predicantium*. Yet, as usual, he names no names. Interestingly enough though, he introduces the symmetric parallelism: *unus… alter…* that will be further developed by Ubertino and Dante.

Ubertino’s mediation was fundamental for Dante, for Ubertino made explicit and overt that which Olivi might only have elliptically suggested. Specifically, Ubertino 1) continues the formal parallelism initiated by Olivi, 2) mentions St. Francis and St. Dominic, and 3) enriches the passage with expressions such as *ardore, sapie, mundi, clarus, radiavit*, which eventually find their way into Dante’s version: “L’un fu tutto serafico in *ardore*; / l’altro per *sapience* in terra fue / di cherubica luce uno *splendore*” (Par. 11.37-39). It seems quite likely that Dante had taken this verse from Ubertino, not Olivi. Even Manselli concisely comments (in a footnote, an occurrence upon which Derrida

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67 *“According to Augustinus, Gregory, and Richard, these two witnesses are literally Helias and Enoch, and this is commonly believed, although they also may also represent two orders of preachers. Of which, one will be, with an external guidance, more subjected to sufferings, thence even John allegorically identifies him with Peter. The other will be more given to peace and contemplation, whence he is in the same place identified with John.”* “Secundum Augustinum et Gregorium et Ricardum, hii duo testes sunt ad litteram Helias et Enoch, et hoc communiter tenetur, quominus et per eos designetur duo ordines predicantium. Quorum unus magis erit exteriori regimini et passionibus mancipatus, unde et Iohannis [in his Gospel] ultimo allegorice designatur per Petrum […]. *Alter vero magis erit datus contemplationi et paci, unde et designatur ibidem per Ioannem*” (LSA, 484).

68 *“Inter quos in typo Helie et Enoch Franciscus et Dominicus singulariter clariuerunt, quorum primus seraphico calculo purgatus et *ardore* celico inflamatus totum mundum incedere videbatur. *Secundus vero ut cherub extensus et protegens lumen sapie clarus et verbo predicationis fecundus super mundi tenebras clarus radiavit*” (V, 3, 421b).
would blissfully build] that “these lines prove that Dante knew at least this part of the Arbor.”

However, Manselli draws no consequences from this acknowledgement. This example alone tells us something on how a particular aspect of the ideology of *ecclesia spiritualis* was included in the *Commedia*, through the fundamental mediation of Ubertino, who contributed to reshape Olivi’s positions. As a *corollario*, the identification of the two angels of the *Book of Revelation* with the founders of the mendicant orders become with Ubertino a sign of eschatological unity, which is promptly received in Dante’s narrative, where we eventually find them inextricably connected.

De l’un dirò, però che d’amendue  
si dice l’un pregando, qual ch’om prende,  
perch’ ad un fine fur l’opere sue. (*Par.* 11.40-42)

At the very ending of his essay, Manselli eventually discards Ubertino, and holds that “Dante recognized as his masters, Bonaventure and, *although without mentioning him*, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi.” Manselli’s opinion is that, “Ubertino must have appeared to Dante as a partisan […], overexcited, and stubborn supporter of the coercion of the Franciscan Rule” Paradoxically, on the one hand, Manselli dismisses Ubertino as a trivial and irrelevant mediator of Olivi’s thought (as if it is of no importance through which lens Olivi’s ideas came to Dante); and on the other hand, he dismisses him as too radical. In his effort to “associate Dante and Olivi,” Manselli forgot that Dante actually mentions and cites Ubertino. Besides ideological incongruities, it was difficult to explain how Dante could condemn Ubertino and simultaneously endorse Ubertino’s most radical points.

As we said, Mineo defined this conundrum as a “problem of discordance,” whose need for a solution raised at times a schizophrenic attitude toward the friar. Sometimes Ubertino is denied

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70 *Ivi*, p. 122.

71 *Ibidem*. 
altogether (Manselli, Forni), sometimes he is simultaneously acknowledged and denied (Mineo, Davis, Havely), but the denial takes the form of a psychological analysis rather than literary interpretation. Manselli’s description of Ubertino as overexcited, stubborn, and exaggerated, just follows the portrayal that Kraus offered seventy or so years earlier, of a bizarre friar whom Dante could not follow down the path of his exuberant eccentricities (such as the identification of a pope as the Antichrist). Mineo tried to overcome the “problem of discordance” that he first theorized, introducing the attribute of “pessimism” of the friar, which Dante, again, could not accept. Pasquini, who contributed to the field by setting off the similarities between Dante’s representation of Lady Poverty and Ubertino’s eroticization of Poverty, held that the poet could not agree to Ubertino’s ideological stances, not so much because of his ideology, but because “Dante has little to do with […] the aggressive and irritable Ubertino da Casale, who, although friend and admirer of Olivi, was not able to inherit his self-control.”

These notes have in common that they seem to be finalized toward a description of Ubertino’s character and moral attitude, rather than of his ideology and aesthetics. In fact, Ubertino in Avignon proved to be capable of a great deal of self-control and diplomacy. In any case, how does his irritability have anything to do with a discourse on Dante’s endorsement or refusal of the friar? Suffice here to recall that St. Peter himself, in Paradiso 27, seems to display a great deal of Ubertino’s eschatological impatience and irritability: “Se io mi trascoloro, / non ti meravigliar, ché, dicend’ io / vedrai trascolorar tutti costoro” (Par. 27.19-21). Should there be any difference between Ubertino and Olivi, I would not look for it in Ubertino’s temperament. And should there be any reason for Dante to dislike Ubertino, I would not look for it in his moral impulsiveness. As I will try

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72 E. PASQUINI, “S. Francesco e i frati minori in Dante,” in Francescanesimo in volgare, (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi per il medioevo): 145-158. “Dante dunque ha poco da spartire con l’altro grande Spirituale, l’insofferente e aggressivo Ubertino da Casale, il quale appunto pur essendo sodale e ammiratore di Olivi, non sa ereditarne l’autocontrollo.”
to show in the second chapter, there are points in which Ubertino distinguishes himself from his mentor Olivi, and precisely those that make him “extreme and radical.”

Even when and where it is possible to share Manselli’s opinion that, “Original and personal thoughts of Ubertino with respect to the history of the Church and the Franciscan Order simply do not exist,” it seems a hasty judgment to deny him a role in Dante’s definition of an aesthetics of the apocalypse. The lens through which we look at the world is as significant to our understanding of the world as the world itself. If Dante looked at Olivi through Ubertino, this is not of little importance, nor without consequences. Ubertino’s writing should be looked at more closely, precisely insofar as he mediates Olivi’s thought, and precisely inasmuch as it shows a higher degree of irritability. In fact, I believe there is more to Ubertino’s rewriting of Olivi’s Lectura than merely avoidance, as Manselli again holds, of Olivi’s “academic style.”

4. Pietro di Giovanni Olivi in Dante

Manselli went back to the influence of the Franciscan Spirituals on Dante in 1982. The conclusions reached then by the historian are no different from those exposed above, except that he dedicates a slightly longer section of the essay to Dante’s poem as a literary text, not just an ideological recipient, almost as if picking up precisely from where he had left off in 1965, when he hinted at Dante’s “supreme inspiration of his art.”

The answer to the question [the influence of the Spiritual Franciscans on Dante] does not come from textual comparisons, because we are convinced that certain kinds of verbal coincidences and almost-quotations are part of the common terminology of the ecclesiological disputes of that time (as for example the identification of the pope as the “prince of new Pharisees” or similar ones); rather [the answer to the question] comes from the ecclesiological conception that shows through Dante’s work

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as a whole, and that in the Divine Comedy finds its highest lyrical and oratorical manifestation, to use Benedetto Croce’s wording.\textsuperscript{75}

Manselli here confirms the traditional structure of his previous essays, and restates that it is not possible to determine a literary genealogy of Dante’s sources because the “verbal coincidences” between the Divine Comedy and Joachist, or pseudo-Joachist, literature are allegedly never unique, and are in fact largely common to the theological and ecclesiological debate of Dante’s time. But in this way, Manselli fails to be accurate in the aspect he is most interested in: to prove that the poet endorsed fully and exclusively Olivi’s ecclesiological and eschatological determinations. How could this be ascertained without the support of verbal coincidences? Manselli’s methodological warning to avoid relying on verbal coincidences is reasonable (especially if we look at what his followers did), but at times one has the feeling that Joachist footprints in Dante’s Divine Comedy, such as that which identifies the pope as the “Prince of the new Pharisees,” are ultimately dismissed not because they are common in eschatological literature, but because a higher degree of Joachism would undermine Manselli’s agenda to associate Dante and Olivi. The fact is that, if we look at the verbal coincidences, there is more Joachim of Flora than Olivi in the Divine Comedy (and even more Ubertino than Joachim). But these very distinctions make sense if we assume that Olivi was independent from Joachim, as Manselli struggled to prove. In any case, Manselli’s methodological stands generated a peculiar reception in this field. In the last few years, Alberto Forni, one of Manselli’s most reverent followers, attempted to overcome the problem of proving Olivi’s influence on Dante by providing

\textsuperscript{75} Ivi, p. 53: “La risposta a questo interrogativo [the influence of the Spiritual Franciscans on Dante] viene non tanto e non solo da confronti testuali, convinti come siamo, che talune coincidenze verbali e quasi-citazioni siano piuttosto espressioni comuni nella discussione ecclesiologica dell’epoca – quale, ad esempio la designazione del pontefice come principe dei nuovi farisei o simili –, ma piuttosto dalla concezione ecclesiologica che traspire da tutta l’opera di Dante e che nella Divina Commedia trova la più alta espressione, per usare due termini crociani, oratoria e lirica.”
those verbal coincidences that his master could not find in support of his thesis. Forni thus ended up infringing on Manselli’s very directives to handle verbal coincidences with caution.76

I am of the opinion that Forni did not achieve the results he hoped for. But his attempt forces us to look at Dante’s eschatology from a new perspective, because while not dismissing the ideological convergence between Olivi and the poet, he posited the issue of the reception of Olivi’s theology in clear and explicit aesthetic terms.

I disagree with Forni’s conclusions, but commend him for taking seriously the problem of defining Dante’s “supreme inspiration of his art.” I agree with Forni that the scrutiny of Dante’s process of poetry making is as important as it is to define his ideological and historical background. With respect to this, Manselli is right when he reminds us that scattered linguistic fragments are difficult to label in terms of ideology. In fact, it is not the appropriation of signs in itself that determines the aesthetics or even the ideology of the poet, but the process of their relocation/recombination within the text. The origin of semiotic signs, linguistic fragments, or philosophical content, is fundamental with respect to ideology, but from the perspective of an aesthetic assessment their final destination makes the real difference. The work of the poet is that of renewing the language (neologisms, catachresis, resemantization, thematization, tropes, and so forth), or as linguists would say, in transforming langue into parole. When a (linguistic) sign undergoes this procedure of “poetryfication,” if I am allowed a neologism, it leaves (partially) behind not only its implied ideology, but also its “real” meaning, to acquire a new one. Dante does so to a degree that makes him a great poet instead of a mediocre one. Manselli and Forni’s ideological conclusions

are in my opinion incorrect, because they failed to carry on a literary analysis. Manselli’s very appeal
to the “termini crociani” is but a sign of an obsolete terminology. Croce, one of the most influential
Italian scholars of the twentieth century, was reluctant to grant even the status of poetry to Dante’s
Commedia, precisely because he abhorred the inclusion of theological, philosophical, and anti-lyrical
themes. Therefore, Manselli’s appeal to Croce, seems to be ironically inappropriate, for Croce in fact
believed that theological stances could constitute nobody’s “supreme inspiration of his art.”

Instead of recognizing the intricacy of this problem, Alberto Forni limited his sources to
Olivi alone, and made him the one great theological model of the Commedia. Methodologically
speaking, he undertook a feverish chase of verbal coincidences to prove the ideological conformity
suggested years before by Manselli. In fact, on Manselli’s premises there could be no other response
than Forni’s, for ideological restraints limit the search for literary suggestions. Once Dante’s
ideology is established a priori (but are we supposed to understand the intentio auctoris or the intentio
operis?), then room for literary scrutiny is equally compressed. Consequently, the ideology of the
Commedia is granted to be Dante’s ideology, and Dante’s ideology is granted to be Olivi’s. In sum,
Dante’s Commedia becomes, for Forni and more cautiously for Manselli, a rhythmic and rhymed
version of Olivi’s eschatological and ecclesiological beliefs, freshly repainted on the outside with a
layer of rhetorical color and inventiveness. I offer examples.

Forni did a great deal of work to uncover connections between Olivi and Dante by detecting
clusters of words allegedly common to both the Divine Comedy and the Lectura Super Apocalipsim. His
decision to make a transcription of the Lectura available on his website (www.danteolivi.com), even
though not a critical edition, is very useful to Dante scholars and historians who do not have the
opportunity to undertake the longer task of deciphering a manuscript, for no printed editions exist
of this text (although both Warren Lewis and Paolo Vian have now long announced it forthcoming).
Forni’s comparative practice is better explained by his own metaphor of “the garment and the
cloth,” derived from a metadiscursive insertion of *Paradiso* 32. Forni applies the metaphoric interlude of St. Bernard in *Paradiso* to the *Lectura*, “At a certain point [St. Bernard] interrupts the description of the *candida rosa* to introduce the simile of the tailor who remains with no fabric to make the dress. It is now time to address the Virgin Mary with a prayer, before redirecting the gaze towards the First Love.”

> “Ma perché ’l tempo fugge che t’assonna, 
> qui farem punto, come buon sartore 
> che com’ elli ha del panno fa la gonna” (Par. 33. 139-141)

> But time, which brings you sleep, takes flight, and now we shall stop here — even as a good tailor who cuts the garment as his cloth allows (Par. 33. 139-141)

Continuing his application of this metaphor to Dante’s method of borrowing from Olivi, Forni writes:

This image of the garment and the cloth renders that which appears [as a metamorphosis] to those who compare Olivi’s and Dante’s masterpieces. The *Lectura Super Apocalypsin* is the cloth from which the tailor made the *Divina Commedia*. There seems to be an ideological influence of the Provençal theologian on the Florentine poet, but also Dante seems to have deliberately decided to start from a theological text and transform it, with an Ovid-like metamorphosis, into a poetic text.

Forni’s hypothesis is suggestive but it actually ignores how poetry is written. The evidences that he provides are arbitrary; and his solution denies the polysemous nature of Dante’s poem. The vast quantity of references, classical and coeval, Christian and pagan, literary and historical, that centuries of restless exegetical excavation have brought to light, confutes Forni’s notion of the *Lectura* as a prevalent source. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* shows (and most overtly in the Heaven of the

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77 A. Forni, “Pietro di Giovanni Olivi e Dante: Cambiale punto interrompe la descrizione con la similitudine del sarto che non ha più panno per fare il vestito: è tempo ormai di rivolgere la preghiera alla Vergine per poi drizzare l’occhio al primo Amore,” p. 352-353.

Sun) a significant syncretism, in which the *Lectura Super Apocalipsim* might have played a role, but it is not at all prevailing. I do not mean to dismiss any influence of Olivi on Dante, but to pare down the relevance of his influence as described. Moreover, I think Ubertino played a significant role in the transmission of Olivi’s ideology into the *Commedia*, a role that still waits to be addressed.

I will offer a second example. In the Heaven of the Sun, Forni plays with the idea that the reticent and belated recognition of the *fifth light* of the first circle as King Salomon suggests the presence of Dante’s “secret master,” Giovanni Olivi. Forni, unacknowledging the narrative suspance, sees a connection with the chapter five of the *Lectura*.

The scroll was ‘in the right hand of the one sitting on the throne,’ first of all because it contains the laws and rules of the mighty Emperor, and the verdicts and judgment of the mighty Judge, but also because a high [altam], stable, mature, peaceful, and reconciled mind [mentem] is needed for that which could be attained with the intellect, from which [comes] the understanding of God. Also, [this scroll] “is written inside and outside” because of its various senses and its very meaning, of which some are more on the inside, that is to say more hidden to us, some are more on the outside and well known. And I say so with respect with all the aforementioned openings of the books, as I explained in more details with regard with the whole [Sacred] Scripture, in the account of the first general principle on this passage. The book of the Sacred Scripture has its literal meaning on the outside, whereas on the inside [it hides] the anagogical, allegorical, and moral one. With respect to the literal meaning it has on the outside historical deeds and examples of the saints and their external acts, on the inside instead it has deeper [profundiores] sentences of the divine precepts, and of wiser [sapientialum] teaching.”

79 A. FORNI, “Dialogo tra Dante e il suo maestro.” “E il quinto, la luce più bella, non viene nominata. I contemporanei vi videro senza difficoltà Salomone ma, si può aggiungere oggi, la veste del sapiente è tessuta, nel discorso di Tommaso con i tratti dalla *Lectura*, la ‘pestifera postilla’ dell’Olivi su cui si accanivano gli inquisitori domenicani,” p. 115.

80 “The scroll was ‘in the right hand of the one sitting on the throne,’ first of all because it contains the laws and rules of the mighty Emperor, and the verdicts and judgment of the mighty Judge, but also because a high [altam], stable, mature, peaceful, and reconciled mind [mentem] is needed for that which could be attained with the intellect, from which [comes] the understanding of God. Also, [this scroll] “is written inside and outside” because of its various senses and its very meaning, of which some are more on the inside, that is to say more hidden to us, some are more on the outside and well known. And I say so with respect with all the aforementioned openings of the books, as I explained in more details with regard with the whole [Sacred] Scripture, in the account of the first general principle on this passage. The book of the Sacred Scripture has its literal meaning on the outside, whereas on the inside [it hides] the anagogical, allegorical, and moral one. With respect to the literal meaning it has on the outside historical deeds and examples of the saints and their external acts, on the inside instead it has deeper [profundiores] sentences of the divine precepts, and of wiser [sapientialum] teaching.”
I have underlined in italics the parts that according to Forni evidence Dante’s metamorphosis of the *Lectura* into the *Commedia*. Of the many examples provided by Forni, maybe this is the most convincing, but it is not at all conclusive. Manselli’s admonition to distrust verbal coincidences, especially when widely diluted in the texts, has remained unheeded; we should not forget that Manselli even rejected as defective literal convergences such as that of the “abate Giovacchino / di spirito profetico dotato.” Forni’s parallel between the *Lectura* and the *Divine Comedy* is not even grounded on reproduction of full sentences, but by means of a vague gathering of words spread over multiple paragraphs; and words that are far from being uncommon, technical, or peculiar enough to prove any direct lineage. According to Forni, Olivi’s words, which are neither expressing the meanings they have in the *Divine Comedy*, nor syntactically bound (except for the first two)—*altam, mentem, intus, profundiores, sapientialium*—allegedly become secret signals of Olivi’s presence in Dante: “entro v’h è l’alta mente u’ si profondo / saver fu messo.” And therefore the (temporarily) unidentified *quinta luce* should evoke the ghost of Giovanni Olivi. According to Forni, “We are not talking about ideological influence, but we are talking about the conversion of a text, deliberately chosen, into a completely new one.” Given these criteria, hundreds of references can be mistaken for textual or ideological appropriation. Furthermore, in the example we cited, Olivi never mentions Salomon.

Forni’s general conviction is that Dante had selected key words very familiar to the followers of Olivi, and his intention was to communicate in a secret code with a sort of secret society “formed

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81 A. FORNI, “Dialogo tra Dante e il suo maestro:” “Non si tratta di influenza di idee, ma del passaggio di un testo, deliberatamente scelto, in un altro del tutto nuovo,” p. 89.

82 Olivi mentions King David, as he who has the keys to open the seals of the book held by the man on the throne: “Clavis David, id est spiritualis iubilatio psalmodie, est precipua clavis aperiens librum,” p. 382. Also we should not forget that King Salomon’s wisdom is a very widely spread topos in the Middle Ages, and it is of little surprise that he is the light “più bella.”
by the elects who would have carried on the spiritual reformation of the Church.” Forni wonders whether “Dante had meant to send a [secret] message to the Spirituals, those very few who had the keys to read the Lectura, those who were signed by Christ and would reform the Church during the sixth status.” The temptation to attribute to Dante’s Commedia esoteric meaning and drag the poet within the gravity field of some sort of masonic culture has been always alive, especially in Italy during the Risorgimento; but clearly Dante’s message is all but esoteric in the Gnostic sense. Although at times obscure, Dante’s message is—if we only think about his choice to write in vernacular—universal. One could continue with examples of this sort taken from Forni’s articles, but I believe that what we have shown so far is enough to understand his peculiar perspective. I therefore reject Forni’s conclusion:

The Divine Comedy is the metamorphosis of Olivi’s Lectura Super Apocalipism. With metamorphosis we mean the transcription of a prose theological text into poetry. This is not about influence of ideas, but the transcription of one text, freely chosen, in a completely new one.

Forni’s tried to face the issue of “transcription of a prose theological text into poetry,” but his answer was no satisfactory, because, he disregarded the recent achievement of the studi danteschi. This was also Manselli’s problem. The fact that he looks around for a literary reference and finds Croce is a perfect index of the changes that have in fact occurred in the larger culture of Dante studies. Therefore, the purpose of my dissertation is not to deny the achievement of Manselli, Kraus and others—but to bring their results within the context of the literary arena.

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84 Ivi, p. 114: “Dante abbia inteso lanciare un messaggio agli Spirituali, a quei pochi depositari della chiave costituita dalla Lectura, ai segnati dell’esercito di Cristo che nel sesto stato avrebbero riformato la Chiesa.”

5. Ubertino and Olivi in the *Commedia*

Alberto Forni has been drastic in his identification of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi as Dante’s primary source, not only with respect to the most overtly Franciscan aspects of the *Commedia*, but to the whole poem. Other scholars suggested more moderate solutions that although sometimes go in the direction indicated by Manselli, at times diverge. In the recent volume edited by Santa Casciani on Dante and the Franciscans, Giuseppe Mazzotta, in line with a tradition of Italian scholars like Nardi and Barbi, and taking his distance from Manselli, is suspicious of acknowledging a real influence of the Spirituals on Dante: “In the wake of Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure, Dante rejects the anti-fraternal attacks by the secular masters. Like them, he also rejects the millennial prophecies endorsed by the Spirituals.”86 However, the same book displays, among others, an article by Stan Benfell on Dante’s use of Olivi’s ideology, which partially continues in Manselli’s footsteps, and therefore recognizes the Franciscans as playing a role in shaping Dante’s aesthetics of the apocalypse. Benfell moves within the contours traced by Manselli and reprises a general ideological presence of Olivi, with some objections. While discussing *Inferno* 19 and specifically Dante’s chastisement of the simoniae pope Nicholas III, Benfell is startled by the force of Dante’s semiotic invention:

“Di voi pastor s’accorse il Vangelista,  
quando colei che siede sopra l’aque  
puttaneggiar coi regi a lui fu vista;  
quella che con le sette teste nacque,  
e da le diece corna ebbe argomento,  
finché virtute al suo *marito* piaque.” (*Inf.* 19.106-111)

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Nowhere in the text of the *Apocalypse* (nor, for that matter, in Olivi’s commentary to the *Book of Revelation*, which together should allegedly constitute Dante’s sources) is Benfell able to find a conclusive indication as to where Dante derives his poetic materials. Dante actually combines different elements in a completely original way, with no direct, recognizable or verifiable correspondence with specific literary, historical, or semiotic context. This procedure is not novel in the re-combinatory aesthetics of medieval mimesis or in Dante’s poetics. Eric Auerbach had magisterially explained it in his “Mimesis.” In his notes on *Inferno* 10, the German scholar sets off Dante’s unparalleled talent for semiotic accumulation: “More is packed together in this passage than in any of the others [literary masterpieces] we have so far discussed.” Such combinatory formula is also quite common in apocalyptic literature, and not unusual in coeval arts. Suffice here to recall, as an example, the iconography of the seraph-Christ appearing to St. Francis. The angel is equipped with six wings, all performing different tasks, and with a wood cross hanging from his back. Two famous examples are Giotto’s and Lorenzetti’s frescoes in the Lower Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. Red bloody rays shoot off of the Angel’s limbs and hit the saint who is down on his knees, impressing the signs of the stigmata on his hands, feet, and chest. The complicated image of the Seraph-Christ conjures together the symbolism of crucifixion, and that of the Eucharist, with a system of signs that spans from the prophet Ezekiel to the *Apocalypse*, related to the number, movement, and meaning of the wings, as well as to Christ’s wounds. In apocalyptic literature, David Burr once observed that the rhetoric of semiotic recombination is a special trademark of St. Bonaventure. In his exegesis of the Angel of the sixth seal, a topic of great importance to the Franciscan Order, for the angel was interpreted as a hypostasis of St. Francis, the *Doctor Seraphicus* “is

combining [Revelation] 7:2 with Revelation 21. […] Elsewhere the combinations are even more impressive.”

The novelty of this procedure lies in Dante’s poetic appropriation of it, something hitherto almost unheard of in the vernacular poetry of Dante’s time. Benfell actually observes that Dante’s literary practice is far from limited to pure mimesis. In fact, while the principle of semiotic recombination does not contradict the concept of imitation, it constitutes a complementary form of aesthetics that becomes denser in the eschatological sections of the poem. For example, Benfell shows his surprise and admiration at Dante’s use of this combinatory practice in Inferno 19. He argues that the Great Harlot of Revelation 17 is joined with the woman clothed with sun of Revelation 12, and that the monstrous image newly formed is metamorphosed in the great Beast with ten horns. In the Apocalypse the beast and the woman are two separate figures, the latter riding the former; in Dante we have only one horrific creature. The dreadful monster ends up being married to a “husband” (marito), which according to Benfell has no precedent in apocalyptic literature. So Benfell’s endorsement of Forni’s (and Manselli’s) opinion that the Divine Comedy rests on an ideological substratum provided by Olivi is not uncritical; he in fact acknowledges that most often Dante is innovative to the point that identifying one single source is impossible.

Again, when Benfell comes to talk about the complicated allegory of the history of the Church at the end of Purgatorio (that which could be considered as the most condensed eschatological section of Dante’s work), the American scholar underscores that Dante’s subdivision of history is six-fold, and not seven-fold as is that of Olivi; but in fact this is a minor point, because one might also assume that the binding of the chariot to the tree represents the first period of the Church (its foundation). Benfell, most importantly, emphasizes that Dante’s opinion on the

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88 D. BURR, Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom, pp. 36-37.

89 V.S. BENFELL III, “Dante, Peter of John Olivi, and the Franciscan Apocalypse.”
Donation of Constantine diverges drastically from Olivi’s. Scholars know the weight of this topic for the poet; Dante is as interested in the Donation of Constantine as Olivi is not. Olivi even credits Constantine’s donation with a positive and pacifying effect, similar to the one that Dante bestows instead upon the providential seizing of power of Cesar Augustus.\textsuperscript{90} More recently, Sergio Cristaldi has expressed a similar opinion. He specified the political traits of such parallelism, by recalling the the Monarchia and the Commedia, and comparing them to the understanding of history of the Provençal friar: “Dante was unavailable to postulate something beyond the institutional Church. […] The content of Dante’s renovatio is based on the principle of universal monarchy.”\textsuperscript{91} Cristaldi points out that Dante is not as concerned with the issue of the wealth of the Church in itself as he is concerned with the fact that the Empire, like Christ’s tunica inconsuntile, ‘one piece tunic,’ has been torn apart. This, of course, could be of no interest for Olivi. The point is that the political expectation of the two diverged drastically. Benfell astutely notices that the magnitude of this fact is more important than it seems at first sight, because “the difference in attitude toward the Donation [of Constantine] points to a larger difference in the ultimate direction of History.”\textsuperscript{92}

This larger difference consists in Dante’s failure to say “that the Franciscans have a crucial role to play in the working out of God’s historical design.”\textsuperscript{93} Benfell’s striking remark sounds like a tomb epitaph for Manselli’s ideological assumptions. Benfell is probably right. In his studies on the tradition of the Apocalypse commentary, Charles Davis identifies St. Francis’ apocalyptic role

\textsuperscript{90}“Ecclesia per totum tempus martirum usque ad conversionem Constantini imperatoris fuit sic dispersa et oppressa quod non habuit sic apparentem unitatem et potestatem in toto orbe sicut habuit tempore Constantini, exclusa idolatria et paganismo et data sibi undique pace, quando et plenius apparuit romanam ecclesiam esse universalem matrem omnium membrorum Christi” (LSA, 516).

\textsuperscript{91}S. CRISTALDI, Dante di fronte al gioachinismo, p. 359.

\textsuperscript{92}V.S. BENFELL III, “Dante, Peter of John Olivi, and the Franciscan Apocalypse,” p. 44.

\textsuperscript{93}Ivi, p. 45.
(prudently first proposed by St. Bonaventure, but then stressed to the point of paroxysm by the so-called Spirituals) with one of Olivi’s great inventions:

Olivi diverges from his fellow commentators, from Bonaventure and from Joachim in two extremely important ways: in the way he reads the current Franciscan augs pauper dispute into the coming persecution of Antichrist, and in his remarkable openness to the possibility that the persecution will be led by the pope himself.\(^94\)

More precisely, “Olivi is the only commentator who can accept literally Bonaventure’s identification of Saint Francis with the Angel of the sixth seal.”\(^95\) Not only does Olivi accept this identification, but he makes his whole eschatological vision hinge on it, and devotes to this subject large portions of his Lectura Super Apocalypsim. Benfell rightly notices that Dante does not seem to acknowledge any explicit role of St. Francis or of the Franciscans in the apocalyptic allegory of Purgatorio. If the Divine Comedy is the metamorphosis of Olivi’s Lectura into a poetical text, how could Dante fail to follow Olivi when most expected to do so? One could say that the poet delays the treatment of St. Francis’ eschatological role to the Heaven of the Sun, “Però chi d’esso loco fa parole / non dica Ascesi, ché direbbe corto / ma Oriente…” (Par. 11.52-54); nonetheless, those verses could have been derived from St. Bonaventure’s Legenda maior, not necessarily from Olivi. Moreover, according to Pasquini, the parallel Francis-Sun must be understood as Dante’s most idiosyncratic invention in the portraiture of the saint, for the metaphor of the Sun is not predominant in Olivi. But the reason Dante is not clear about assigning a salvific role to St. Francis and to the Franciscan Order, as we said, is ideological and political, for “the promised savior […] is not to be found in a group of new


\(^{95}\) Ivi, p. 123.
spiritual men or a faction of friar minors that refuses to compromise the ideals of Christ as lived by Francis, but in a new Holy Roman Emperor.”

While inclined to accept Forni’s and Manselli’s opinion on Olivi, Benfell realized that his predecessors’ exegetical assumptions have many contradictions. He therefore circumscribes Olivi’s presence in the *Commedia* to *Inferno* 19 and *Purgatorio* 32, with strong limitations. In sum, according to Benfell: “Dante treats Olivi and the other Spiritual Franciscans much as he does virtually all of his sources—selectively, taking from them what suits his own purposes and his own vision, but not following them.”

On Benfell worked with greater force Charles Davis’s opinion that Dante follows at times Olivi (for example, on the issue of the validity of Boniface VIII’s election), and at times Ubertino, for example, “in picking out specific contemporary popes to represent the mystical Antichrist.” But while Davis agrees with Manselli that “Dante’s view of ecclesiastical history was probably influenced by that of Olivi,” there is one thing that seems to have gone unnoticed by the scholars. Dante and Ubertino, while having ideologically opposite opinions, seem quite close in their attitude toward temporal rulers, and toward Philip IV in particular. It is true that, with respect to substance, Ubertino praised Philip IV as much as Dante despised him, but their formal understanding of his role in the eschatological context is strikingly similar, as I will try to show.

If compared to Dante’s devotion to the ideal of the universal monarchy, Ubertino (as Olivi before him) was very conservative, if not to say indifferent to the problem of political power. Niccolò Mineo was convinced that “one can easily see the striking difference in the essence of

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97 Ivi, p. 49.


99 Ivi, p. 79.
Dante’s eschatological hopes and those of the Spirituals.” Eschatology here indicates the very moment in which history reaches its sum, and “seems to become a different kind of time, which is continually generated as the time of the end.” Eschatology is history. Mineo’s notion of Dante’s eschatology as compared to that of Ubertino could be summarized in four points (on which I mainly disagree). 1) Dante does not share Ubertino’s opinion on the Antichrist; 2) With regard to the issue of poverty, the poet fully accepts the distinctive principle of usus pauper dear to the Spirituals; 3) Dante accepts the validity of Celestine V’s resignation (and consequently of Boniface VIII’s election), against Ubertino’s opinion; and 4) While Dante and the Spirituals, including Ubertino, agree on the imminent castigation impending over the apocalyptic Great Harlot, their vision differed in that the friars remained faithful to the Joachist eschatological notion that the renewal of the world would be assured by an ordo monachorum, some sort of spiritual force. Dante awaits a political leader that would embody a temporal solution for the decline of his times, as the Veltro allegedly shows along with the mysterious figure of the Cinquecento dieci e cinque. Mineo interprets the Veltro and Cinquecento dieci e cinque traditionally, as a lay leader, DXV-DXV.

With respect to this fourth point the idea that none of the so-called Spirituals would ever hope, as did Dante, in the good deeds of a lay leader, is not completely correct, even though there


102 N. Mineo, “Gli spirituali francescani e l’Apocalisse di Dante.”


104 For a Franciscan reading of this section see E. Giosi, “A Franciscan explanation of Dante’s Cinquecento dieci e cinque,” in S. Casciani, Dante and the Franciscans: 141-169.
remain macroscopic differences between the universal monarchy envisioned by the poet and the insufficiency of Ubertino’s political analysis. However, Ubertino displays a pragmatic optimism in the intervention of a lay king. In the fifth book of the *Arbor Vitae* he resolutely praises Philip IV’s initiative to start a trial for heresy, and other assorted crimes, against Boniface VIII. Ubertino defines Philip IV’s attack as a *solenmpnis percussio*, “a solemn beating.”

Given the fact that in his book, Ubertino identifies Boniface with the Antichrist, the head of the apocalyptic Great Harlot of the carnal church, Philip IV, whom Ubertino also calls “boxer of Christ,” comes to ultimately acquire, in his grand vision, an apocalyptic role of a certain importance. We have to recall here that the key event of the sixth status of the Church is in fact the vanquishing of the Antichrist, the killing of the Great Harlot and the Beast she rides. Our mind cannot but run to Dante’s *solenmpnis percussio* of *Purgatorio* 32, where the Giant on the chariot hits the *puttana sciolta* who stands next to him before they disappear together in the wood. If Dante’s son, Pietro is right in his commentary on the *Commedia*, that the Giant of *Purgatorio* 32 is Philip IV, *the Boxer of Christ*, then we see more clearly how, despite the differences, this allegorical moment of *Purgatorio* could indeed have been inspired by Ubertino’s *solenmpn beating* of the pope. Of course, it goes without saying that Dante’s analysis of the political circumstances is more sophisticated than Ubertino’s. But where Olivi expected no positive interferences from temporal rulers, Ubertino interpreted in eschatological terms Philip IV’s quarrel against Boniface VIII. This casts more light onto Dante’s artisanal labor of poetic invention. Ubertino is the only Spiritual to directly identify the Antichrist with a pope and indirectly to bestow an apocalyptic role on a lay leader. In this respect he does resemble what Dante does in *Purgatorio*. This resemblance of course makes Ubertino closer to the poet than Olivi.

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105 “Solennis percussio auctoritis eius superbie […] facta per inclytum phylippum regem francorum in consilio congregato parisius […] in quo solenniter statuit esaminare facta predicte bestie, prepositis horribilis que de ea ad eius aures pervenerant, ex quibus non Christi vicarius sed vere Antichristi magni precursor, se probata fuerint, clarissime apparebit, non solum ex predicatam quare usurpavit sibi fedem ecclesie, sed quare vita eius scelleratissima esset et eretica (si prefatus rex probaret preposita)” (V, 8, 466a).
In this perspective Benfell’s construal of the eschatology of the Commedia is in line with Davis’ opinion that Dante combines diverse soteriologies, secular and divine, and foresees the coming of a temporal and a spiritual reformer; in other words, “Dante links Francis and Augustus.”  

6. “Parole ancor più gravi.”

As we anticipated, according to Mineo, Dante rejects the political ideology of the Spiritual Franciscans, partially agrees to their eschatology, and fully consents to their notion of radical poverty. Mineo is also the first scholar to explicitly spell out the “the problem of discordance,” the idiosyncratic alchemy originated in the poetic laboratory of the Commedia by rejecting and simultaneously using Ubertino da Casale. For this Mineo needs to be praised, for its unrecognized status led historians such as Raoul Manselli to reject Ubertino on the ground of ideological extremism. But all things considered, Mineo’s conclusions do not diverge drastically from Kraus’ list of likenesses that we registered at the beginning of this chapter. While Kraus does not touch the “problem of discordance,” for his goal was to set off the similarities, not the idiosyncrasies between Ubertino and Dante, Mineo recognizes that we have to face a problem of literary and ideological interpretation. His solution to this problem, however, does not seem to be satisfactory, because in the attempt to explain St. Bonaventure’s reprisal of Ubertino, he resorts to contingencies that are completely arbitrary. His conclusion is that St. Bonaventure’s words represent Dante’s dissatisfaction with Ubertino, because “In the last decade of thirteenth century, Ubertino was actively involved in the battle of the rigorists against the construction of Santa Croce church, whose first stone was laid

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106 CH. T. DAVIS, “Poverty and Eschatology in the Commedia,” p. 59. This view is well explained by S. CRISTALDI, Dante di fronte al gioachinismo. “Non ci sarà una pace superiore a quella di Augusto, che è già una pace ecumenica, sancita da un censimento a cui lo stesso Cristo si è voluto sottomettere, comprovando così non solo il governo temporale in quanto distinto dallo spirituale, e non solo quel particolare governo unico fra gli altri, ma ancora e soprattutto la sua universalità, autentica sigla distintiva. [...] Dante elabora insomma una forma debole di messianismo, senza annunzio di un vero e proprio tempo messianico, di una risoluzione o comunque di una sospensione delle contraddizioni storiche,” p. 222.
down on May 3, 1295.”\textsuperscript{107} As a second hypothesis, Dante’s assumed disapproval of Ubertino might have been due to the friar’s political networking: “One can infer that Dante did not like Ubertino’s proximity to the Cardinal Napoleone Orsini.”\textsuperscript{108}

Reading these and similar explanations of the problem of discordance, one has the impression that the clearer Dante’s connection with Ubertino, the more difficult for the scholars to explain St. Bonaventure’s censure. At the root of such misunderstanding there lies an error in literary exegesis: the assumption that a character speaks for its author. In theoretical terms, there are no problems in admitting the truth of such a truism, but on the ground of ideology it seemed difficult for some scholars to contemplate the possibility that Dante could disagree with St. Bonaventure, his own beatified character! The reason for Dante’s assumed discontent with Ubertino must therefore be allegedly linked with Ubertino’s opinion on the construction of Santa Croce, or on the friar’s supposed responsibility in the turmoil created by the Italian Spirituals in Italy, as Charles Davis otherwise suggested.\textsuperscript{109} This kind of interpretation is as erroneous as to think that Cardinal Matteo d’Acquasparta, the other extreme of the dichotomy created by St. Bonaventure in Paradiso 12 (\textit{non fia da Casal né d’Acquasparta...}), is censured because of his negative role in Dante’s biographical vicissitudes.

While these conjectures are based on factual events, a more pernicious outcome of this methodological stand arises at times; we can call it a moralistic approach. We already noticed Kraus’ eccentricities, and we mentioned the fact that Manselli himself was not innocent of this temptation, when he defined Ubertino as overexcited. Pasquini talked about an irritable character; Mineo speaks of


\textsuperscript{109} Ch. T. Davis, Dante’s Italy and Other Essays, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).
pessimism.¹¹⁰ My observation also applies to scholars like Marino Damiata, whose representation of Ubertino’s writing seems directed to praise the friar more as a devoted follower of Christ and St. Francis than as an author.¹¹¹ But there seems to be more to it.

Charles Davis, for example, in many respects more equilibrated than others, shows a similar approach when he comes to talk about St. Peter in Paradiso 27. Dante has St. Peter employ a very strong term, a technical term, which he applies to his throne: vacante. Although vacante is a term that Ubertino and his followers in Italy, against Olivi’s opinion, applied to the papal throne after the resignation of Celestine V, and after Boniface VIII seized it, Davis diminishes the importance of this language, and holds that St. Peter “was speaking only in a moral sense.”¹¹² I disagree that St. Peter speaks only in a moral sense. But I understand why Davis says so. Any other interpretation would raise contradictions with other sections of the Commedia, such as when Dante, a propos of Philip IV’s slap of the pope, comments that he saw “nel vicario suo Cristo esser catto” (Purg. 20.87). Saying that St. Peter’s throne is vacant and simultaneously that Boniface VIII is the Vicar of Christ seems an ideological short-circuit. But we have to accept it, as we accept, say, Cato—a pagan, an enemy of Augustus, and a suicide—as the guardian of Purgatory. For vacante seems indeed to be a technical term, not a vaguely moral one. So we have to deal with an apparently insoluble contradiction.

Again, when talking about Dante’s popes, and comparing them to Ubertino’s opinion on them, Davis shows a similar reaction. Apropos of Nicholas III, upside down in the pit of the

¹¹⁰ N. Mineo, Dante. Un sogno di armonia. “[Dante] could not accept Ubertino’s pessimism on human beings and their deeds, and his disparage for nature and life itself.” “…non poteva far suo il pessimismo di un Ubertino nel valore dell’uomo e delle sue operazioni e il suo disprezzo della natura e della vita stessa,” p. 221. I don’t know where Mineo have seen disparage for nature and life in the Arbor vitae.


¹¹² Ch. T. Davis, “Poverty and Eschatology in the Commedia,” p. 81.
simoniaes, Davis holds that “neither Olivi nor Ubertino had condemned him,” implying that his condemnation must have been an original idea of Dante's, based just on his simony rather than on Nicholas’ relationship with the Franciscans. Nicholas III is a soul whom Dante places in hell. With respect to this, Olivi surely never condemns Nicholas III. In fact he even helped the pope in the writing of his bull *Exiit qui seminat*. But Ubertino does condemn him. Ubertino makes clear his disapproval, or condemnation, of Nicholas III in the *Arbor Vitae*, writing that the bull *Exiit qui seminat* was “a stone [...] tied to the waist of the Order, such that, [the Order], indulging in relaxation, as if almost falling into a deep sea, sank down in the abyss.” That is quite unequivocal condemnation. Charles Davis knows Ubertino well, and knows that the reason the friar resorted to the papal bull *Exiit qui seminat* in Avignon is not because he had changed his mind on it, but because he tried to bend it to his agenda rather than publicly attack a pope at the papal Curia. But in the *Arbor Vitae* his opinion is clear.

Maybe we can rephrase the question in these terms. Ubertino condemns Nicholas III for his bull on the interpretation of the Franciscan Rule. Dante, standing “as does the friar who confesses,” *(Inf. 19.49)*, writes about Nicholas III’s damnation for advancing the bear cubs. How important is Nicholas III’s connection with the Franciscans in determining his fate in hell? Davis thought it was not important, but Nick Havely, in his recently published and important book, *Dante and the Franciscans*, considers it essential.

In his work, Havely presents a broad excursus on the *Commedia*’s reuse of Franciscan material. For example, he convincingly explains in Franciscan terms the figure of the Angel at the gate of Purgatory, in *Purgatorio* 9; and most importantly, he has attempted on a grand scale to give an

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113 Ivi, p. 76.

114 “Ac si lapis molaris fuisset appensus ad ventrem ordinis. Sic postea operibus relaxationis est quasi in maris profundum precipite se immersit,” (V, 3, 432a)
aesthetical/rhetorical explanation of Dante’s appropriation of Franciscan themes. He demonstrates, effectively, that “Franciscan discourse […] becomes a way, here [in Inferno] and later in the Commedia, of both addressing and assuming authority.”

Therefore, the better our understanding of what we mean by Franciscan discourse, the better our understanding of Dante’s poetics, aesthetics, and theology in the Divine Comedy. The only problem is that even Matteo d’Acquasparta had produced Franciscan discourse by transferring Franciscan legal terminology to the coeval diatribe on political power. For example, Matteo asserted, “against the whole world and ready to die for such truth,” that any jurisdiction, spiritual and temporal, belonged to the pope de iure. A few months later, Boniface VIII included this piece of Franciscan discourse in his bull Unam Sanctam, which is considered by scholars “an unqualified extreme statement of papal monarchy, fashioned to overawe the disobedient [Philip IV] by sheer weight of sacerdotal authority.” Is this a kind of Franciscan discourse that Dante includes in his work? Havely does not take into consideration major differences within Franciscan discourse.

For example, like Charles Davis before him, Havely wonders why Dante condemns Nicholas III.

115 Nick Havely, Dante and the Franciscans, p. 71.


Why then, if Nicholas and his family had such a close and seemingly honourable relationship with the Franciscan Order, does Dante choose to consign him to the holes of Malebolge as the harbinger of Boniface VIII and the first pope to speak and be spoken of in Hell?119

Again, I think the question is not well posited, for in the semiotic context of Dante’s virtual universe, the narrative itself justifies the presence of Nicholas III in the pit of the simoniaes, per avanzar li orsatti, “to advance the bear cubs.” In Inferno 19, Dante encounters a pope, whose reasons for being where he is are clearly expressed in the narrative. We can build upon it to understand the complexity of Dante’s poetry, not Dante’s morality or “human sympathy” for Nicholas. In literature the presence of a character is tautological, it justifies itself, for literature is phenomenological, not logical. We can gloss Dante’s canto on the simoniaes and Havely’s comment to it by saying that Nicholas III indeed had a close relationship with the Franciscan Orders, except that it was not the “seemingly honorable” one that Havely states. As we said, Ubertino believed that Nicholas III’s bull on the Rule had been the kiss of death for the Order. The same problem arises with Clement V:

As in case of Nicholas III and Exivi qui seminat, it is not Clement’s declared view of Franciscanism that is the reason for his Dantean damnation. It is once again the discrepancy between pious intentions and simoniae deeds that calls this pope’s authority in question and leads him to be identified in apocalyptic terms as one of the ‘pastors’ whose ‘avarice brings the world to grief.’120

The point, I believe, is not “the discrepancy between pious intentions and simoniae deeds,” but precisely the impious intentions of the popes, regarding both the whole Church (made explicit in the bull Unam Sanctam of Boniface VIII) and the Franciscan Order.

It is important to recall that Nicholas III and Clement V promulgated two interpretations of the Franciscan Rule that dissatisfied the Spirituals, and Ubertino especially (Exivi de Paradiso has been


120 N. Havely, Dante and the Franciscans. Poverty and the Papacy in the Commedia, p. 83.
often described as a formal victory, but a substantial defeat, for the Spiritual party). The three popes we “meet” in Inferno 19 actually have in common the morally reproachable vice of cupidity that led them to indulge in simony and nepotism, but first and foremost they share a great scarcity of intellectus spiritualis, whose absence is most visible in the legal acts they produced in their capacity of heads of the Church. I believe that these popes’ official declarations on the Franciscan Rule played a role in Dante’s construction of this part of hell, precisely because the themes of Franciscan ideology run throughout the canto, as much as does the topic of spiritual authority. As Havely, though surprised at Nicholas’s destiny, magisterially demonstrates, they are strictly connected. The day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost descended on the Apostles in the shape of flames. These popes are upside down in the rock, and their feet, not heads, are on fire; a sure sign that, in assessing the essence of their spiritual guidance, the poet judged it negative and insufficient. The treatment of these popes shows not that they are impenitent sinners, although they are, but that they are spiritually inverted. In Paradiso 9, Dante will explain that the reason for, and at the same time the consequence of, lacking intellectus spiritualis is the practice of legalism, the wickedly founded conviction that legal acts or documents could replace spiritual life, and spiritual authority: “Per questo l’Evangelio e i dottor magni / son derelitti, e solo ai Decretali / si studia, si che pare a’ lor vivagni” (Par. 9.133-135). Not by chance, in his reproach of Nicholas III who mistakes Dante for Boniface VIII, the pilgrim will end up attacking a legal document, the most famous and hated of them all (by Dante): the Donation of Constantine. It is not the moral vice of cupiditas that makes the Church sway from its path, because vice and virtues, as Aristotle explains, are individual and internal qualities, but legalism. As the Franciscan William of Nottingham said: “As it is a greater evil to lay down false principles of actions as to do evil actions themselves, so wrong opinions […] are worse than imperfect observances.”

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121 T. OF ECCLESTON, in F. CUTHBERT (ed.), The chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston: De adventu Fratrum minorum in Angliam
With respect to Ubertino and Olivi, Havely incorporates in his work the achievements of Manselli, Mineo and Davis, including some of their prejudices on Ubertino. He accepts that Dante knew or might have known Ubertino, but ideologically refuses him as too radical for Dante. However, he seems inclined to accept some moderate aspects of Ubertino; namely, the diplomatic tone, and temperate positions Ubertino employed during the magna disceptatio: “There are some further specific convergences between Ubertino’s language in Avignon and that of Dante in Inferno 19.” The Arbor Vitae is once again dismissed as too radical and exuberant.

My understanding of Franciscan discourse is that of a process of resemantization of linguistic and ideological signs of diverse nature. Dante seems not only to recombine on the page elements taken from Olivi, St. Bonaventure, St. Francis, Ubertino, the Sacrum commercium, and the Vaticinia, but also bends each of them in a way that is new, of which we gave an example above when we talked about the complicated semiotics of Inferno 19: “Di voi pastor s’accorse il Vangelista…” et cetera. Let us go back to that point once more, to specify how actually Dante appropriates an important unnoticed passage of Ubertino da Casale, in a context, that of Dante’s reply to the damned soul of Nicholas III, which is surely grounded in the reading of the Apocalypse, likely through the mediation of St. Bonaventure and Olivi. We will see that, although subtle theologians, such the ones we mentioned, could in fact provide the ideological background on which the poet builds his discourse, still, the signifiers are often more important for poets than the signified, and one single words is capable of opening new interpretative horizons. I refer to the word marito, “husband.”


Manselli authoritatively argues against Nardi, and Barbi, that Dante did not read the *Apocalypse* relying on his own intelligence, but through the mediation of commentators, whom he identified in Olivi. But as we said, in the text of the *Apocalypse*, the Great Harlot is sitting on a beast with seven heads and ten horns; in Dante’s text the seven heads and ten horns become an attribute of the woman. Olivi does not mention this, although it is true that he was the first to identify the Great Harlot with Christian Rome and the papal curia. Also, Olivi mentions no husbands. In fact, one of Benfell’s major points is that a husband (*fíncé virtute al suo marito piacque*) is to be found neither in the *Apocalypse* nor in Olivi’s commentary. But it is precisely on this point that Ubertino founds his demonstration that Boniface VIII must be associated with the Antichrist, proving that Boniface VIII is the beast and the corrupted woman foreseen in the *Apocalypse* as well as a husband who started disliking virtue. The bond between the Pope and the Church, says Ubertino, is as irreducible as that of a man with his wife, under the bond of marriage. Christ is the bridegroom of the Church, the pope is *Vicarius Christi*, therefore, the pope is the mystical bridegroom of the Church. This bond is indissoluble:

> “Dicit Apostolo ad Ephe V loquens de matrimonio, qui uxorem diligat seipsem diligat. Nemo unquam carmen suam odio huit, sed nutrit et fovet eam sicut Christus ecclesiam, quare membra sumus corporis eius de carne eius et de officiis eius. Propter hoc relinquuet patrem et matrem suam et adherebit uxori sue, et erunt duo in carne una. Sacramentum hoc magnum est. Propter hoc […] inestimabiliter maior est [unio magna] inter Christum et ecclesiam, ac propter hoc *eadem est inter summum ponteficem et ecclesiam totam.*” (V, 8, 464a)

The Apostle says [in the Epistles to] the Ephesians, when he speaks about marriage: he who loves his wife loves himself. Nobody ever hated his own flesh, but fosters and feeds it like Christ does with the Church, because we are the limbs of her body […]. Therefore the man will leave his father and mother and will belong to his wife, et they will be two in one flesh. This is a great Sacrament […]. Because of this, […] the tie between Christ and the Church is inestimably bigger, and because of the that, the same tie is the one between the pope and the Church.

Ubertino wants to demonstrate that Boniface VIII is the mystical Antichrist. Gian Luca Potestà explains that there exists an “a relationship of analogy between those who deny the union
between the two natures of Christ, human and divine [great Antichrist], and those who deny or break the union between Christ and the Church [mystical Antichrist].”¹²³ Ubertino hopelessly cries that “many believe it impossible that the Vicar of Christ, universal bridegroom, and sovereign pontiff could be separated from his office of leading the Church, and especially in a fraudulent and fallacious way, as it happened in fact with Celestine V.”¹²⁴ As we know from his letter to Corrado da Offida, in which Olivi arguments in favor of Celestine V’s resignation, the Provençal friar had a completely different opinion on this point. Ubertino’s definition of the marriage-like relationship between the pope-husband and the Church-wife sounds like a reaction to his master’s opinion: in the Prologue of the Arbor Ubertino says that, although Olivi was a reference for him, nonetheless he made mistakes. Does Ubertino refer here to the question of the validity of the pope’s resignation? Anyway, Dante uses the term marito—or so seems to me—in its full theological-technical meaning, to signal the implication of betrayal of the mystical bond between the Church and the pope, which in turn results in loss of spiritual understanding. The kernel of that betrayal, the fact of “disliking virtue,” is not so much avarice, simony, and idolatry as it is the lack of intelligentia spiritualis. Yes, of course, vices are visible and tangible, but the core of Dante’s symbolism should be seen in the reversed position of the souls, a clear parody of Pentecost. The Donation of Constantine, of which Dante talks about later in the same canto, is the archetype of the gain of temporal power, and the origin of “disliking virtue.” The Donation ontologically precedes the vices; it is not a consequence of them. (In fact Dante thinks that the Donation of Constantine had been done with pious intention). In conclusion, all vices and all sins can be forgiven, but legalism blots out the understanding of the


¹²⁴ “Impossibile multi reputant quod eius [Christi, ndr] vicarius et universalis sponsus summus pontifex possit separari ab officio regiminis ecclesie, et maxime modo fraudolento et fallaci, sicut fuit utique Celestinus” (AV, V, 464a).
Sacred Scripture. Impious intentions, especially when expressed in official papal bulls, cannot be forgiven.

By employing the term *marito*, and by representing the papal deprivation of spiritual power through depiction of his adultery, the poet evokes the senses and the arguments of Ubertino. All the more so, if we remember that this episode (and that of Guido da Montefeltro in which he talks again about Boniface VIII), takes place in the narrative frame of the sins of fraud. Dante then seems to be possibly suggesting that by “disliking virtue” the fraudulent husband has broken the *sacramentum magnum*, the nuptial-like tie that mystically links the pope and the Church. It seems to be an anticipation of St. Peter’s accusation of the vacancy of his throne in *Paradiso* 27. If this interpretation sounds excessive, we have only to recall Dante’s metadiscursive speech in *Inferno* 19. During his chastisement of Nicholas III, the pilgrim eloquently says that, “Io userei parole ancor più gravi” (*Inf.* 19.103), “I would even use more severe words.” Is this remark meant to allow (or even to instigate) the readers to conjecture about which words Dante actually repressed?

The pilgrim’s explanation for restraining himself is “la reverenza de le somme chiavi” (*Inf.* 19.101). But we have to remember that, technically speaking, “Io userei parole ancor più gravi” is litotes, a rhetorical device that allows one to say what he pretends to keep silent. If Dante announces that he has something left untold, then as readers, we are allowed to think it as “real.” In fact, after having accused Nicholas III of his personal sins (a moral interpretation might fit here), “Però ti sta,ché tu se’ ben punito / e guarda ben la mal tolta moneta / ch’esser ti fece contra Carlo ardito” (*Inf.* 19.97-99), Dante widens his perspective towards a severe eschatological twist (*Di voi s’accorse il Vangelista…*). This is discourse that the “parole ancor più gravi” are supposed to mitigate, and which instead they end up emphasizing.

Dante evokes and provokes our conjectures by making the pilgrim say that he restrains himself; the poet explicitly solicits the readers to do so, in the same way that in *Inferno* 5, Francesca
eventually finishes her account of her story saying: “quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante” (Inf. 5.138). Dante resorts to a rhetoric of silence to create blind spots that the reader must fill in by him/herself. In the following two chapters we will attempt to articulate a response to the task that Dante set for us by attempting to reconstruct his parole ancor più gravi, and hoping to find help in the reading of Ubertino da Casale.

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Chapter II

“Habitare In Aliquo Ramo Huius Arboris:
Ubertino and Pietro di Giovanni Olivi

1. Insipido stilo scribere

Earlier studies on Dante and the Franciscans, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, considered Ubertino as an unoriginal mediator of Olivi, and thus diminished his contribution to Dante’s eschatological vision. In the present chapter I will focus on the differences between Olivi and Ubertino to show that the notion of Ubertino’s neutrality, per se and with regard to Dante’s making of the Commedia, is no longer tenable.

According to Manselli, Ubertino’s Arbor Vitae, and especially the fifth book, which extensively relies on Olivi’s Lectura Super Apocalipsim, is a lightened version of Olivi’s work: “unburdened of all the exegetical parts, and of minor textual and theological discussions.”126 I argue that there is more in Ubertino’s reuse of Olivi’s commentary than unburdening it. In fact, to continue this line of expression, Ubertino even burdened the Lectura with new significance.

Olivi’s commentary is but a part of Ubertino’s complex mechanism of blending diverse and nonhomogeneous sources together. Scholars have already noticed some of these sources, such as the anonymous Sacrum Commertium,127 St. Bonaventure’s Lignum Vitae and Brviloquium.128 Other sources


have contributed to a lesser extent to the making of the *Arbor*, and their actual influence still needs to be assessed. In the first fifty pages alone I counted citations from St Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, *Liber de Nuptiis*, and *Enchiridion*, St. Ambrose, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Hieronymus, St. Bernard’s *Sermo de Annuntiatione*, Origen, Gregory the Great, St. John Damascene, Chrysostomus, Pseudo-Dionysus, St. Odilo of Cluny, Beda, and the Franciscan friar Hugh of Digne. Only a critical edition will be able to ultimately reconstruct Ubertino’s complicated puzzle of sources.

Ubertino makes clear in the *Prologus* that his goal is not to write a speculative work, like that of Olivi, but to compose a *plenius*, a revised and ‘more complete’ version of his pastoral activity:

During my preaching activity in front of the multitude of the people and clergy of Perugia, I have partially (*semiplene*) exposed those things that in this book I have expressed fully (*plenus*). Under the persecutions of somebody, because of my preaching, silence was imposed upon me, and I was forcefully taken to the sacred place that is called Mount Alverna.

Coram clero et popul multitudine perusina pluries, predicando exposui *semiplene* quod in hoc libro *plenius* expressi. Sub cuiusdam persecutionis titulo predicationis, *imposito silentio*, ad solitudinis locum deductus sum sacrum, qui dicitur *mons alverine*.129 (AV, *Prologus*, 5b)

But the decision to write the *Arbor* is not just a consequence of Ubertino’s interrupted preaching activity. Once retired on Mount Alverna, Ubertino—so he claims—is *forced* to write.

I spent the whole first year on the sacred mountain annoyed by many different people, who wanted me to explain certain things of the Scriptures (*alia scripturarum exponerem*), or write examples for preaching (*predicabilia componerem*), or to comment on the *Apocalypse* (*apocalypsim exponerem*), while others, even more zealously importune, [asked me to] describe the life of Jesus Christ and his heartfelt torments (*passionem describerem*).

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129 As in the previous chapter, the italics are always mine, unless otherwise specified.
While the censors of the Perugian church pushed Ubertino into silence, his fellow brothers of the Mount Alverna forced him to break it.

It is from the clash of these contrary forces that the *Arbor Vitae* miraculously—according to Ubertino’s account—originates and takes shape. Thus Ubertino outlines, not abstractly but concretely, the opposite factions that operate within the Church. For him, contrary to Olivi, the *ecclesia carnalis* and the *ecclesia spiritualis* are not general and moralistic abstractions. Ubertino refers to specific groups, of which he mentions names and facts. Ubertino looks at Olivi’s ecclesiology from a specific and well-determined sociological perspective.

I will go back to this point later; suffice here to say that in the apocalyptic clash between the carnal church and the spiritual church, Ubertino is not an external observer, a detached foreteller of future or probable events. He puts himself in the very middle of the fighting arena. Ubertino conceives himself as a protagonist, and defines his writing as the necessary outcome of such striving. This point alone, never explicitly set off, makes Ubertino radically different from Olivi, and renders him a necessary mediator between previous apocalyptic expressions and Dante.

The brethren eventually succeed in their effort to make Ubertino break his silence. Ubertino thus dictates to a scribe (*scribenti guardiano*) his thoughts. As we have seen, Ubertino’s goal is four-fold: exegetical (*scripturam exponere*), pastoral (*predicabilia componere*), prophetical (*apocalysim exponere*), and devotional (*passionem describere*). In each one of these aspects we can detect a prevalent reference: Joachim of Flora, St. Bernard, Olivi, St. Bonaventure. The fact that Ubertino at times follows these sources literally is partially founded on the flexible medieval notion of authorship; on the other hand

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130 R. MANSELLI, “Dante e l’*ecclesia spiritualis*. “
it can be explained with Ubertino’s very heterodoxy. It is in fact in the interstices of these giants’
grand visions that Ubertino tactfully introduces unorthodox opinions—therefore original
opinions—which would otherwise be lacking authoritative support. However, the ultimate authority
for Ubertino’s writing is his own extraordinary mystical experience. Ubertino claims not to be just a
mediator between these recognized authorities and his readers, but he ultimately claims to be
Christ’s mediator.

Ubertino’s original plan—we shall go back to this point later—is that of briefly commenting
on a few verses of the life of Jesus, partially taken from Bonaventure’s *Lignum Vitae*, a devotional
manual for the meditation of Christ’s spiritual gifts, based on the episodes of His life. Ubertino
starts the project with all precautions.

Since the aforementioned scribe was insisting that I succinctly explain such versicles
I tried to do it by *barely interposing here and there a middle line, to elucidate the sense.*

Suadente [6a] vero mihi predicto scriptore, quod breviter vel eorum intellectum
exponerem, illud intendi, *vix alicubi medium lineam pro expositione versiculi ponens.* (AV,
*Prologus*, 6a)

However Ubertino specifies that while he is aware that the things he talks about are taken *ex aliorum
dictis,* ‘from the writings of others,’ it was the spirit of Jesus that had already dictated to him these
things in his heart first, thus establishing a direct connection with Christ.

I disclosed openly those short versicles, *taken from the writings of others, but put inside me
by Jesus Christ,* in order to more easily recall the memory of the life of Jesus, and with
full heart blame the misery of the present status [of the Church].

“Nam eos [versiculos], *ex aliorum dictis,* et *a Christo Iesu mihi inmissis,* comperneram ad
Christi vite faciliorem recolligendam memoriam, et presentis status [ecclesie]
miseriam cordialiter deplorandum. (AV, *Prologus*, 5b)

And again, more specifically:

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When I came to the first versicle, *Iesus futura previdens*, it was so forcefully put inside me by the *Spirit of Jesus*, that with full heart I [then] commented the sorrows of Jesus.

Cum venissem autem ad primum versiculum, *Iesus futura previdens, fortissime fuit mihi inm issum a spiritu Iesu*, ut cordiales dolores Iesu exponerem. (AV, *Prologus*, 5b-6a)

Ubertino acknowledges his debt toward his predecessors (*ex aliorum dictis*), but unambiguously states that the real *dictator* of his literary effort is none but Jesus Christ (*fortissime fuit mihi inm issum a spiritu Iesu*).

Ubertino struggles to authorize himself as visionary writer in line with a mystical tradition that was something quite different from Olivi’s rational argumentation. Should a comparison be made, Ubertino’s approach more closely resembles Dante’s very notion of sacred narrative: “al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” (*Par*. 25.2).

This idea is also implied in the geographical circumstance of his writing. Ubertino’s claim to miraculous inspiration can be better understood if one looks at the location—Mount Alverna—in which the book is composed. Ubertino is forced onto Mount Alverna, and there he writes.  

Mount Alverna comes to constitute a sort of “objective correlative” that physically represents mediation between heaven and earth. Ubertino calls it: “Door of Heaven.” Mount Alverna is an important place for the Franciscan Order. It is here that St. Francis received the stigmata, and St. Bonaventure wrote the *Itinerarium in mentis Deum*. Says Bonaventure:

> Moved by divine impulse, thirty-three years after the death of this Saint, I withdrew to Mount Alverna as to a quiet place where to seek after the peace of my soul. And there, while considering in my mind certain spiritual ascents to God, among other things I considered that miracle which in that very place had happened to St. Francis, namely the vision of the winged seraph in the form of one Crucified.

> Cum igitur exemplo beatissimi patris Francisci hanc pacem anhelo spiritu quauerem [...] contigit ut, nutu divino, circa Beati ipisis transitum, anno trigesimo tertio ad

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Bonaventure also sought at the retreat of Mount Alverna, among other places, inspiration for the writing of the *Legenda Maior*, “I visited the places where [St. Francis] was born, lived and died, and I have carried on careful investigations with [the help of] the companions of his who are still alive.”

By exploiting the implicit force of such a toponym throughout his narrative, Ubertino makes himself the recipient of a spiritual inheritance that is intended to confirm his claim of divinely received inspiration. Though long, the following passage reveals the significance that this place had for Ubertino, in connection with his spiritual life and his writing.

This place, the sacred *mount Alverna*, is worthy of the greatest veneration. Here, in a singular, sublime, familiar, efficacious way, Jesus deigned to return and appear in a seraphic form, in such way to seal, inflame, and start for men as well as for angels, the foundation of the third status of the world [that of the Holy Spirit]. This place is really God’s Home and the *Door of Heaven*. This is really a place of Spiritual Fire that those two seraphim, the Great and the Little [Jesus and St. Francis], wanted to set on fire with their presence. Oh, my poor miserable and icy soul, you have been undeservedly allowed to live in the furnace of the heavenly fire, and write about the flaming Christ, with the insipid pen that he himself has ignited in my hand. […] I am stunned at what happened to me, for when I was compelled by weakness to descend from the sacred mountain, to find a better place to write, I was not able to write the least word.

O quante reverentie *locus iste sacer mons alverne* in quo sic singulariter sic sublimiter, sic familiariter, sic efficaciter in forma serafica dignatus est Iesus apparere et fundamentem tertii status mundi sic sigilare sic inflammare sic insignire, non solum hominibus sed seraficis spiritibus reddere. Vere locus iste est *Domus dei et Porta celi*, vere locus spiritualis incendii quem illi duo seraphim, magnus et parvus, [Christ and St. Francis] voluerunt sua presentia inflammare. O misera et gelida anima mea cui indigne concessum est habitare in fornace celestis incendii, et ibi de flammae iesu, *et ab ipso inflammate scilicet insipido stilo*, scribere. […] Mirum est autem quod mihi accidit, quia

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133 *DOCTORIS SERAPHICI S. BONAVENTURAE, Opera omnia.*

licet ex debilitate de monte sacro descenderim, ut alibi scriberem, non potuit nec minimum verbum scribi. (AV, V, 437b)

Ubertino openly declares that Jesus was the one who “enflamed his insipid pen,” and he could enjoy this sacred inspiration nowhere but on Mount Alverna. His miraculous prerogative resembles, and simultaneously surpasses, Bonaventure’s spiritual inspiration when writing the *Itinerarium*. Bonaventure never links his writing to a direct divine intervention. This aforementioned citation allows us to emphasize, by contrast, Ubertino’s authorizing strategy.

It is on top of this spiritual claim, and mystical experience, that Ubertino incorporates Olivi’s commentary (and other sources). Ubertino conflates in his work, as to a convergence point, the mystical tradition—at the same time the literary and existential of St. Bonaventure and St. Francis—with Olivi’s prophetic, but quintessentially speculative, reasoning on the *Apocalypse*.

This, we will see more in detail now.

2. Dormitat Homerus

In his *Lectura Super Apocalipsim*, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi distinguished himself from Joachim of Flora (the most cited source of the *Lectura*, along with Richard of Saint Victor), by emphasizing the different epistemology between himself and his predecessor. Olivi at a certain point reports Joachim’s opinion that the Antichrist will be a pseudo-pope or a pseudo-prophet. We are not concerned here about the Antichrist. My point is that Olivi dwells on Joachim’s idea to discuss his epistemological premises.

*A propos* of this and similar opinions, one should be warned that [Joachim] says many things not in an assertive way but in a disputable way [*non assertorie sed opinative*]. In the same way, with regard to the *natural light of our intellect* we know certain things indubitably as first principles, other things as conclusions necessarily resulting from those principles, other things we cannot know, but only conjecture through probabilistic reasoning. In this third case we can fail and in fact we often fail.
However, the natural light [of the intellect] that has been created together with us is neither false, nor do we fail [in our opinions] as much as we acknowledge that our opinions are not infallible science. In the same way, the light of revelation freely given to us (per gratuitam revelationem datum) can know certain things as revealed and indubitable first principles, other things as conclusions necessarily derived from them, and other things that we can only conjecture. And this [third case] is the case of the Abbot Joachim’s spiritual intellect and theory of concordance between the New and the Old Testament, given—as he himself testifies—by revelation.

Super quo et consimilibus, advertendum est quod ipse plura dicit non assertorie sed opinative. Sicut enim ex naturali lumine intellectus nostri quedam scimus indubitabiliter ut prima principia, quedam vero ut conclusiones ex ipsis necessario deductas, quedam vero nescimus sed solum opinamur per probabiles rationes, et in hoc tertio sepe fallimur et possimus falli. Nec tamen ex hoc lumen nobis concreatum est falsum nec pro tanto fallimur pro quanto opiniones nostras scimus non esse scientias infallibles. Sic lumen per gratuitam revelationem datum quedam scit ut prima principia et indubitabilia revelata, quedam vero ut conclusiones ex ipsis necessario deductas, quedam vero ex utrisque solum probabiliter et conjecturaliter opinatur, et sic videtur fiisse intelligentia scripturarum et concordie novi et veteris.testamenti per revelationem abbati Ioachim, ut ipsemet asserit, data. (LSA, 455)

According to Olivi, Joachim’s epistemology falls into the category of free revelation (lumen per gratuitam revelationem datum), and it is of the third type, that of fallible conjectures.

Olivi’s treatment of the Apocalypse, instead, is not given per revelationem, but it is essentially speculative, and must be epistemologically considered as the result of Olivi’s adherence to the “natural light of intellect.” This epistemological premise alone makes the Lectura and the Arbor two radically different books. In Ubertino, the lumen per gratuitam revelationem datum has certainly a greater epistemological value than the light of the intellectus naturalis, and he numbers himself among those who profited from it.\(^\text{135}\)

Coherent with this vision, Ubertino takes his distance from Olivi in the Prologus of the Arbor. In the Prologus, as we shall see soon, Ubertino explicitly says that Olivi was wrong in “something.” Unfortunately, Ubertino does not specify in what respect Olivi was wrong, which would have been very interesting to know.

\(^\text{135}\) See E. Gilson, Reason and revelation in the Middle Ages, (New York: Scribner, 1950, c1938).
I argue that the fundamental reason for Ubertino’s suspicious attitude towards the Provençal friar lies in the excessively intellectualized argumentation assumed by Olivi, which paradoxically risked being too close to hated Aristotelian rationalism.\textsuperscript{136} We can infer part of Ubertino’s discontent from the way he addresses Olivi. Ubertino calls Olivi “Doctor Speculativus,” an attribute that emphasizes Olivi’s rationality in a way that sounds like praise as much as it does criticism. This hypothesis is confirmed from what follows immediately afterwards (it is interesting to notice that contrary to some scholars’ opinion that Ubertino lacks self-control, the Italian friar shows here a great deal of diplomacy).

Peter of John Olivi instructed me (although Jesus had first instructed me inside) in every light of whatever science, and especially [Olivi instructed me] in the high truths of theology, and in every aspect of any created nature. Yet, \textit{I do not follow this perfect doctor}, whom I so much commend \textit{with respect to rational thinking (rationabiliter)}, in some of his opinions, because even the Good Homer at times nods, and not all things are given to everybody.

Petrus Johanni Olivi] docuit me—prius interius docente Iesu—in omni lumine cuiuscunque scientie, quam maxime in altis veritatibus theologie, et in omni aspectu cuiuscunque create nature […]. \textit{Non tamen hunc perfectum doctorem, quem rationalbiliter tantum commendo, in aliquibus dictis suis sequor, quia aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus, nec omnia omnibus data sunt.” (AV, Prologus, 2b)}

This is indeed a striking and ambiguous remark. Although a “perfect doctor,” Ubertino refuses to follow Olivi everywhere (“non tamen… in aliquibus dictis suis sequor”). In fact, Ubertino’s major point here is that Olivi is not perfect at all. Ubertino commends his master only \textit{rationabiliter}, an adverb that, given the context, must be referred not to Ubertino—meaning “in a rational way”—but to the object of his discourse, thus meaning “with respect to rational thinking.” This reading complements and clarifies Olivi’s attribute as \textit{Doctor Speculativus}, as well as Ubertino’s declaration that Olivi trained him “in altis veritatibus theologie, et in omni aspectu cuiuscunque create nature;” that

is to say, in biblical exegesis and in every aspect of the created world: likely a reference to the subjects taught in academic environments.

But most important is the statement that “even the Good Homer at times nods, and not all things are given to everybody” (“aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus; nec omnia omnibus data sunt”), which forces us to ask: what was that which was not given to Olivi? The first part of the sentence is a hitherto unrecognized citation from Horace’s *Ars Poetica*: “Indignor, quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus,” “I am filled with indignation, for at times even the good Homer nods” (*Ars Poetica*, v. 359). Even Homer at times sleeps: even the greatest poets can be wrong. Although Horace’s quotation might have become a proverbial expression, this allows room for speculation.

While it is certain that Ubertino is taking his distance from Olivi, the quote evokes parallels between poetry considered as practical knowledge (though highly codified, *Ars Poetica* being one of the utmost examples of such code), and the speculative knowledge as that taught by Olivi. Moreover, the sleeping Homer, while referring to the fact that even the most excellent minds make mistakes, subtly introduces two categories—that of *sleeping* and *blindness*—both related, in the Middle Ages, to mystical intuition. Ubertino seems to be suggesting that the *Doctor Speculativus* Olivi lacks such visionary insight.

Ubertino finally concludes that “nec omnia omnibus data sunt,” ‘not all things are given to everybody.’ What else could Olivi lack, being *rationabiliter* perfect, if not the *lumen per gratuitam revelationem datum*, the light of divine revelation? If Olivi had ignited Ubertino’s *intellectum*, it was

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137 Somewhere else Ubertino says that Olivi introduced him “ad profunda scripture et ad intima tertii status mundi” (2b); that is to say, to biblical exegesis and to Joachim of Flora’s eschatological vision.

138 Interestingly, Ubertino will resort again to Horace and his famous notion of “poetry as painting” (*ut pictura poesis*) also contained in the *Ars Poetica*. Ubertino employs the metaphor of the painter to elucidate a sort of rhetoric of ineffability: “Wherever the reader should see the beauty of Christ poorly rendered by my unlearned hand [*indocta manu depingi*], he should not be angry with me that I am bad painter [*non mihi irascatur malo pictor*], but he should ask Jesus to illuminate the purity of the eternal light, elucidate his will, and grant to a sinner like me his forgiveness” (“Ubi, ergo, lector perspexerit pulchritudinem Iesu indocta manu depingi: non mihi irascatur, malo pictori, sed oret candorem lucis eterne Iesum suam clarificare et decorare sententiam, et mihi peccatori concedere veniam”) (*Prologus*, 7a).
others who had made him part of the real wisdom, a kind of knowledge *per gratuitam revelationem datum*; these were Ubertino’s *Practical Teachers*.

3. Practical Teachers

Olivi’s influence on Ubertino is limited to the intellectual aspect of comprehending the Scripture, and specifically to the *Book of Revelation*. Olivi’s influence on Ubertino, while extraordinary, is limited in fact to leading the disciple “ad profunda scripture et ad intima tertii status mundi.” But Olivi is neither the only mentor of Ubertino, nor the most important. Olivi in fact “adfuit cum […] *magistris practicis*,” ‘stood along […] with *practical teachers,*’ namely, “Petrus de Fenis Pectenarius et devotissima virgo Cecilia de Florentia” (*Prologus*, 2b). Ubertino clearly outlines here a dichotomy between pure speculation and practice.

So doing, Ubertino delimits the contours of a social milieu of spiritual friends. This spiritual *brigata*, whose presence shines throughout the whole *Arbor Vitae*, includes—besides Pier Pettinaio and Cecilia da Firenze referenced above—Margherita di Città di Castello, Angela da Foligno, and also Giovanni da Parma, Corrado da Offida, Angelo Clareno, and others. Some are recollected with the greatest affection in the *Prologus*, along with an unknown “frater uterinus” named Johanninus, perhaps Ubertino’s disciple. Since Ubertino and Pier Pettinaio are both mentioned in Dante’s *Commedia*, and Cecilia was a Florentine coeval of the poet, Gian Luca Potestà had no doubt about numbering Dante among the members of this “circolo fiorentino.”

In my opinion it is likely that Dante personally knew these people. However, it is impossible to prove whether or not he was on familiar terms with them. Yet, he was certainly aware of the spiritual and cultural exchange that constituted the essence of such religious turmoil.

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The contours of this spiritual group are defined by the acceptance of a spiritual life made of mystical insight, visionary experience, charitable activities, poverty, and preaching. These people share not so much an ideology as biographical and existential vicissitudes, spiritual kinship, and most importantly, a common vocabulary, a sort of spiritual dialect.

Angela da Foligno, an illiterate, whose visionary experience had been collected and written in macaronic Latin by her confessor, insists on the importance of the “mirabilis […] revelatio divinae familiaritatis et allocutionis Dei,” a concept that Ubertino adopts, to show Christ’s language and relation to his faithful.

Dicunt tibi scilicet pater “filius meus es tu” et mater “ego genui te,” et alii laterales “tantum attines mihi”, et eis credis. Crede ergo veritati Christo qui nec fallit nec fallitur. (Prologus, 8b)

Your father tells you, “You are my son,” and your mother tells you, “I gave birth to you,” and other relatives tell you, “You are related to me in such and such way,” and you believe them. Believe to the truth, believe to Christ, who never deceives or is deceived.

In fact:

Et licet in familiaribus locutionibus Christus nominet se tibi omni modo parentele et amicitie nunc patrem, nunc matrem, filium, fratrem, sororem, amicum, sponsum, regem, dominum, thesaurum tuum, et multis talibus. (Prologus, 8b)

Christ refers to himself in family locutions (in familiaribus locutionibus) and in every kind of kinship and friendship, such as father, mother, son, brother, sister, friend, spouse, king, lord, your treasure, and many more of this sort.

Ubertino goes further than this. If we accept Christ’s friendship and kinship, Ubertino says, we are one with him. He is the vine, and we are the branches. We cannot live without him, but if we remain close to him, “ipse est magnus Christus, et tu es parvus Christus in ipso vivens et insertus,”

‘he is the Great Christ, and you are the Minor Christ, living in him, and grafted onto him.’ (Prologus, 8b). Ubertino eventually comments that:

Nescio quod aliud in similitudinis corporalibus expressius possit dici ad ostendendum quod tu totus transit in Christum et ipse est tu, si vere diligis eum per amorem extaticum. (Prologus, 8b)

I don’t know what else could be said in corporal similes, to express that you completely transmute into Christ and He in you, if you really love him with ecstatic love.

Here, the friar comes to express his ultimate goal. He wants to make the reader become part of that spiritual family, in which Christ himself is at times son, father, mother, and so on, and in which all the members are in turn Minor Christs, as long as they live in Him and with Him. In sum, the language ultimately shared with Angela da Foligno, Margherita di Città di Castello, Cecilia da Firenze, is that of ecstatic love, of which the familiaris locutio is a structural element. This is the spiritual bond that connects the faithful with Christ, and the members of the spiritual community between each other.

In describing the subtle and deepest connections of this spiritual group, Ubertino resorts to the intimate ecstatic knowledge of Jesus and the progressive interiorization of his life. His access to ecstatic love was in fact possible thanks to the said practical teachers. In the same way that Olivi had introduced him “ad profunda scripture et ad intima tertii status mundi,” these practical teachers “me introduxerunt ad arcana Iesu” (Prologus, 4b), says Ubertino. The ecstatic knowledge of Jesus is strictly connected to the understanding of oneself. Ubertino in fact came to know “totum processum superioris contemplationis de vita Iesu et arcana cordis mei” (Prologus, 4b).

Ubertino’s emphases on the spiritual community, however, should not lead us to underestimate the autobiographical aspects of the Arbor. Despite Ubertino’s recurrent and humble proclamation of his insignificance, he builds his writing around his personality, his being at the very
center of a crucial moment in the history of the Church. Ubertino says: “I” very emphatically. The first person is hardly found in Olivi’s commentary, with the exception of one passage. It is not possible to understand Ubertino and his mediation of Olivi’s sophisticated argumentation without taking into consideration his direct and personal involvement. Olivi seems to view things with a detached look, removing himself from his narration. He is not detached because his professional outlook forces him to be so, but rather because the events described in the *Lectura*, while imminent, are not yet present. Olivi looks at the near future; Ubertino at the *now*.

With that in mind, we can thus better specify the quality of Ubertino’s claim to divine revelation. His privileged insight is not a private one, and his writing is not the outcome of a solitary visionary mind. Ubertino claims to participate in a sort of extended revelation: that is what is actually signified by the spiritual community of which he is part, which is in fact a practical example of *ecclesia spiritualis*. All that he writes is at the same time known mysteriously by his practical teachers.

Ipsa mihi aperiret secretissima huius libri, que nulla potuit, humana ratione, cognoscere. [...] Et dum vix tertiam libri partem fecissem, mihi predixit que eram positorus in alia. (AV, *Prologus*, 6b)

She would abundantly reveal to me the secret of this book that nobody could have known, by human knowledge. [...] And while I had barely finished the third part, she predicted to me the thing that I was to write in another.

If on the one hand Ubertino shares the privileged insight of divine things with a company of spiritual friends devoted to ecstatic love, on the other hand Ubertino does not forget that he is part of a larger community, which today we would call the “institutional” church.

Si quid in isto libro videtur dictum quod appareat repugnare veritatibus quasi in explanatione articulorum et confutacione errorum contrarium edixerim, sciat quicumque legerit, vel ab alio hic fuisse appositorum, vel a me per inadvertentiam, et per defectum debite examinationis propter brevitatem temporis fuisse prolatum. Et ideo ex nunc plene revoco omne illud quod sancta romana ecclesia predictis repugnare iudicaverit, cuius correctioni solius tamen me et librorum submitto. (AV, *Prologus*, 7b)
If anything in this book should appear to be contrary to the truths, either in the explanation of the doctrine or in the refutation of opposite errors that I expressed, the reader must be advised that it was included here by somebody else, or it has been thrown in unintentionally and for lack of proper inspection due to the short time I had. Therefore since now I completely revoke whatever the Saint Roman Church will judge contrary to the aforementioned truths; I submit to her sole corrections my book and myself.

Of course, while formulaic, Ubertino’s submission to the Church shows his awareness of the unorthodox potentiality of his discourse; Ubertino’s declaration of compliance to the opinion of the Church is not detrimental to his discourse. It is intended to reinforce his claim that he had what he considered an extraordinary mystical experience, that the writing of the Arbor Vitae was miraculous completed, and therefore that the book had already received the privilege of Christ’s approbation and seal. In fact, “the author of this book is the same Jesus,” “Auctor [istius libri] singulariter est ipse Iesus” (AV, Prologus, 3a).

4. *Ego audivi*. Ubertino and the Word of Mouth

Ubertino’s identification of St. Francis with the Angel of the sixth seal is one of the kernels of his book. A brief but important reference to such identification can be found in Bonaventure’s *Legenda Maior*, and more diffusely in Olivi’s *Lectura*. However, although at other times Ubertino refers to Bonaventure to support his opinions, on this occasion he mentions neither Bonaventure nor Olivi. Ubertino resorts to Olivi’s oral report (*ego audivi*) of the Parisian general Chapter of the Order in which he had witnessed Bonaventure say as much:

Ego audivi a solemni doctore istius ordinis que frater Bonaventura tunc generalis minister et doctor solennis, presente prefato doctore qui mihi dixit, que in capitolo parisieni solemniter predicavit que ipse erat certus et certificatus que beatus
Franciscus erat angelus sexti segnaculi, et que ad litteram de ipso et eius statu et ordine evangelista Johannes intellexit. (AV, V, 422a)\textsuperscript{141}

I have heard from a solemn doctor of this Order [Olivi], who was present on that occasion and then told me, that Brother Bonaventure—former minister general and solemn doctor—solemnly preached during the Parisian Chapter that it was certain and certified that the blessed Francis was the Angel of the sixth seal, and that John the evangelist meant to speak about [St. Francis], his status, and his Order ad litteram.

While the identification of St. Francis with the Angel starting the sixth age of the Church is an important topic, it is not strictly about this that I want to talk here, but the fact that Ubertino had resorted to oral sources rather than to available written ones.

A propos of written sources, we should also recall here that during the very Narbonese Chapter mentioned in the quote, Bonaventure received the commission from his brethren to write the new biography of the founder. Six years later, at the time of St. Bonaventure’s submission of his finished work, the new Chapter ordered that it alone be considered the official biography of the founder. The Chapter also ordered that all the other and different sources of St. Francis’ life be destroyed: a peculiar editorial agenda indeed, which in itself contains a rough figure of Bonaventure’s generalate.\textsuperscript{142} According to Rosalind Brooke, St Bonaventure’s agenda was to make the Order a tool in the hand of the Church, and he believed that the followers of St. Francis were not supposed to imitate the founder sic et simpliciter.

Bonaventure “admired and venerated st. Francis but as an inspiration rather than a model. He never nursed the illusion that the destiny of the movement was to spread throughout the world the greatest possible number of exact imitators of the founder.”\textsuperscript{143}

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\textsuperscript{141} Although Olivi likely never was a “doctor,” we agree with David Burr that there is little doubt that “a solemnis doctore,” is a reference to Olivi. See D. BURR, Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom, p. 40.


As Bonaventure was afraid of both internal schisms and external attacks, for they threatened the very existence of the Order, he abandoned the primitive observance—instead of defending it—and led the Order to a stage of higher institutionalization.

Bonaventure was a keen reformer. His attacks on the practices of those friars who were later to form the nucleus of the Conventual party tend to be soft-pedalled because he also had clashes with the ‘Spirituals’ on doctrinal issues. He was probably aware that there was a danger of schism, and many of his efforts were consciously directed to secure unity. He himself took a middle position.  

In such a context, one aspect of Bonaventure’s ideology seems particularly relevant to our discourse: Bonaventure seems to consider any deviation from the Rule in terms of personal failure, rather than in terms of structural problems (such as construction of wealthy convents, possession of books, and whatnot). This was a view that the Spirituals, Franciscans, and Ubertino in particular, strongly opposed. Ubertino was very harsh in his criticism against Bonaventure, precisely because he denied that the root of corruption was already visible during St. Francis’ life:

multa circa hoc et stupenda [Franciscus] fecit in confusionem astutie impugnantium spiritum eius, que frater Bonaventura in Legenda modicum pertransuendo tetigit, quia nolebat antique nostre ruine initia legentibus publicare. (AV, 449a)

Francis did many and marvelous things to confuse the shrewdness of those attacking his spirit, which Brother Bonaventure in the Legenda just briefly touched upon (modicum pertransuendo tetigit), because he did not want to make public to the readers the beginning of our ancient decline.

Even sharper was Ubertino’s censure of Bonaventure’s treatment of the prophecies foreseeing the future degeneration of the Order:

que industria frater Bonaventura omisit et noluit in Legenda publice scribere, maxime quia aliqua erant ibi in quibus etiam et tunc deviationem regule publice mostrabatur, et nolebat fratres ante tempus extraneis inflamare. (V, 445a)

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that Bonaventure deliberately omitted (*industria omisit*) and did not want to write in the *Legenda*, especially because there were things there [in Brother Leo’s writings] that publicly showed, even at that time, the abandoning of the Rule; and he did not want to instigate the people against the friars before the time.

David Burr has rightly observed that Ubertino had a biased knowledge of the events of the past that was determined by his agenda to restore the primitive observance of the Rule; thus, historical reconstructions based on his writing should be treated with much caution.¹⁴⁵ That said, Ubertino’s opinions, while subjective, are not completely unreasonable. One thing especially made him genuinely unhappy, and could not be denied: the leveling effect of Bonaventure’s intellectual project. The legitimate decision of Bonaventure to ignore (*industria Bonaventura omisit*) certain sources, and especially those he considered unauthorized, eventually determined the destruction, or loss.

According to Chiara Frugoni, Bonaventure thought that the brethren should renounce St. Francis as a model to be imitated *ad litteram*. Bonaventure’s ideology, as expressed in the *Legenda Maior*, according to Frugoni, became eventually prevalent and was officially shared by the Roman church, as proved by the fact that it was wholly received in the fresco cycle in the Upper Basilica of Assisi, completed under the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV.¹⁴⁶ In short, St. Bonaventure, with the full support of the institutional church, completed the process of sanctification of Francis, in the attempt to establish him, and his Order, as eschatologically “necessary.” The faithful thus should venerate Francis in his unique—and thus untouchable—sainthood: an agenda that *ipso facto* neutralized Francis’ project to pursue an evangelical life potentially extensible to all. Bonaventure’s goal was to push the Order and the Founder out of the reach of their enemies; however, by establishing St. Francis as unmatchable standard of perfection, Bonaventure also pushed him out of


the reach of his followers: he made him sacred in the Latin sense of ‘untouchable.’ The outcome of such an agenda was that St. Bonaventure’s *Legenda* stood grand and solitary among all the other sources, and imposed a devotional, “institutional” image of the saint.

Other unofficial sources—among which we can number the lost *rotuli* of Brother Leo, the *Sacrum Commercium*, *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, the *Anonimo Perugino*, and all those marked by the formula “nos qui cum eo fuimus,”147—were of completely different tone and ideological substratum.

Tutte queste testimonianze insistono in una direzione precisa, e tendono a dare una rappresentazione, in sostanza, concorde della figura di Francesco. Per singolare e straordinario che possa sembrare il Santo non ci viene rappresentato né come *alter Christus*, né come angelo del sesto sigillo. […] Il San Francesco che ne risulta è il povero, l’umile, il servo di tutti, colui che nella carne ha sofferto.148

All these sources go in one direction, and give a similar representation of St. Francis. Although this might seem strange and unexpected, the saint is depicted neither as the Other Christ, nor as the Angel of the sixth seal. […]St. Francis stands out as the poor, the humble, and the servant of all, he who suffers in the flesh.

In brief, these unauthorized sources rendered an image of St. Francis as a man among other men, seen in his full humanity. For Ubertino, the eschatological aspect of St. Francis is fundamental. However, its necessary premise lay in the expression of Francis’ humanity, which he could find neither in Bonaventure nor in Olivi.

In commenting on the cantos dedicated to St. Francis in the *Commedia*, Eric Auerbach underlined that Dante had depicted the allegory of Lady Poverty in terms of physical and erotic personification.149 According to Emilio Pasquini, in fact the eroticized image of Lady Poverty in *Paradiso* comes from Ubertino, who was able to transform the metaphor of spousal union found in


the *Sacrum Commercium* into a metaphor of erotic passion, a desire so strong as to make lovers run, and St. Francis to appear as one *on the road*, as a brother amongst brothers: “Calcaverit mundum et calcandum mandaverit proli sue” (AV, V, 421b).

In the following passage for example, Ubertino interpolates passages of the *Sacrum Commercium* with language akin to the language of love poetry (reverberations of the *Divine Comedy* while feeble are audible). Here we have St. Francis speaking:

Nam et ego eius amore anxior, nec sine ipsa requiescere possum, domine mi, tu nosti quod me de ista *innamorasti*, sed et ipsa sedet in tristitia ab omnibus repulsa, facta est quasi mulier vidua, […] quod omnes amici eius spreverunt eam et facti sunt eius inimici, et ipsos probant iam diu est adulteros et non sponsos. (AV, V, 426a)

I am in fact made anxious for her love, and I cannot find peace without her, my Lord. You knew that you enamoured me of her, but she also sits in sorrow and rejected by everybody, and she became almost like a widow woman […] because all her friends scorned her and they became almost enemies for her, they prove to have now long been adulterers and not husbands.

Ubertino represents St. Francis in his full humanity, with words that are inspired, and at times poetic. Below I display another example that refers to the topic of the stigmata, in which Ubertino imagines the encounter between Francis and the Christ-Seraph. In happening on the line “et transformatus est amans in amatum”, it is almost impossible for a reader of the *Commedia* not to jump in memory to the renowned line of *Inferno* expressed by Francesca, “Amor che nullo amato amar perdona”:

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150 E. PASQUINI, “S. Francesco e i frati minori in Dante.” According to Stefano Brufani, in the *Sacrum Commercium* the relation between Francis and Lady Poverty is already decidedly “courtly” rather than “nuptial.” S. BRUFANI (ed.), *Sacrum Commercium Sancti Francisci cum Domina Paupertate* (Edizioni Porziuncola: Assisi, 1990). “L’autore volendo evidenziare la fraternità minoritica nel suo insieme non poteva cantare un rapporto sponsale, esclusivo tra Francesco e Madonna povertà, ma quello più tipicamente cortese tra i servi del Signore, con in testa Francesco, e la sposa di Cristo, madonna Povertà,” p. 22. It is worthy to notice *en passant* that Dante's language is at the same time nuptial and courtly (*marito… amanti…*).

151 Although a whole study needs to be done on this, Ubertino often uses intensely dramatized dialogues that recall Jacopone; and resorts to linguistic variety that goes from violent realistic metaphors to gentle and affectionate expressions typical of coeval love poetry. We should not forget that Ubertino lived in Florence and Tuscany at the end of the thirteenth century, and the beginning of fourteenth.
Nam igneus Iesus, scintillans, divina et humana facie apparente, supra cor et corpus Francisci tam flammaeum ignem effundit, ut fieret cor suum tamquam cera liqueascens, quia divinus amor habet vim liquefactivam, ut est dictum, et vim figurativam ad modum cere fluentis in sculpturam sigilli. Sic Franciscus et mente et carne fluxit intra sculpturam vulnerum apparentis dilecti, et transformatus est amans in amatum. (AV, 436b-437a)

The fiery sparkling Jesus, appearing in human and divine aspect, poured over the body and heart of Francis such a burning fire, to make his heart become like melting wax, because divine love possesses in itself a melting force, as people say, and [also] a shaping force, in the way wax fills up the carving of a seal. In the same way Francis with his flesh and mind completely filled up the carving of the wounds of the appearing blessed one, and the lover is transformed in the loved one.

The seals here are literally wax seals impressed by Jesus into St. Francis’s body (vim figurativa ad modum cere fluentis in sculpturam [...] vulnerum). Ubertino offers an image of St. Francis that is simultaneously human and divine, historical and eschatological. This is something quite different from the official image carefully constructed by Bonaventure, or the rarified intellectualized hypostasis inherited by Olivi. It is on these passages that one can measure the distance between Ubertino and his predecessors.

Ubertino’s project of re-humanization of the saint was based on his eclectic appropriation of the sources, with a preference, unsurprisingly, for the unauthorized ones. In fact his agenda is precisely that of disobeying the intimation of the Narbonese Chapter of 1266 to destroy all the unauthorized sources, except Bonaventure’s Legenda. Ubertino instead endeavors to contaminate Bonaventure’s devotional and pious portrait of the founder with diverse references. Among these sources we already mentioned the Sacrum Conmertium. This was once believed to be the work of John of Parma, former minister general of the Franciscan order. John was put under trial by Bonaventure himself on the grounds of his Joachism, and eventually confined at the hermitage of Greccio. John was the personal friend and confessor of Ubertino, who mentions him at various points in the Arbor,
and was certainly a part of his spiritual circle. According to what Ubertino says in the Arbor, John had foretold to Ubertino some future happenings of his life.

Another unorthodox source, of which Ubertino bemoans the loss, is the Scripta Fratris Leonis, the writings of Brother Leo. The writings of Leo are particularly important for Ubertino precisely because Leo was a companion of St. Francis and an eye/ear-witness of the original fraternitas. Ubertino sorrowfully cries that Brother Leo’s rotuli became lost, and directly blames St. Bonaventure’s decision to neglect them, in a way that sounds like an allegation of having indirectly caused the loss of such precious documents.

Affirmabat etiam sanctus ille frater Maseus qui visionem vidit, de qua in Legenda habetur, quod sedes illa quam vidit servari, scilicet fuit dicta sibi fuisset Luciferi, quod frater Bonaventura, humana discretione, conticuit, propter detractum morsus […] Sic et multa alia magnalia sancti tacuit maxime illa que videbantur nimiis discoprire defectum transgressionis quam [sic] oculis suis cernebat in filiis, licet nec omnia tacuerit, sed quasi sub calculo multa dixit. (AV, V, 437a)

Brother Masseo, who had this vision, of which the Legenda talks about, declared that the seat that he saw being saved was told to be of Lucifer. Bonaventure, moved by human caution, passed this over in silence, because of the bites of the detractors. In the same way, many other important things of the saint he passed over silence, and especially those that seemed too much reveal the defect of the transgression that he saw in his sons with his eyes, although he did not passed all things over silence, but he said many things almost sub calculo.

Nam quod sequitur [audivi] a sancto fratre Conrado predicto qui et viva voce audivit a sancto fratre Leone qui presens est et regulam scripsit. Et hoc ipsum in quibusdam rotulis, manu sua, conscripsit, quos commendavit in monasterio sancte Clare, custodiendos ad futurorum memoria dicitur contineri. In illis autem multa scrivit, sicut ex ore patris audiverat, in factis suis viderat, in quibus magnalia continentur de stupendis sancti, et de futura corruptione regule, et de futura renovatione ipsius, et de magnialis circa regule institutione et renovacione a Deo, et de intentione beati Francisci super observantiam regule, sicut ipse illam eandem intentionem dicebat se accepsisse a Christo, que industria frater Bonaventura omisit et noluit in Legenda publice scribere: maxime quia quia erant ibi in quibus etiam et tune deviatio regule publice mostrabatur, et nollet fratres ante tempus extraneis inflamare. Claret autem quod mullo melius fuisset ea scribere, quia non tanta postea fuisset secuta ruina, maxime istud, quod sequitur, ex tune non servabatur. Cum multo dolore audivi illos rotulos fuisset distractos et forsitan perditos. (V, 5, 445a)
I have heard the following from the aforementioned blessed brother Conrad, who heard it, *viva voce*, from the blessed brother Leo who was present [at that time] and wrote the rule. And he [also] wrote this very thing, by his very hand, in certain scrolls that he entrusted to the monastery of St. Claire, to be preserved for the for the posterity. In those scrolls he wrote – as he had heard it from the mouth of the father [Francisci] and seen in his deeds, many things – in which great things are contained about the marvels of the saint, the future corruption of the rule, and its the future renovation, and [also] about the great things regarding the institution of the rule and the renovation coming from God, and about the intention of St. Francis regarding the observance of the rule. [Francis himself] said that he had received from Christ that very intention, which brother Bonaventure intentionally [*industria*] left out and did not want to write in the *Legenda*, especially because other things were in there, in which, even at that time, it was publicly shown the corruption of the rule: and [Bonaventure] did not want to inflame the brothers before the time, in front of strangers. It is obvious that it would have been much better to write those things, because so great a decline would have not happened afterwards, and especially this, which follows, since then was not saved. With great sorrow, I heard that those scrolls were removed, and maybe lost.

While understanding the reasons of Bonaventure’s silence, Ubertino cannot justify him, and accuses him of *humana discretione*. In the *Sacrum Commercium*—a source that, as we said, Ubertino certainly knows and refers to—*discretio* is synonym for Avarice: “Avaritia, nomen Discretionis assumens…” In this light, Ubertino’s accusation becomes very strong.

In conclusion, Ubertino’s decision to endorse the identification of St. Francis with the Angel of the sixth seal, not through Bonaventure’s writing, but through a chain of ear-whispered revelations, should be understood according to the logic of his agenda to authorize and restore diverse, non-official sources. Ubertino opposes—and complements—Bonaventure’s institutional and monumental writing, with a plurality of captured voices forming an invisible community that traces back to the founder. Ubertino finally counterbalances Bonaventure’s authorship and authority, with the shared revelation freely given to a spiritual group of men belonging to diverse generations. In this context, “Ego audivi,” and “mihi dixit,” become the most frequent refrains of Ubertino’s narrative.

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I heard one great marvel to which I refer without fear, but I devotedly recite for the faithful. So, I heard from the holy man Conrado [da Offida] and from many other trustworthy people, that the blessed Francis after his glorification in heaven revealed to the holy Brother Leo—and some others are told to have been revealed—that in this apparition Christ foretold to Francis the tribulations of his status and of the Church and the corruption and condemnation that his Rule.

Et audivi unum stupendum quod cum nulla temeritate assero, sed devote devotis recito. Audivi autem a sancto viro Corado et a pluribus aliis fidedignis, quod beatus Franciscus post suam glorificationem in celis revelavit sancto fratri Leoni, et aliquibus aliis revelatum dicitur, quod in hac apparitione Christus predixit Francisco tribulationes sue status et ecclesie, et condemnationem et corruptionem sue regule.” (V, 442b-443a)

And again:

Many times I have heard from this holy man Brother Conrado [da Offida] that he himself had heard all the aforementioned things, and many other and greater things, from the holy man Leo and from the holy fathers Masseo and Cesolo and from many others, all companions of the holy man, that even he waits in tears, with passive desire, to see [these things] fulfilled. From a great number of friars, who had lived with the holiest father brother in great familiarity, many times I heard the [same] opinion of the said men. […] Who could possibly describe in any way the holiness of the holy man Egidius? He in fact was the fourth of all the friars minor, and the third legitimate son of [our] father [Francis]. […] I heard from many witnesses that, as soon as the glory of the paradise was mentioned, he would be enraptured with the sweetness of that [vision], and lose his conscience.

Ab hoc tamen sancto viro frater Conrado pluries audivi quod ipse omnia predicta, et multa plura et maiora audivit a frate sancto Leone predicto et a sanctis patribus frate Maseo et a frate Cesolo et a pluribus alius sancti viri socii, quod et ipse expectat cum flectibus cum passivo desiderio videre completa. A magna etiam multitudine fratum qui cum sanctissimo patre fratre Egidio vixerunt cum familiaritate multa hominum priorum sententiam audivi. […] Huismodi vero viri sancti Egidii sanctitatem quis enarrare sufficiat? Ipse enim fuit quartus frater minor, tertius legitimus patris filius. […] A multis audivi qui viderunt quod statim nominata gloria paradisi in illius [fratris Egidii] rapiebatur dulcedinem per mentis excessum. (V, 433b)

One of the features, in fact, shared by this spiritual circle, was the existence of genuine prophecies about the decline of the Order, which were passed on through a transmission chain of personal acquaintances and word of mouth. That made Ubertino’s agenda both formally and substantially contrary to Bonaventure’s bi-dimensional project.
5. The Time of the Antichrist

I will now show how Ubertino’s approach applies to the identification of the pope with the mystical Antichrist.

At the beginning of the Christian era up to the conversion of Constantine the main methodological stream of interpretation of the Book of Revelation was unambiguously anti-imperialistic and anti-Roman. Most importantly, it was historical: interpretation based in actual history. But starting in the fourth century, after Constantine’s conversion, apocalyptic symbols began to be interpreted for their moral rather than their historical value. It is in this context that the first associations of the pope with the Antichrist occur. The bishop Arnulf referred to the Antichrist in 991; later, a group of cardinals adverse to Gregory VII’s attempt to reform the Church also resorted to this image; yet “these were sporadic notices at a time when a non-historical, moralizing interpretation of the scriptural symbols of the end was current.” A change, however, was about to come.

During the struggle for the Investitures, a tension between temporal and spiritual power, between the Pontiff and the Emperor, became manifest; thus, the Pontiff and the Emperor came to play key roles in the apocalyptic scenario. The papal party began to use the Apocalypse as a means of understanding, as a hermeneutic key to the new events. In the twelfth century, the imperial party too began to exploit the symbolic potential of the Apocalypse as a propagandistic vehicle. It was at the court of Frederick II that the Pope began to be associated with the Antichrist.

Along with the Antichrist, after Joachim of Flora, especially in the Franciscan environment, a Pastor Angelicus—a saint pope who would be empowered to start a real renovation of the Church—was announced and long awaited. Celestine V seemed for a short moment to embody the figure of

Pastor Angelicus for he was in fact purely “spiritual”— in the sense that he was unfamiliar with the system of power of the papal curia. Once he resigned, or was compelled to do so, it was just a short step to drawing the parallel between his successor with the Antichrist.

By this point a whole change in perspective had rather swiftly occurred. The association of the pope with the Antichrist was no longer taking place within the broader context of the struggle between the Church and the Empire, but within the Church itself: between one kind of Christian and another. Olivi first advanced the idea that the Antichrist could have been, among other things, the protagonist of the struggle between the Carnal church and Spiritual church. In particular, Olivi’s notion of such struggle implied an opposition between the Carnal church and the Franciscan idea of evangelical poverty; the Antichrist thus specifically opposed Franciscan Rule. Ubertino pushed this hypothesis to its extreme consequences. If Olivi had indicated a path, Ubertino was the one who walked it, and for the first time Ubertino mentioned a specific name as the Antichrist.

In chapter thirteen of Olivi’s Lectura, the Provençal friar discusses the Beast coming from the sea. Here he specifies that, “it is not of my great concern to determine who will actually be the Antichrist. […] It is enough for me to know that it will be false and contrary to Christ.”

Declarations of this sort disappeared from Ubertino’s Arbor Vitae. Ubertino did not intend to be silent, for he had a clear notion of the identity of the Antichrist.

When Olivi elsewhere incidentally comes to talk about Celestine V, he expresses himself in these terms: “At the end of this forty-second generation, there happens the new event of the election of pope Celestine and his successor.” Ubertino, in the Arbor, rephrases Olivi as such: “Upon the church was brought the horrible new event of the rejection of Pope Celestine and the usurpation of his

154 “Michi autem non est cure magne an ille. […] Sufficit enim michi scire quod erit fallax et Christo contrarius.” (LSA, 533)


successor.” “Novitas” thus becomes “horrenda novitas,” “electionis” becomes “reiectionis,” and finally “successoris eius” becomes “usurpationis successoris.”

In fine autem huius XLIIe generationis contingit novitas electionis Celestini pape, et successoris eius. (LSA, 509)

Tunc illa horrenda novitas reiectionis Celestini pape et usurpationis successoris super ecclesia est adducta. (AV, V, 460b)

Ubertino’s choice of words is eloquent enough, and prepares the reader for what he is about to say next. To further clarify the context in which Ubertino pushes forward his ideas, I should mention that while Olivi went only so far to say—quite tautologically—that the Antichrist will be “contrarius Christo,” Ubertino remarked that the main feature of the apocalyptic figure of the Antichrist would be his falsehood and his deceiving appearance. The chapter of the Arbor where the identification of the Antichrist is provided is poignantly contained in the chapter entitled Jesus Falsificatus. Having declared that Jesus is falsified, he is now ready to put forward a name. Here Ubertino suggests that the name of the Antichrist is Benedictòs, in the plural form. With this double name Ubertino meant to indicate Boniface VIII (Benedict Caetani), and his successor Benedict XI.

We shall see now in more detail Ubertino’s reasoning. Ubertino presents his argumentation in terms of a struggle that features the characteristics discussed above, thus emphasizing oral sources and first-hand experience over written sources. Ubertino resorts to the authority of ear-witnesses, and traces the contours of a group of saintly men that he now calls congregatio pauperum, a “congregation of the poor,” in other words a group persecuted by the institutional Church. In this way, Ubertino exemplarily and vividly illustrates the fight between the spiritual church and the carnal church typical of the sixth age of the Church. The congregatio pauperum to which Ubertino refers is
that of the followers of Pietro da Macerata (also known as Frate Liberato) and Pietro da Fossumbrone (aka Angelo Clareno).\footnote{AA.VV., \textit{Chi erano gli spirituali}. \textit{G. L. Potesta, Angelo Clareno: Dai poveri eremiti ai fraticelli}, (Roma: ISIME, 1990).}

These were the so-called “Poor Hermits,” a group of Franciscan friars who had received from Pope Celestine V the permission to start a new fraternity in which the Rule of St. Francis was to be followed \textit{ad litteram}. After the renunciation of Celestine V, the newly elected pope, Boniface VIII, revoked the permission previously accorded to the Poor Hermits to found a new—and thus schismatic—“Franciscan” Order. Afraid that the leaders of the Friars Minor would punish them for having abandoned the Order, the Poor Hermits fled to the Island of Trixoma in the Gulf of Corinth, in Greece. After the death of Pope Caetani they attempted to return to Italy to vindicate their rights. According to Clareno, they went through even worse persecutions under the pontificate of Benedict XI. During this period, Ubertino himself had been also forced into silence and to retire on Mount Alverna.\footnote{\textit{A. Clareno}, in G. Boccali (ed.), \textit{Liber chronicarum sive tribulationum ordinis minorum}, (Assisi: Biblioteca Francescana Chiesa Nuova, 1998).} This explains why Ubertino sees in Benedict XI as a continuator, although apparently a meeker one, of Boniface VIII’s violent policy: “Quia primus fuit apertus vastator, hic callidus et timidus simulator” (AV, V, 467a), “because the first one [Boniface] was an obvious devastator, this [Benedict XI] a shrewd and shy one.”

As we said, Ubertino does not just appeal to authoritative sources, rather he bases his treatment of the subject on a conversation that he had with his friends Liberato and Angelo. They discuss the number of the apocalyptic Beasts, the mystical figure representing the Antichrist, 666:

I have heard from two really evangelical men [Angelo and Liberato], of which one knows Greek perfectly, the other a little bit, that while one who has greater familiarity with it [likely Angelo Clareno] was reading the commentary on the \textit{Apocalypse} by Justin the martyr and Greek doctor, and he had come to the point in which Justin himself was computing the the Greek letters, from the letters of this
number [666] he composed this name, in Greek, “Benedictος,” whose nominative singular in Latin is “Benedictus;” and [Justin] said that this is the future name of the aforesaid Beast.

Ego audivi a duobus vere evangelicis viris, quorum unus optime scit grecum, et alius aliquantulum, quod dum legeret ad mensam ille qui melius scit librum Iustini martyris doctoris greci super Apocalypsim, et venisset ad hunc locum quod idem Iustinus computando litteras grecas composit, ex litteris, huius numeri apud grecos nomen istud “benedictos” qui nominativus singularis huius nominis latini [est] “benedictus,” et dicit quod hoc est nomen futurum predicte bestie. (V, 465a)

At this point one already has a clear sense of where author of the Arbor Vitae is taking the reader.

Yet, Ubertino goes even further, wanting to leave nothing vague or implicit:

A propos of this we can be more specific. He who was reading [Justin’s book] told me that there were two men there, listening, while he was reading in the refectory for those evangelical poor who—fearing the aforementioned Beasts—had fled to Greece to freely live there in poverty. They told me that the whole group of poor people, when they heard that, rejoiced and laughed; the one who was reading smiled as well, and said to the brethren: “If the Benedict from Anagni [Boniface VIII] who now reigns, knew this, he would command to all his men to find and burn this book, which so openly discloses his falsehood.

Quid clarius ad propositum dici potest: ille qui legit mihi dixit sic esse duo qui audierunt dum legeret ad mensam illis pauperibus evangelicis qui timore utriusque bestie predicte confugerant ad grecos, ut ibi paupercule victitarent. Dixerunt mihi quod tota illa congregatio pauperum spiritum hoc auditu exultavit et risit, et qui legebant subrisit similiter dixit ad fratres “Si Benedictus de Anagria, qui nunc regnat, sciret hoc, ipse mitteret totis viribus suis ut haberet et conburaret librum istud qui sic aperte eius aperit falsitatem. (AV, V, 654a)

To be even clearer, Ubertino immediately afterwards adds that:

[Boniface VIII] directed his wrath against these perfect men, for the Spirit of Jesus suggested to them that he was the aforementioned Beast and not the pope.

Singulariter contra viros perfectos sua iracundia exardebat, quia istic, Spiritus Iesu suggerebat ipsum esse predicatam bestiam et non papam. (V, 465b)

Olivi had been silent about the identity of the Antichrist. Ubertino is not. Put in these terms, one has the impression—apparently confirmed by the fact that the fifth book of the Arbor Vitae
contains long pieces of the *Lectura Super Apocalipsim*—that Ubertino has just made explicit what Olivi had perhaps thought but not told. But things are never so simple. Olivi is in fact undecided as to whether the Antichrist will actually be an individual (perhaps a king or pseudo-pope, or an apostate) rather than a collective or moral idea, and thus he invents the notion of the “double Antichrist.” Olivi says that there is a mystical Antichrist who will be the precursor of the great Antichrist.

The mystical Antichrist will be killed at the beginning of the sixth age of the Church, followed by a moment of peace, followed in turn by the persecutions wrought by the great Antichrist. Subsequently, the seventh age of the Church will start, at the end of which Christ will eventually return to judge the living and the dead, after the final defeat of *Gog novissimus*, the ultimate persecution.

David Burr, in his book *Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom*, outlines the diverse opinions of scholars on Olivi’s obscure notion of double Antichrist. In particular, Burr emphasizes the distance between Raoul Manselli and Warren Lewis. According to Manselli, Olivi saw the mystical Antichrist as an individual but not as a real pope. The Antichrist will be the head of the wicked—carnal—church, and probably a schismatic pseudo-pope of the sort that medieval Christianity was used to often experiencing. On the other hand, Warren Lewis thought that the mystical Antichrist was to be morally intended as just a seed of moral depravation that was planted in the heart of the faithful; whereas the great Antichrist was a real historical individual, likely Boniface. However, Burr believes it untenable that in Olivi’s thinking this individual could be Boniface VIII or any other living being.157

I believe that the truth lies in the middle, for I agree with Lewis that Olivi intended the mystical Antichrist as a moral idea, and the great Antichrist as an individual, but I also agree with Manselli and Burr that he did not mean to make any specification, let alone to specify Boniface VIII.

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If this middle position is the correct interpretation of Olivi, then Manselli’s opinion that Ubertino was an unoriginal contributor becomes weaker.

Ubertino’s goal is precisely what we have said before, to associate Boniface with the mystical Antichrist (and Benedict XI with the great Antichrist). Ubertino makes his point by referring to a conversation with Brother Angelo and Brother Liberato. These passages not only lead the readers to accept the identification of the Antichrist with the Benedictòs, but also provide for us, as they provided for Ubertino’s readership, a vivid cross-section of what he concretely meant by ecclesia spiritualis and ecclesia carnalis.

In fact, the urgency of the present is fundamental to understanding Ubertino’s eschatology. While Ubertino’s ideas are certainly grafted onto Olivi’s general scheme, this interest of Ubertino in the now makes him radically different from his predecessor, and consequently much more vivid and tangible. Gian Luca Potestà suggestively wrote that: “The eschatological vision that Olivi struggles to keep open towards the future is curved by Ubertino to explain the present, according to a perspective that tends to reduce eschatology into ideology.” Olivi thus made a great effort to limit the influence of his own ideology on speculative scrutiny with respect to the apocalyptic times; Ubertino did exactly the opposite: he injected Olivi’s bloodless scheme with life. In fact, if I can slightly correct Potestà’s definition, we can say that Ubertino did not merely “reduce eschatology into ideology,” but on the contrary, he expanded his own ideology to empowering eschatological horizons. In short, Ubertino is not a concise version of Olivi, but an expansion. In the context of this study, my understanding of Ubertino’s expansionist and vivid ideology is fundamental to understanding why, conceptually speaking, Ubertino becomes a necessary evolutionary link between the Doctor speculativus, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, and the poet of secular world, as Eric Auerbach called Dante.

158 G. L. POTESTÀ, Storia ed escatologia..., “La visione escatologica che Olivi si sforza di mantenere aperta verso il futuro, è curvata da Ubertino a spiegare il presente, secondo una prospettiva che tende a ridurre l’escatologia ad ideologia,” p., 149.
6. Apocalypse Now

I will now propose five points which, taken together, constitute Ubertino’s original argumentation to support his identification of Boniface VIII with the Mystical Antichrist.

1) The ninth chapter of the *Book of Revelation* talks about the blare of the fifth trumpet. In Olivi’s interpretation the trumpets refer to the understanding of the Sacred Scriptures:

   By Trumpet one should understand the office and gift of teaching and preaching. In the gift of preaching is actually included the knowledge of the Sacred Scripture, which has the shape of a trumpet, because it was the blowing and the sound of the spiritual intelligence.

   Per tubam autem intelligitur officium et gratia docendi et predicandi. In gratia autem predicandi includitur notitia scripture sacre, que formata est instar tube, quia flatus et sonus spiritualis intelligentie fuit. (LSA, 435)

More specifically, the fifth trumpet refers to the preaching of the *ordo doctorum* of the fifth status of the Church against three great evils, three *mala gravissima*:

   The first was the horrible and unrestrained indulgence […].
   The second was the noxious flood of the manichean and valdesian heretics.
   The third is the assault against the Spirit of Christ and His life of other hypocritical religiouses.

   Primum fuit horrenda et effrenata laxatio […].
   Secundum […] hereticorum manichaeorum et valdentium […] multa et pestifera inundatio.
   Tertium est aliorum ypocritalium religiosorum […] et spiritus Christi et vite eius ab omnibus impugnatio. (LSA, 447)
After this explanation Olivi enters into a lengthy, detailed description of these three *mala gravissima* that Ubertino follows for long pages step-by-step, copying verbatim from the *Lectura*. In this context, Olivi’s interpretation of the image of the locusts ascending from the bottomless abyss of hell is particularly interesting. According to the text of the *Apocalypse*:

\[
\text{Similitudines lucustarum similes equis paratis in proelium et super capita earum tamquam coronae similes auro et facies earum sicut facies hominum, et habebant capillos sicut capillos mulierum et dentes earum sicut leonum crant, et habebant loricas sicut loricas ferreas et vox alarum earum sicut vox curruum equorum multorum currentium in bellum, et habebant caudas similes scorpionum et aculei in caudis earum potestas earum nocere hominibus mensibus quinque. (Ap. 9.7-10).}
\]

The shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle. And on their heads were, as it were, crowns like gold: and *their faces were as the faces of men*. And they had hair as the hair of women: and their teeth were as lions. And *they had breastplates as breastplates of iron*: and the noise of their wings was as the noise of chariots and many horses running to battle. And *they had tails like to scorpions*, and there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men, for five months.

Olivi, followed closely by Ubertino, comments as such:

\[
\text{Facies earum [erant] sicut facies hominum, quia fingunt se humanus et modestos. (LSA, 451) (AV, V, 456a)}
\]

And also:

\[
\text{Scorpio apparat facie blandus et quasi branchiis ad amplexandum expansis, sed cauda retro pungit et nocet suum toxicum infundendo. (LSA, 449) (AV, V, 455b)}
\]

As readers of the *Commedia* must have noticed already, these apocalyptic monsters strikingly resemble Dante’s flying monster ascending from the dark abyss of the Malebolge, Gerione. It is very likely, if not certain, that Dante, in creating Gerione, referred not simply to the *Book of Revelation* and to classical sources such as the *Aeneid*, but to Olivi’s commentary, and in particular, to the two aforementioned passages. And these passages he had possibly read through the intense, historicized, vivid rendering of Ubertino. We shall see this more in detail in the final chapter. Suffice here to
notice that Ubertino emphasizes two important aspects of Olivi’s speculations. First, the treatment of the Locusts takes place within the broad semantic framework of the *intelligentia spiritualis*, the understanding of the Sacred Scripture, for the Trumpets traditionally refer to the authority of teaching and preaching. Ubertino eventually denies this authority to the pope, and especially to these particular popes, the Benedictos. Second, the image of the Locusts coming from the abyss is not limited simply to what Olivi had said, but constitutes a full description of Boniface’s pontificate. After Ubertino has followed Olivi word-for-word for very many pages, suddenly he swerves onto an independent path:

> Per has locustas *significantur mali prelati in quibus non est legitimas auctoritas, nec legitimus usus clavis.* (AV, V, 456b)

> These locusts represent wrecked prelates in which there is neither legitimate authority, nor legitimate use of the keys.

By evoking an illegitimate *usus clavis*, Ubertino swiftly begins to undermine the papal authority, which Olivi had not done. He seems to attack not just the claim of full temporal power—the doctrine of the so-called *Plenitudo Potestatis* that constituted the core of Boniface’s theocracy—but the pope’s very spiritual authority.159 Things become more explicit as one moves forward, following Ubertino. The friar copies a few more pages from Olivi, to say that the Locusts have a king, referred to as *Angelus abyssi*, whose name is “Exterminans.” According to Olivi: “Potest etiam per hunc angelum designari *quicumque precipuus princeps et incensor prefatorum malorum*” (LSA, 452), “This angel could possibly represent any major leader and instigator of the aforesaid evils.” For Ubertino the Angel of the abyss is not just *quicumque*, anybody. Ubertino complements the definition with an

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emphasis on the falsehood and universal power of this Angel: “Hic talis est princeps, vel per excellentiam malitie, vel per immensitatem potentie vel universitatem” (AV, V, 456b), “This person is leader either for the excellence of his malice or for the greatness and universality of his power.”

So far Ubertino has mentioned no names, but I argue that, given the features he attributes to the Angelus abyssi and the characteristic of his power—immensitatem and universitatem—Ubertino may refer implicitly but directly to Boniface’s bull Unam Sanctam, where the concept of Plenitudo Potestatis is put forward most explicitly. This hypothesis is confirmed by the conclusion that, departing abruptly from Olivi (Ubertino in fact specifies “it seems to me”, videtur mihi) puts forward:

Although by the Angel of the abyss is universally understood the devil, still with this, it seems to me that by this Angel of the abyss is signified he who—through the abyssal malice of the demons and with their malign help, and through his own astute ambition, which was versed in every evil of the abyss—was raised to the rank of Greatest Pontiff, not in a regular way, but with fraud [fraudulenter], and usurped this position in a tyrannical way.

Licet autem per angelum abyssi universaliter intelligi diabolus, tamen cum hoc videtur mihi quod hic angelus abyssi vocetur ille qui per abyssalem malitiam demonum et illorum procurationem malignam, et sui ipsius ambitiosam astutiam, que in omni malo erat inabyssata, ad gradum summi pontificii, non canonice sed fraudulenter ascendit, que sic tyrannyce usurpavit. (AV, V, 457a)

Boniface is thus the King of the locusts, the Angel of the abyss: Rex locustarum, Angelus abyssi. The name of the Antichrist is still in pectore, yet his identity is patent.

We cannot but notice that fraudulenter and usurpavit are also terms that Dante uses in his thematization of Boniface VIII and of the Papal throne in the Divine Comedy. The main feature of Ubertino’s Antichrist is his falsehood, his fraudulent appearance, and his deceiving and self-proclaimed authority. Boniface VIII is the Antichrist because he deceivingly induced Celestine V to resign; something that—according to Ubertino and Corrado da Offida, a friar to whom Olivi sends a letter on the subject—he could not do. Olivi, in his letter to Corrado da Offida, holds an opinion contrary to that of Ubertino. On this point the ideological gap between the Italian friar and the
Provençal theologian could not be larger. Interestingly, it is on this very point that Ubertino builds the very rational argument that Boniface is the Antichrist.

2) The bond between the Pope and the Church, says Ubertino, is as irreducible as that of a man with his wife under the sacred bond of marriage. Ubertino proposes a simple syllogism. Christ is the bridegroom of the Church; the pope is the Vicar of Christ; therefore the pope is the mystical bridegroom of the Church. A husband. This bond is indissoluble:

Et sicut impossibile est dicere quod humana natura renunciet unioni personali filii dei, vel quod separetur ab ea, et solvatur vinculum unioni divina, sic est impossibile quod Iesus, caput ecclesie, renunciet regimen ecclesie peregrine, sic impossibile multi reputant quod eius vicarius et universalis sponsus, summus pontifex, possit separari ab officio regiminis ecclesie, et maxime modo fraudolento et fallaci, sicut fuit utique Celestinus.

Since it is impossible to say that human nature renounce the personal union of the son of God, or that it could be separated from it and that the bond of the divine union be broken, it is also impossible that the Vicar of Christ, universal bridegroom, and sovereign pontiff could be separated from his office of leading the Church, and especially in a fraudulent and fallacious way, as it happened in fact with Celestine v.

Ubertino goes on, saying that:

Antichristus Apertus illum unionem divinam Christi Iesu separari nitetur, ad quod disponit assertio possibilitatis separationis summi pontificis ab ecclesia, idcirco dixerim quod hic est error antichristianus, et quod inventor huius erroris est Misticus Antichristus, illius magni precursor. (V, 8, 464a)

The Great Antichrist struggles to separate that divine [double] union of Jesus Christ, to which the assertion of the possibility of the separation of the High Pontiff from the Church disposes, therefore I said that this is anti-Christian error and that the inventor of such error is the mystical Antichrist, precursor of the Great [Antichrist].

By inducing Celestine v, maxime modo fraudolento et fallaci, to be separated from the Church, and by severing the mystical union between the bride and her bridegroom, Boniface VIII reveals himself to be the mystical Antichrist, the Angelus abyssi, the Beast ascending from the sea. Once it has been
proved that Boniface’s evils have been foretold in these mystical figures, Ubertino discusses his defeat.

3) Ubertino resorts to the image of the Beast rising from the sea, which has seven heads. One of the heads is said to be seriously wounded, but not killed, “Et vidi unum de capitis quasi occisum” (Ap. 13, 3). Ubertino interprets Boniface’s death and Philip IV’s attempt to start a trial against him as the non-mortal wound inflicted on the mystical head of the Beast that will revive with Benedict XI. It is interesting for us to notice here, as we already did in our first chapter, that Ubertino bestows an apocalyptic role to Philip IV, in the same way that Dante will do in Purgatorio with the figure of the Giant.

Possumus vulnus bestie et curationem eius exponere, ut vulnus ipsius sit horrenda mors et finis eius, et solennis percussio auctoritatis eius superbe […] facta per inclytum phylippum regem francorum in consilio congregato parisius […] in quo solenniter statuit esaminare facta predicte bestie, prepositis horribilibus, que de ea ad eius aures pervenerant. Ex quibus non Christi vicarius sed vere Antichristi magni precursor, si probata fuerint, clarissime apparebit, non solum ex predicta [sic] quia usurpavit sibi sedem ecclesie, sed quia vita eius scelleratissima esset et eretica. (V, 8, 466a)

We can explain the wound of the beast and healing of it [in the sense] that the wound represents the death and the end of it, and a solemn blow [percussion] of the super authority of it, done by the famous Philip king of the French during a Parisian meeting […] in which he solemnly decided to examine the deeds of the said beast that arrived to his ears. From such things, if proved, will clearly appear that [Boniface] was not the Vicar of Christ but the [mystical] Antichrist, precursor of the great [Antichrist]. Not only from the said things, because he usurped the seat of the Church, but also because he had a wicked and heretic life.

The death of Boniface VIII does not put an end to the persecution of the spiritual church, for the papal throne remains vacant. The cardinals Colonna, in fact, fierce adversaries of Boniface VIII, are not reintegrated in their full capacity of cardinals of the Church. Against the cardinals Boniface had
launched a crusade, and he besieged and took their castles in Palestrina with the help of Guido da Montefeltro, an episode that remains very present in the *Divine Comedy*.

The death of Boniface VIII thus is not a sufficient condition to reestablish the mystical *sacramentum* of the unity of the Church. The papal throne is still *vacant* because the election of Benedict XI, his successor, is illegitimate:

> Oves omnes non fuerunt vocate ad gregem, sed malitioso contempte, et ideo pastor non est nec fuit hic qui sic fuit electus. (AV, V, 467b)

Not all the sheep were called back in the flock, but maliciously disdained, and therefore no pastor there exists or existed, who has been elected in such way.

This Ubertino again says on the grounds of pure revelation: “Scio persona cui Christus dixit in raptu” (AV, V467b). The anonymous visionary, who “non erat papa nec cardinalis, sed frater *predicatore*” (AV, V, 467b), a Dominican friar—which for the spiritual church extends beyond the limits of Franciscan circles—confided to Ubertino that in one of his dreams he saw a beautiful empty throne. Next to the throne were standing St. Peter, St. John, and St. Francis. From the side of the throne was hanging a black hammer. The interpretation of the dream given by Ubertino was that the hammer was *iste Benedictus*. He was hanging on the side because the throne is still empty, “quia videtur papa et non est” (V, 467b). As a conclusion according to Ubertino, who heard so from “a persona fide digna que dixit mihi” “a person worthy of faith who told me” (V, 467a), during the pontificate of *Benedictus* the papal throne was void and vacant.

4) According to David Burr, Olivi had no intention to identify the institutional church with Babylon, the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse. In the passages where Olivi talks about Babylon, he says, “words like *quasi, videatur, and fere* keep Olivi from actually identifying the institutional church with
Babylon, but let him come very close to doing so.” An earlier and more resolute statement of Burr, that the Church had been “turned into a new Babylon,” had caused the following reaction of Paolo Vian:

Orbene, quel quasi prima, quel fere non sono affatto un espediente di tattica prudenza né una casuale appendice stilistica ma una distinzione essenziale che non può essere omessa senza alterare radicalmente tutto il pensiero dell’Olivi sulla delicata questione: la chiesa carnale tende pericolosamente, tragicamente a coincidere ma non giunge mai ad identificarsi con la Chiesa di Cristo che, in quanto tale, non potrà mai essere totalmente infetta dal male.

That quasi and that fere are not a cautious tactic expedients, nor a random stylish appendage, but an essential distinction that cannot be omitted without radically altering Olivi’s thought on such delicate point: the carnal Church dangerously and tragically inclines to coincide—but never goes so far to be associated—with the Church of Christ, which by definition can never be completely corrupted.

Obviously, given that Christ is the head of the mystical body of the Church, Olivi cannot concede that the Church is completely infected, for as St. Paul says, the evil will not prevail. However, the very idea that evil forces could not plague the Church is already implicit in the double notion of ecclesia spiritualis opposed to the ecclesia carnalis. The point is: did Olivi believe that the “institutional” church represented the carnal church tout court?

According to Manselli this is not possible, because the ecclesia carnalis “is not a concept that touches upon the sacramental and jurisdictional aspect of the Church and of the clergy, but it refers

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160 D. BURR, Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom, p. 94. Olivi says that, “Ad istum autem reditum valde, quamvis per accidens, cooperabitur non solum multiplex imperfectio in possessione et dispensatione temporalium ecclesie in pluribus comprobata, sed etiam multiplex enormitas superbie et luxurie et symoniarum et causidicationum et litigiorum et fraudum et rapinarum ex ipsis occasionaliter accepta, ex quibus circa finem quinti temporis a planta pedis usque ad verticem est fere tota ecclesia infecta et confusa et quasi nova Babilon effecta” (LSA, 262).


There is little doubt that spiritual and moral values are involved, but can we not say that, even if the carnal church is not institutional, that still the institutional church might be carnal? This is, I argue, how Ubertino saw it. Olivi himself might have thought so, although not explicitly. Certainly, he did not exclude this possibility a priori. All the more so if we consider that Olivi’s juxtaposition of Babylon with the idea of the synagogue is recurrent:

Sic, \textit{reiecta sinagoga}, electa est ecclesia plenitudinis gentium, sicque in sexto statu ecclesie \textit{reiecta Babilone adultera} oportet spiritalem ecclesiam exaltari et celebre ac spiritale convivium pro eius nuptiis celebrari. (LSA, 596)

In the same way that [during the first status] the Synagogue is rejected and Church of all people is chosen, in the sixth status it is necessary that, after the rejection of the adulterous Babylon, the spiritual Church be exalted and the famous spiritual banquet be celebrated for her marriage.

In the Jewish religious world the synagogue was the “institutional” element that Olivi opposes to the “ecclesia plenitudinis gentium.” Since the synagogue did not accept the preaching and the gospel of Christ, its spiritual primacy is taken away and given to the first followers of Jesus, endowed with the gift of spiritual intelligence. This crucial passage from synagogue to church is called “translatio.” Olivi in the following passage talks explicitly about the ministers of the synagogue, and underlines that the glory prepared for them was taken away, transferred, and given to the primitive Christian church:

163 R. MANSELLI, “La terza età...” “Non è, dunque, un concetto che tocca gli aspetti carismatici e giurisdizionali della Chiesa o degli ecclesiastici; si riferisce, invece, ai valori morali e spirituali.” p. 65. It is interesting also to notice that while the carnal church and the spiritual church, in Ubertino, are conflicting, in Olivi the spiritual church is but a subset, a part, of the carnal church. Thus the carnal church in Ubertino almost comes to mean “militant church.” “Hec ergo est \textit{ecclesia carnalis}, tam Rome quam in toto regno romanorum seu christianorum diffusa. \textit{Trinit autem partium eius erit una electorum}, de solo Christo et eius spiritu curantium et ad omnem tribulationem patienter sustinendam preparatorum. \textit{Secunda erit} carnalium Antichristo seu decem regibus rebellare conantium. \textit{Tertia erit} aliorum reproborum ad Antichristum confugientium seu confugere disponentium. Potest etiam per hoc designari quecumque \textit{intestina discordia} et divisio tunc temporis futura in ipsa” (LSA, 571). Moreover, Olivi blames those who attempt to fight (\textit{rebellare conantium}) against the Antichrist, thus begetting an \textit{intestina discordia} within the body of the Church. It is difficult to say if this was a subtle criticism against the Italian Spirituals who opposed the election of Boniface VIII, but such an interpretation cannot be excluded.
The glory prepared for the Synagogue and its priests—if they had believed in Christ—was transferred to the primitive Church and to its pastors. In the same way, even the glory prepared for the final Church of the fifth status will be transferred to the elect of the sixth status, because of its adulteries.

In the same way that the synagogue was subjected to a spiritual *translatio* after their rejection of Christ, so the glory prepared for the ruined church of the fifth status will be taken away, and Babylon will be destroyed. While it is true that Olivi does not explicitly say that Babylon *is* the Roman curia—a statement that would be completely alien to his way and style—still, he devises a dichotomy between the institutional synagogue and the gift of spiritual intelligence given to the Apostles. This is reproduced in the opposition between the Church of the end of the fifth status (Babylon) and the elect of the sixth status. Joachim's mechanics of *concordia*, which Olivi fully accepts, imply without doubt that the Jewish synagogue had its counterpart in a Babylon-church founded on false spiritual power rather than real spiritual understanding. While this idea is not limited to the curia, of course, neither is the critique of the curia limited to only “moral” as compared to jurisdictional issues, as Manselli suggests. I believe that the problem of the corruption of spiritual understanding, the gift of *intelligentia spiritualis*, which began with Olivi, continued with Ubertino, and was fully endorsed by Dante, came slowly into focus by contrast with the notion of *Plenitudo Potestatis* which really was the ideological watermark of the papacy under Boniface.

My point, however, is not to prove that Olivi meant to identify *tout court* the papal curia with Babylon when, in 1297, he composed the *Lectura super Apocalipsim*, but that Ubertino does so eight years later, at the time of the composition of the *Arbor Vitae*. In commenting one of the apocalyptic visions that refers to the aperture of seven phials, being the last opened “in aere,” Ubertino comments that:
The infected air, polluting everybody, represents the infection of the Roman Curia that, although infected from before, in a special way during the present time was the dwelling of this beast, and door of hell.

Per aerem autem infectum qui inficit omnes habitantes in eo significatur infectio curie romane, que, licet a prioribus temporibus sit infecta, singulariter tempore huius bestie fuit habitatio, eius ianua inferni. (AV, V, 469a)

Either Ubertino knew or thought that Olivi believed that the institutional church was mystically signified in the image of Babylon, or else he introduces a point of discontinuity with him greater than what we thought so far.

In sum, Olivi might (or might not) have believed that the papal curia was Babylon, the Great Harlot, and he might (or might not) have thought that the Antichrist, in the next future, would be an individual. Ubertino indicates that the name of the Antichrist is Benedictos, and the Great Harlot is his curia. Most importantly, everything is happening now.

In fact, a real spiritual translatio was happening under Ubertino’s very eyes. Boniface VIII claimed temporal power but was humiliated by the King of French, who even tried to set up a trial post mortem against him; a French bishop was then elected pope, Clement V, but he never made it to Rome again, not even for his coronation. The Babylon-like captivity of the Church, his long exile in Avignon, was about to start—it had actually started.

5) As Frank Kermode said, the sense of an ending is not imminent, but immanent. In this canny word play, I believe, one can find the whole difference between the two friars, Olivi and Ubertino. Ubertino’s sense for present events becomes strikingly overt when he comments on the passage of the Apocalypse in which the Beast carries the Great Harlot on his back.

Declinatio vero huius solis fuit in quinto tempore, cuius vesperam et iam quasi noctem in fecibus huius quinti stati cum nimis doloribus experimur. Et cum Babylon
meretrix, et bestia portans eam, fuerit in suo summo, et miror si iam non est, et forte summum eius transivit in turbinibus mortis filii qui precessit, tunc dicitur nox eius tenebrosissima. (V, 415a)

The descent of this sun [of contemplative wisdom] happened in the fifth age [of the Church], whose sunset, and already almost night we experience with overwhelming grief in the impurities of this fifth age. And when Babylon, the Great Harlot, along with the Beast who carries her, will have reached its highest point—and I am wondering if she is not there yet—and maybe crossed over the top of it, in the turmoil of the death of the son who preceded her, then its night is told [to be] very dark.

The passage is taken almost literally from Olivi, as the scholarship has noticed.

Nam eius mane commixtum tenebris idolatrie fuit ab initio conversionis gentium usque ad Constantium. Eius vero meridies fuit in preclara doctrina et contemplatione et vita doctorum et anachoritarum. Eius vero vespera circa finem quinti temporis nimis apparat. Et cum Babilon meretrix et bestia portans eam erit in suo summo, tunc erit nox eius tenebrosissima. (LSA, 263)

Its morning, mixed with the dark of idolatry, went from the beginning of the conversion of the gentiles up to the time of Constantine. Its midday was [the time of] luminous doctrine, and contemplation and life of doctors and anchorites. Its evening appears at the end of the fifth status. And when Babylon the Harlot, and the beast that carries her, will reach its highest point, then the night will be very dark.

While Olivi uses a simple future tense, Ubertino transforms “cum… erit,” to “cum… fuerit,” which I would treat as a future perfect. The fact that it is followed by a past tense (transivit) referring to the same subject can be ascribed to a loose use of the consecutio temporum that we find in medieval Latin and old Italian. In his comparison of the works of these two friars, Raoul Manselli exiles to a footnote a brief discussion of this passage that however seems crucial for understanding the differences between Olivi and Ubertino.164 Ubertino’s bending of a future into a past tense, which he clearly proposes as describing present events, is a significant grammatical blueprint of his conception of history. Things are not about to happen, things have happened, things are now.

By juxtaposing these two texts we easily notice the original insertion of Ubertino that most expresses his eschatological impatience, and prepares the reader (we are still at the very beginning of the fifth book of the *Arbor vitae* here) for his identification of the Antichrist with Boniface (and the Angel of the sixth seal with St. Francis and his followers).

Olivi:

Et cum Babilon meretrix, et bestia portans eam, erit in suo summo, tunc erit nox eius tenebrosissima.

And when Babylon the Harlot, and the beast that carries her, will reach its highest point, then the night will be very dark.

Ubertino:

Et cum Babylon meretrix, et bestia portans eam, fuerit in suo summo, *et miror si iam non est*, [...] tunc dicitur nox eius tenebrosissima.

And when Babylon, the Great Harlot, along with the Beast that carries her, will have reached its highest point—*and I wonder if she is here yet*—[...], then its night is told [to be] very dark.

Ubertino’s inserted cry, “et miror si iam non est,” makes the last days so much closer to the reader, and transforms eschatological time into historical (and therefore narrative) time.


According to what Ubertino says in the *Prologus*, the initial project of the *Arbor Vitae* slowly developed and grew to an extension and degree of inclusiveness that he himself had not foreseen. The book becomes very long and Ubertino needs to apologize to the readers for the multiple repetitions remaining in the final version (about 250 leaves on two columns in the Assisi manuscript):
I could not, unless briefly, revise what I have written so far; therefore, oh reader, excuse me for the confused exposition, and for the several repetitions that may appear in the course of the book.

Nec quod scriptum est adhuc potui vel cursorie revidere, propter quod habeat me lector excusatum de ordinatione multiplici, et repetitione plurima quod in decursu libri forsitan apparebit. (Prologus, 6a)

Curiously, Ubertino justifies the length of the book with the shortness of the time at his disposal.

Ubertino interprets such circumstance as Jesus’ very miraculous intervention:

[Jesus] allowed me to write this whole book, which I had barely ever thought about, in a time span of no more than three months and seven days, in a condition of solitude, with no books at my disposal where I could check my doubts.

Nam in more solitudinis, cum librorum penuria ubi possem dubia revidere, non plus quam trium mensium et septem dieum vel circa spatium temporis in scribendo totum hunc librum—de quo scribendo vix unquam cogitaveram—occupare [Jesus] permisit. (AV, Prologus, 6a)

The real inspiration of the book—Ubertino restates—comes not from literary sources, which he lacked in his solitude on the mountain, nor from his own intellectual ability, but from Jesus. Initiatives to plan his work in advance all result in failure:

Because if I attempted to think of things in advance, Jesus changed them completely while dictating them to the scribe.

Quod si precogitabam aliquando, dum postea dictarem scriptori, ut sepius Jesus totaliter alterabat. (AV, Prologus, 6a)

Ubertino’s initial plan is to comment, as we said in the first part of the chapter, on some versicles taken from Bonaventure’s *Lignum Vitae*. This concise booklet provides Ubertino not as much with content as with a Tree-structure that Ubertino somewhat imitates. In Bonaventure each one of the twelve branch-chapters yields four fruits, for a total of forty-eight fruit-paragraphs, each one introduced by a short versicle. But according to Gian Luca Potestà, Ubertino’s Tree extends beyond Bonaventure’s intention.
In both these works [the *Lignum* and the *Arbor*] the tree functions to organize the subject matter around thematic areas. However, while in the *Lignum* the three sections refer exclusively to the life of Christ (*Origo, Passio, Glorificatio*), the five parts of Ubertino’s tree do not include only Jesus’ life, but also the history of the Church. 

Next to the Christological theme we have the eschatological theme.

In entrambe le opere, l’albero ha la funzione di suddividere la materia, raccogliendola attorno ad alcuni grandi blocchi tematici. Ma mentre nel *Lignum* le tre sezioni rinviano esclusivamente alla vita di Cristo (*Origo, Passio, Glorificatio*), l’albero di Ubertino nelle sue cinque parti non include solo la vicenda di Gesù, ma giunge a comprendere come frutto, anche la storia della Chiesa. Al tema cristologico si affianca dunque quello escatologico.¹⁶⁵

Ubertino’s book is devised in the following manner. The first section of the book (the roots) explicates the theme of Jesus’s incarnation; the second part (the trunk) talks about the life of Jesus from his childhood up to John the Baptist; the third book (the branches) expounds the time of Jesus’ preaching, from his baptism to the entrance in Jerusalem; the fourth book, and first to be written (the fronds, the foliage) “consists in the top [of this tree], referring to Christ’s exit from this world, through his passion and death, and to his glorification, resurrection and ascent” (*summitatem est de Christi exitu de hoc mundo per passionem et mortem, et de ipsius glorificatione, et resurrectione, et ascensione*) (*Prologus*, 8b).

Finally, the fifth book (the fruits) discusses the history of the Church, with particular attention to the experience of St. Francis, *alter Christus*, thus introducing a resolute apocalyptical twist. This circumstance made Marjorie Reeves think that Ubertino’s Tree came in fact from Joachim of Flora’s symbolic Trees. Joachim had in fact devised a Tree made of three smaller Trees, one on top of the other, each representing a different Age of the world, and a Person of the Trinity.

This combination of a work of personal and mystical experience with a philosophy of history gives to Ubertino’s book its highly individual character. It represents the

grafting of Joachim’s Tree of the generations of history onto the older stock of the
*Lignum Vitae.*

Potestà agrees with Reeves that the novelty of Ubertino’s Tree resides in its eschatological aspect, but he opposes Reeves’s opinion that Ubertino is dependent on Joachim, because in Ubertino the three Ages of the world are not assimilated to one specific Person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is in fact the beginning and end of history. Ubertino’s Tree is Christocentric. For this very reason, in figurative terms, Ubertino is closer to Bonaventure’s Tree, which, however, shows no sign of an eschatological dimension, although it displays to some the degree the future glory of Jesus.

In my opinion, rather than a sum of Joachim and Bonaventure, Ubertino’s Tree looks like something new. While Joachim’s *figura* is just a figurative expression of his thought, with no narrative force, Bonaventure relies on the structure of the tree for disposing his material. Bonaventure’s mental diagram seems to function primarily as an organizing principle to facilitate memory and aim meditation. In fact, according to Micheal Cusato, “a reflection upon the life and mystery of Christ is already seen, in *mere outline form*, in Bonaventure’s *Lignum vitae.*”

*In mere outline form* means that it should not be forgotten that Ubertino’s book must be seen as a part of the rise of a the new popular genre of the *Vita Christi*, whereas Bonaventure devises a diagram that seems to function primarily as an organizing principle to facilitate memory and meditation. Cusato speaks of “emotional identification” of the subject with the life of Jesus: a trademark that will become fundamental in the ensuing exemplars of genre, starting with Franciscan John de Caulibus’ *Meditationes vitae Christi*, once wrongly attributed to Bonaventure, and Ubertino’s *Arbor vitae*. Something not so yet developed in


Bonaventure’s scheme. Moreover, in the Middle Ages, “Every medieval diagram is an open-ended one; in the manner of examples, it is an invitation to elaborate and recompose, not a prescriptive, objective schematic.”

Ubertino surpasses Bonaventure’s diagram in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative terms. What was just a little bit more than a chart in Bonaventure’s hands becomes a fully developed metaphor that continually pushes the narration forward; not just the moralized narration of a story, but the narration of History. As much as in the *Lignum Vitae* one has a sense of stillness and immobility, the sense of progression and growth in Ubertino’s book is essential, compelling, and inescapable.

Ubertino also combines Bonaventure and Joachim’s Trees with some suggestions taken from Olivi, as I shall show, connecting the metaphor of the Tree with that of the Seed. In Aristotelian terms, the seed is of course a tree *in potentia*. Ubertino lets us see in what way he developed the idea to make his Tree grow, starting from the beginning.

When Ubertino comes to what he describes as the very first versicle upon which he commented, (*Jesus future providens*) moved by divine inspiration he begins to talk more diffusely about Jesus’ “cordiales dolores” (*Prologus*, 6a), Jesus’ innermost sufferings. Thus we know for sure that the chapter *Jesus futura providens*, the ninth of the fourth book, is the first one to be written. In fact if we look at the chapter more closely, we easily find the traces of Ubertino’s desire to get rid of the constraints of a limited commentary. To continue the tree-metaphor: one can find here the very seed of Ubertino’s *Arbor*:

Alia objecta dolorum fuerunt plura de quibus, magis transeundo quam explicando, aliquid tango, videlicet paupertas, fames, sitis, vigilie, labor, despectus, vituperia, infamie, irrogate injurie, ultra priditiones insidie, tractatus, et maligna consilia contra ipsum, ulterius captio, ligatio, vilissima tractura, persecutiones, percussiones,

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flagellationes, sputa, spinarum aculei, dura expeditio ad crucis supplicationem a iudeis facta, impia sententia mortis, in ipsum, crucis onus, conclave, extensio in patibulo crucis, agonia et transitus mortis. (AV, IV, 311a)

There were other sorrows of which, rather skipping than explaining, I touch upon: poverty, hunger, thirst, waking hours, work, contempt, insults, disgrace, inflicted offences, dangers beyond trachery, plots, evil advice against him, excessive cavils, dispute, vile dragging, persecutions, blows, flagellations, spits, thorns, painful walk to the place of his crucifixion the Jewish people inflicted upon him with unlawful death sentence, the weight of the cross, nailing, exposition to pillory of crucifixion, agony, and transition of death.

These are the themes that push Ubertino to say more. In the Prologus Ubertino suggests that all these things were in his heart since his novitiate.

At the very beginning of the Prologus, Ubertino develops the biblical symbol of a “Bundle of myrrh,” also briefly touched upon by Bonaventure. In the fiction of his work, Ubertino develops this image and makes it the starting point of his work. Ubertino kept hidden this Bundle of myrrh in his heart since his conversion, and this was but a small portion of the incommensurable vastness of the Life of Jesus, which is compared to a forest—an expression taken from Bonaventure:

huius libri ipse [Jesus] est singulariter actor et materia, finis et forma. Nihil enim in hoc libro intenditur nisi Iesu Christi noticia, et dilectio viscera, et imitatoria vita. Hic est speciose mirre fasciculus quem a primevo novitiatus mei inter ubera mea se collocare studuit, a quibus millesies milies per meam impuritatem sacrilegam crudeliter est eiectus. Nam a principio spiritus eius […], memoria fatagebat [sic] hunc mirre fasciculum colligere de tota sylva latissima sue virtuose vite. (Prologus, 3a)

Jesus is in a special way actor and matter, end and form. In fact this book is nothing but information on Jesus Christ, his intimate bliss, and imitative life. This is a scented bundle of myrrh that from the beginning of my novitiate I endeavored to hide in the inmost of my chest, from which it has been cruelly thrown off a thousand miles because of my sacrilegious impurity. In fact from the beginning, […], my memory strived to collect this bundle of myrrh from the vast forest of His virtuous life.

169 “My beloved is a bundle of myrrh to me. He shall abide between my breasts.” (Canticum canticorum, I,17)

170 BONAVENTURA, Lignum Vitae, in Opera Omnia, 12 (Quaracchi, 1902): 68-87.
Then Ubertino continues by suggesting that the reader should imitate what he himself had done, to make Jesus a Bundle of myrrh, to be kept in their hearts: far from being just a biblical reference, in Ubertino the Bundle of myrrh becomes the hinge of his mystical reflection. The mystical potentiality of Ubertino’s Tree seems to have been neglected in the previous analysis of the Arbor Vitae. In fact, while not a novelty, the mystical importance of the plant planted in the heart of the faithful has not been connected as it should to a overall assessment of the significance of Ubertino's metaphorical system. As scholars have been elsewhere noticed, this theme is also present in the large intersection area that around this time grew between mysticism and vernacular poetry, from Iacopone da Todi to Petrarch.

È in questa direzione che si vuole muovere, alla ricerca dell’albero d’amore-fulcro del pensare che cresce a partire dal seme-desiderio, radicandosi nel profondo sostrato dell’intimo, agostiniano abditum mentis. Un percorso avviato tra tradizione lirica e letteratura francescana.\textsuperscript{171}

It is in this direction that one should move, looking for the love-hinge tree that grows from the desire-seed, rooting itself in the deepest layer of the innermost, augustinian “secret place of the mind.” A path began with the lyrical tradition and the franciscan literature.

The theme of the tree planted in the heart—Boccignone again reminds us—was developed by mystical figures such as Chiara da Montefalco and Margherita da Cortona, preachers like Umiltà da Faenza, poets like the aforementioned Iacopone in his Amor de caritate (lauda 89),\textsuperscript{172} and also the Florentine poet Maestro Rinuccio, active in Florence around the time of Ubertino lectureship, and whose Tree so much resembles the metaphorical scheme adopted by Ubertino. In one of


\textsuperscript{172} IACOPONE DA TODI, in F. MANCINI (ed.), \textit{Laudi}, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2006).
Rinuccino’s sonnets the metaphor of the Tree is extensive, and in the same way of Ubertino—as we shall see soon—he calls it, in the first quartina, *imaginative.*

Love has *seed* and *leaf* and *flower*  
And *fruit*, like a planted tree  
With its *roots in the heart,*  
Although it is just *imagined.*

Amore è nascimento e foglia e fiore  
e frutto, a guise d’albore piantato  
fermat’à sua radice ne lo core  
avegna ched i scenda imaginato.\textsuperscript{173}

I argue that all these suggestions converge in Ubertino’s book, thus complicating his reception of the greater models provided by Bonaventure or Joachim of Flora. All the more as Ubertino’s preferences often are directed to minor, even unorthodox, sources, rather than the official ones. Considering only the “great” names, could result in Ubertino to a real *lectio facilior.* This said, Ubertino’s lingering on the biblical metaphor of the Bundle of myrrh could be read in the perspective of an attempt to develop a parallel between mystical consideration and narrative suggestions.

There is nothing more grateful, that you can do to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, than to spend your time in the blessed Jesus, man and God. *Make Him a Bundle of myrrh* that you always keep in your heart.

Nihil gratius potes facere Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, quam in ipso benedicto Iesu, deo homine, totum expendere tempus tuum. Et *fac de eo unum myrrhe fasciculum* qui semper inter ubera tua conmoretur. (AV, *Prologus*, 9a)

\textsuperscript{173} “Amore è nascimento e foglia e fiore / e frutto, a guise d’albore piantato / fermat’à sua radice ne lo core / avegna ched i scenda imaginato; / per lui si manofesta lo dolzore / e doglia con color trasfigurato / che son due degli afetti dell’amore / che di sovente ha l’omo enamorato. / Il fior d’amore è ’l primo nascimento / de lo disio ch’è posto nascoso; / la foglia-d è ’l disio c’alarga e monta / poi ven lo frutto a guar’ dà compimento / di quello onde lo core è disioso / si come lo frutto che per sol sormonta.” \textbf{MAESTRO RINUCCINO DA FIRENZE}, in S. CARRAI (ed.), *I sonetti di Maestro Rinuccino da Firenze,* (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca, 1981), sonetto IV.
Ubertino’s *fasciculus mirre*, the seed of Jesus’ life planted in his heart, becomes the very seed of the *Arbor Vitae*, as he explicitly and finally says, the Bundle of myrrh resulting to be the possible original working title of his book. Then Ubertino continues by suggesting that the reader should imitate what he himself had done, to make Jesus a Bundle of myrrh, to be kept in their hearts:

Nihil gratius potes facere Patri et Filio et Spiritui Saneto, quam in ipso benedicto Iesu, deo homine, totum expendere tempus tuum. Et fac de eo unum myrre fasciculum qui semper inter ubera tua conmoretur. (*Prologus*, 9a)

There is nothing more grateful that you can do to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, than to spend all your time within the blessed Jesus, man and God. Make Him a Bundle of myrrh, that you always keep in your heart.

Ubertino’s *fasciculus mirre*, the seed of Jesus’ life planted in his heart, becomes the very seed of the *Arbor Vitae*, as he explicitly and finally says”

Instigabar a Iesu quod sue passionis describerem totum cursum, et dum in his procederem, inmissum est mihi quod totam vitam Iesu transcurrerem, et parvulum libellum ex evangelica Silva transcriberem, quem *Dilecti Iesu Myrre Fasciculum* appellarem. (*AV, Prologus*, 6a)

Instigated by Jesus to describe the whole course of his passion, while proceeding in these things, I was inspired to cover the whole life of Jesus, and transcribe a small booklet from the wood of the Gospel that I would call *Bundle of Myrrh of the Beloved Jesus*.

The metaphor of the Bundle of myrrh had suggested to Ubertino a working title (*Dilecti Iesu Myrre Fasciculum*) that only in due time grew to a larger, unexpected extension and thus led to a different definitive title: *Arbor Vitae*.

Ubertino thus allows scholars to glimpse the different stages of composition of his work. I believe in fact that Potestà’s opinion that the inspiration of the *Arbor* is Bonaventure’s *Lignum Vitae*, while not incorrect, should be integrated with an idea of narrative progression originating from the biblical Bundle of myrrh. While the symbol of the Tree, as Potestà and Reeves magisterially explain,
had wide and diverse cultural diffusion in the Middle Ages, Ubertino wants to make the reader aware that he had arrived to a full comprehension, expression, and definition of that symbol in an original and existential way—progressively and incrementally, beginning with his personal *Myrrhe Fasciculum*.

At the end of the *Prologus* Ubertino finally shapes the aforementioned working title into its final version.

Hunc autem librum *arborem vite crucifixe Iesu censui nominandum*, quem in quinque libris sive voluminibus isto modo distinxit, ut primus liber radicem arboris contineat, [and so on]… (AV, Prologus, 9a)

Thus I have thought to entitle this book *Arbor vite crucifixe Jesu*, which I have divided into five books or volumes, in such a way that the first book comprises the root of the tree, [et cetera]…

Ubertino then comes to the conclusion that he has carefully prepared. Christ is the Beginning and the End of all things, but He is also the beginning, middle, and end of the book. Eschatological time and narrative time finally overlap, and comprise in one corpus temporality and eternity, progression and circular perpetuity:

Et sicut patet in infrascriptis versiculis qui plenius sunt digesti in tractatu libri et in isto brevi epitaphio et manuali libello totus decursus omnium creatorum [sic] a Iesu incipit, per Iesum transit, et in benedictum Iesum finit, tamquam in illum qui de se dicit [in] *Apocalypsis* primo: «Ego sum alpha et omega, principium et finis». Et ideo de isto benedicto Iesu *toto facio tibi unam arborem imaginativam*, cuius radix est eterna et temporalis origo. (Prologus, 9a)

As it appears in the versicles written below, which are more thoroughly discussed in the course of the book, in this short epitaph and in this portable booklet the whole development of all creators [sic] begins from Jesus, passes through Jesus, and has its end in the blessed Jesus, like he who says of himself in *Apocalypse* 1: “I am Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End.” Therefore of this whole blessed Jesus *I make for you an imaginative tree, whose root is eternal, and the origin temporal.*
The tree is imaginative, because things cannot be simultaneously eternal and temporal. Logically, not only the radix is eternal but also the summum, the foliage; the creation as well as the consummation of time at the end of the world. Ubertino applies this idea to his own book. While the beginning is “in time” (Incipit Arbor...), the root is eternal: the book is rooted in his mystical tie with Christ. This circumstance leads us to a subsequent specification, also to be seen in the metaphorical framework of the Tree.

When Ubertino comes to chastise the prelates and the religious whose knowledge of God is completely abstract and very little proven in life, he resorts again to a Tree. In fact these kinds of religious men are like trees that bear no fruits (Dante’s readers will notice the consonance with the line from Paradiso, “solo ai Decretali si studia”).

Totus mundus plenus est verbis, et quasi ad hoc solum studere videntur religiosi istius temporis, ut discant loqui, non facere, propter quod figurantur per arborem illam cui dominus maledixit, quia non habebat fructum operum quem Iesus esuribat in ea, sed tamen folia verborum, ex cuius maledictionem subsecutum est quod et folia aruerunt. (AV, III, 181b)

The whole world is full with words, and religious men seem to care almost only about this, to learn how to speak, and not do. For this reason they are represented in that tree, cursed by the Lord because it did not have the fruit of the deeds of which Jesus was hungry, but only leaves of words. From this maledixion followed that the leaves also withered.

Ubertino here touches upon the problem of traslatio we discussed above. The primitive church in fact had replaced the synagogue, which exerted a spiritual power without having spiritual understanding—intelligentia spiritualis—because they rejected Christ. The religiosi istius temporis, now says Ubertino, resemble the “arborem illam que dominus maledixit” (“tree that the lord cursed”), whose image is found in the Gospel, in a parable specifically intended, besides the moral meaning, to

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174 Bonaventure uses the expression “imaginaria quadam arbore” in his Lignum Vitae. Bonaventura, Lignum Vitae, in Opera Omnia, 12 (Quaracchi, 1902): 67-87, p. 68. However, Bonaventure's tree seems different from Ubertino’s imaginative tree. While the latter describes a sort of unnatural eschatological tree, the former uses the image of the tree just as a mnemonic scheme: “propter facilitatem memorie,” p. 67.
signify the Pharisees. These people knew the Law by heart but did not live according to it. The new religious Ubertino refers to also lack *intelligentia spiritualis*, for in fact they have spiritual power (in that they preach and confess and give sermons), but they show no deeds. Thus they are like dead leaves, like trees with no fruits.

On the other hand, in the way that the first Apostles enjoyed greater insight from God’s mysteries, St. Francis and his followers—the new *viri apostolici*—profit from a greater understanding of the Scripture and of History:

Sicut apostolis data est nova elevatio intellectus respectu veteris testamenti, sic et nunc viris apostolicis danda est spiritulis illustratio concordie utriusque. (AV, III, 182b)

In the same way that, with respect with the Old Testament, was given to the apostles a new intellect [elevatio intellectus], now it must be given to the apostolic men a spiritual understanding of the concordance of both testaments.

In Ubertino and Olivi, the acquisition of a spiritual intellect is at the same time progressive and recurrent. Olivi himself compares the history of the Church to a sphere:

Sextus status semper describitur ut notabiliter preeminens quinque primis, et sicut finis prorum et tamquam initium novi seculi evacuans quoddam vetus seculum, sicut status Christi evacuavit vetus testamentum et vetustatem humani generis, unde et quasi circulariter sic [sextus status] iungitur primo tempori Christi ac si tota ecclesia sit una spera. (LSA, 258)

The sixth status is always described as significantly more important than the first five, and in the same way that the end of the previous ones and the beginning of the new one, finishes in a way the old age, the status of Christ finished the old Testament, and the old age of the human race. Therefore almost as in a circle in this way [the sixth status] is connected to the first period of Christ, as if the whole Church was sphere.

But also to a tree:

Sicut arbor, dum est in sola radice, non potest sic tota omnibus explicari seu explicite monstrari, sicut quando est in ramis et foliis ac floribus et fructibus consumata—sic arbor, seu fabrica ecclesie. (LSA, 631)
In the same way that a tree, while is contained in the root, cannot be explicitly shown or exposed to everybody as when it develops branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, in the same way the tree, or development of the Church.

This short passage is one whose suggestive metaphorical potential Ubertino certainly had in mind while developing the *Arbor Vitae*. In more than one point Ubertino articulates the same notion:

Semper primus status respectu sequentis se habet per modum seminis, et sequentes ad modum messis, […] unde et primus se habet ad modum radicis, secundus ad modum fructus. (AV, III, 182a)

The previous status, with respect with the following one, must always be intended as a seed, and the following one as harvest, […] therefore the first one is the root, and the second the fruit.

In Ubertino, the eschatological potential force of the seed/root plays out in such way so as to express its full narrative and metaphorical potential. I suggest that next to Bonaventura’s *Lignum Vitae*, Joachim of Flora’s symbolic trees, and the biblical Bundle of myrrh, Ubertino developed to its full extent Olivi’s notion of *intelligentia spiritualis*, through the image of the seed-tree. It is in fact necessary that God’s mysteries be revealed at the proper time, in the same way that fruits are yielded in the proper season. The men of his time have the great privilege to be born at a moment in history in which the fruits are ripe. They can certainly all enjoy the taste of such fruit, if only they stop behaving like *illam arborem qui Dominus meledixit*:

Et ex his aperte claret quod ex tune mala cepit pullulare radix, que nunc in pessimum fructum excrevit. (AV, IV, 430a)

Openly appears that, since then, iniquities began to sprout out of the root, which now yielded worst fruits.

In the Gospel, Jesus compares the Kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds, but once it grows it becomes the biggest of all plants, and the birds seek refuge
on its branches. Ubertino retrieves this parable to suggest that, like those birds, also the readers should linger on the branches of his book, so that they do not become like dead leaves:

Ut semper possis habitare in Christo, compositum est libellum iste. Quem si vis te Christum sentire iugitur, cogita cor tuum tenere fixum et habitare in aliquo ramo huius arboris vite crucifixe Iesu. (Prologus, 9a)

This small booklet has been composed so that you could always live in Christ. If you want to feel one with Christ, try to keep your heart strong, and to dwell (habitate) in some branch of this tree of the life of the crucified Jesus.

As my advisor Teodolinda Barolini wisely advised, the last line cannot but recall Guinizzelli’s “Al cor gentil rimpaira sempre amore / come l’ausello inselva i · lla verdeura,” a major literary reference for Dante. But as the first Guido (Guinizzelli) was like a father, in poetry, for Dante, I suggest that Dante also took Ubertino’s advice quite literally and did not disdain to habitare in aliquo ramo huius arboris. This is what I will propose in the next chapter.

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Chapter III

“Facio Tibi Unam Arborem Imaginativam:”
The *Arbor Vitae* in Dante’s *Commedia*

1. An Imaginative Tree

In *Purgatorio* 32 and 33, Dante creates an allegory of history that hinges around the symbol of the tree. The griffin pulling the chariot of the Church eventually leaves it tied to a divested plant—one with no fruits or flowers—that grows upwards.

Io senti’ mormorare a tutti ‘Adamo;’
poi cerchiaro una pianta dispogliata
di foglie e d’altra fronda in ciascun ramo.
La coma sua, che tanto si dilata
più quanto più è su, fora da l’Indi
ne’ boschi lor per altezza ammirata.
‘Beato se’, grifon, che non discindi
col becco d’esto legno dolce al gusto.’ (Purg. 32.37-44)

The semantics of Tree that the readers find here and at various points in the *Commedia*, with all its numerous ramifications (branches, fruits, flowers, fronds, *selva, legno*), has only vaguely been associated with Ubertino’s metaphorical system as devised in the *Arbor Vitae*. Despite the overt

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similarities, most commentators, approaching the cantos from a Franciscan perspective, linked them instead to Olivi’s *Lectura* because in fact these are cantos of apocalyptic substance; but they disregarded the fact that the symbolism chosen by Dante was developed and provided not by Olivi, but by his disciple Ubertino, thus privileging the ideological aspects over the aesthetic ones.

Marjorie Reeves in her book on Joachim of Flora’s *figurae* recognizes distinctive trends of interpretation of the tree theme in the Middle Ages. Joachim’s trees are different from Bonaventure’s *Lignum Vitae*, for the latter sought inspiration “in the mystical symbol of the Life and Passion of Christ,” and it is thus devotional in kind; whereas Joachim’s tree represents the series of the human generations and is of an exegetical and eschatological kind. A third example is exemplified in Iacopone da Todi’s *laude*, as he represents the spiritual progression of the soul rather than the progression of History. Finally, Ubertino’s Tree appears to be a sapient mix of all these forms, and contains a sense of spiritual, historical, eschatological, and also narrative and metatextual resonance. For instance, Ubertino originally plans to dictate a short booklet—which he compares to as a small Bundle of Myrrh—that he eventually develops to the extent of a lengthy book. By analogy, the Bundle of Myrrh planted in Ubertino’s heart becomes a tree expanding its branches beyond the devotional intentions of the *Lignum Vitae*, and reaches the boundaries of Joachim-like eschatological exploration. Ubertino conflates the ecstatic, mystical experience of his staying on mount Alverna with history and eschatology, therefore making his metaphorical project vaster than the one offered by Bonaventure or Joachim—although obviously not separated from theirs—for Ubertino imprints a decisive biographical/ideological touch to it. Things happen *hic et nunc*, here and now.

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177 M. Reeves, B. Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore.*

178 *Ivi*, p. 360.
Ubertino’s Tree expands from the beginning of history to its end, from God’s act of creation to the future glory of the triumphant Church. The very core of such a vision is, of course, Christ’s incarnation, namely His passion signified in the symbol of the cross—a metonymy that indicates the true arbor vitae. In the Prologus Ubertino provides the readers with a poignant description of such a scheme, by pulling together the sense of his narrative, history, and, simultaneously, of Christ’s crucifixion.

Et ideo de isto benedicto Iesu toto facio tibi unam arborem imaginativam, cuius radix est eterna et temporalis origo. (AV, Prologus, 9a).

Therefore of this whole blessed Jesus I make for you an imaginative tree, whose root is eternal, and the origin temporal.

It is a beautiful, dense line that illustrates Ubertino’s iconography, eschatology, metaphysics, and spirituality, and that I will take as a starting point for our discussion on the ramification of Ubertino’s ideology in the Divine Comedy, as I suggest that Dante might have had this passage in mind when writing Paradiso 27.

Dante’s effort to create an opera totale, an all-inclusive system containing all aspects of life, often meets—and fully exploits—the tree theme, and the symbolism associated to it. Most often Dante relates the tree theme to apocalyptic discourse. A peculiar feature, I argue, of apocalyptic literature is in fact the polysemous significance of its narrative, i.e., an account of all things from the diachronic perspective of their ultimate end. To use Gianfranco Contini’s words, sorasenso statico (Nature) and sorasenso dinamico (History) overlap.179 Apocalyptic literature is basically a progressive disclosure of the divine in the world; not only in History but also in Nature. In this respect the Franciscan poetics of canticum fratris solis—and the sun is said unsurprisingly to have significazione—includes at an embryonic stage the seeds of aesthetics of the apocalypse. Pietro di Giovanni Olivi’s

understanding of it, for example, is but a continuation of the *Canticum fratri solis* by different means, as the Apocalypse becomes—to use Maria Corti’s expression—a real, stunning, “furia di segni.”

*Liber iste plenus est* huiusmodi similitudinibus, videlicet celi, solis, lune, nubium, imbrium, grandinum, fulgurum, tonitruorum, ventorum, avium, piscium, bestiarum, serpentum, reptilium, arborum, montium, collium, acris, maris, terre et aliarum plurium rerum. (LSA, 294)

This book [of the Apocalypse] is full of any kind of similes, that is sky, sun, noon, clouds, rain, hailstone, lightning, thunder, wind, birds, fish, beasts, snakes, reptiles, trees, mountains, hills, air, ocean, earth, and many other things.

Regarding the coincidence of these two levels—History and Nature—one should not forget the biographical aspects. Dante conjures up his personal destiny—and the eschatological destiny of all men—with the world and the History of the world: “l’essere del mondo e l’esser mio” (Par. 26.58).

“No poet or artist after Dante required an ultimate, eschatological destiny in order to perceive the unity of the human person.”

God’s eternal creation of all things (Nature), the sense of continuous progression of everything towards its teleological goal (History), and the individual fate of every man constitute the essentials of Dante’s apocalyptic discourse. As one combines such elements with the metaphor of the tree, Ubertino emerges from the background. Ubertino adds biographical and mystical aspects of some relevance to the apocalyptic discourse of Olivi, and frames it all within the metaphorical system of the Tree of Life.

Such a system has multiple ramifications in the *Commedia*. Actually the arboreal metaphor is so extensive that the very beginning of Dante’s journey begins in a *selva oscura*, which by coincidence recalls the *vastissima silva* of the Gospel from which both Ubertino and Bonaventure take the inspiration for their writing (respectively of the *Arbor Vitae* and the *Lignum Vitae*). But in *Paradiso* 27

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the readers could possibly find a less vague textual imprinting, whose complications I will try to unpack and connect with Ubertino’s system: “Facio tibi unam arborem imaginativam, cuius radix eterna et temporalis origo.” Dante provides a similar image to express the beginning and the passing of Time.

E come il tempo tegna in cotal testo
le sue radici e ne li altri le fronde,
omeai a te può esser manifesto. (Par. 27.118-120)

The metaphorical essence of this beautiful tercet—the extraordinary image of a reversed tree with the roots, so to speak, in the outer space, and the branches on earth—is all but extempore, though it certainly represents a high point in this line of expression. To understand this passage in its full meaning we should look at other examples of the same kind. A good number of them are to be found in its proximity. Trees, in this part of Paradiso, are not rare. In canto 26 Beatrice compares God to a gardener and His creatures to the verdant fronds of his plants, a metaphor that obviously appears as a sort anticipation of the aforementioned tercet, as the fronds represent all created creatures and their development in history, and the radice/ortolano represents the Creator (the first mover, in Aristotelian language).

le fronde onde si infronda tutto l’orto
de l’ortolano eterno. (Par. 26.64-65)

Again, in the same canto, Dante compares the term fronda as much to the whole creation of the world, as to human events. Everything is subdued to the inescapable law of the tempus edax.

Ché l’uso d’i mortali è come fronda
in ramo, che sen va e altra vene. (Par. 26.137-138)
Time and Nature have the same roots and beginning. But as Dante associates them with the eschatological tree of the Garden of Eden, he suggests that they also have the same development and thus make *sovrasenso statico* and *sovrasenso dinamico* coincide. By meeting Adam in this same canto, the poet adds to the previous references an eschatological aspect that overtly expands the tree system backwards, in the direction of *Purgatorio* 32, and forward, towards the amazing image of the reversed tree of *Paradiso* 27 that we cited above.

As Adam and Dante come to talk about the Tree of Eden that had been the center of the allegorical scene of *Purgatorio*, the scrutiny of God’s providential plan assumes precise contours.

Quindi onde mosse tua donna Virgilio,
quattromila trecento e due volumi
di sol desiderai questo concilio. (*Par*. 26.118-119)

This number—4302 years—encompasses the history of the Old Testament, from the death of Adam up to the moment in which Christ frees him from Limbo. Christ, of course, marks the beginning of the history of the Church. As Adam is the beginning of history, Christ represents its center and moment of renovation. However, that is not the end of the story, for the Church is going to undertake a further decline, and thus is eschatologically promised a second renovation. The second segment of the history of the world started by Adam is provided in the next canto.

*Paradiso* 27 is divided in two parts. In the first part, St. Peter criticizes the contemporary popes—“Caorsini e Guaschi” (*Par*. 27.58)—and praises the old ones: “e Sisto e Pio e Calisto e Urbano” (*Par*. 27.44), and others. In the second part, Dante and Beatrice ascend to the Crystalline

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183 “Non fu la sposa di Cristo allevata / del sangue mio, di Lin, di quel di Cleto, / per essere ad acquisto d’oro usata; / ma per acquisto d’esto viver lieto / e Sisto e Pio e Calisto e Urbano / sparser lor sangue dopo molto fleto.” (*Par*. 27.40-45).
Sphere, and Beatrice attacks cupidity and prophesizes eschatological renovation (again resorting to arboreal images: “...e vero frutto verrà dopo 'l fiore” [Par. 27.148]). St Peter’s speech, as we said, occupies the first part of the canto. His reprimand against the present governance of the Church has the contours of a condensed history of the Church, which ideally continues the history of the world hinted at in Paradiso 26. In particular, St. Peters renders a sense of the “circularity” of history by comparing early periods of the Church—more precisely, that of the Apostles and that of the Martyrs—with present times. The circular recurrency of the periods of the church is a peculiar Joachimist-Olivian idea. “Quasi circulariter sic [sextus status] iungitur primo tempori Christi, ac si tota ecclesia sit una spera” (LSA, Notabile VII). The Church, says Olivi, is like a “sphere,” for the things of the first status happen again in the sixth. Dante draws just such a circle by juxtaposing the violent circumstances related to the martyrdom of early popes to present circumstances. “Sisto e Pio e Calisto e Urbano,” as well as St. Peter himself, gave their blood for the Christian faith:

sparser lo sangue dopo molto fleto. (Par. 27.45)

Whereas, “Caorsini e Guaschi” (a reference to the practice of usury, and an allusion to John XXII of Guascogne, and Clement V of Cahors) drink the blood of the martyrs.

del sangue nostro… / s’apparecchian di bere. (Par. 27.58-59)

This line is an overt reference to the Apocalypse, and precisely to the appearance of the Great Harlot in the Chapter 17, “Vidi mulierem ebriam de sanguine sanctorum et de sanguine martyrum” (Ap. 17.6), “I saw a woman drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of martyrs.”

Nick Havely pointed out that Olivi “interprets this verse at some length […] with reference to the apocalyptic persecution of the dawning sixth period which, in his view, includes attacks on
Franciscan poverty." Yet, the treatment of Franciscan poverty is not included in the glosses to Apocalypse 17, although it certainly belongs to Olivi’s understanding of the sixth status. We find it in Apocalypse 12. “Insurrexerunt etiam alii non modici contra evangelicam paupertatem errores, contra quos est declaratio seu decretalis domini Nicholai” (LSA, 401). Also, Olivi views the attack against the *evangelica paupertas* coming not so much from the Church but from the philosophers, and specifically the followers of Averroes, in a passage contained in Chapter 9 of the *Lectura*, the one discussing the vision of the fifth trumpet from which Ubertino, as we shall see, will start his argumentation against Boniface VIII, and from which Dante will take inspiration for the invention of Gerione. Olivi seems more inclined, in my opinion, to hold the philosophers primarily responsible for the decline of the Church, rather than the Roman Curia. But the blood-drinking theme is important in Apocalypse 17, and here Olivi is explicit enough in indicating that the Great Harlot is red with the blood of the martyrs, and that the color of its temporal glory is gold. Gold and bloody red are indeed present in Dante’s canto, as St. Peter turns red along with the whole heavenly sphere. The poet might have been aware of this part of the *Lectura Super Apocalipsim*; yet, the theme of poverty which Havely emphasizes is not what is mainly at stake here. More important is the theme of theft and usurpation: namely that of the illegitimate misappropriation, usurpation, and misuse of spiritual (and temporal) power. I will return later to this point. Suffice it to say here that,


185 “Pro tertia igitur temptatione impugnativa vite et spiritus Christi, et predisponente ad sectam magni Antichristi, est scendum quod casus stelle de celo in terram habentis clavem putei abissi ipsumque aperientis est quorundam altiorum et doctiorum et novissimorum religiosorum casus in terrenas cupiditates et in mundanorum philosophorum scientias curiosas et in multis erroneas et periculosas. Acceperunt enim ingenium et clavem ad aperiendam et exponendam doctrinam Aristotelis et Averrois comentatoris eius et ad excogitandum profunda et voraginosa dogmata obscurantia solem christianae sapientie et evangelice vite et purum aerem religiosi status ipsius, in tantum quod quidam eorum dicunt paupertatem altissimam non esse de substantia perfectionis eius et quod eius est habere sufficientiam aut saltem necessaria in communi; quidam vero quod usus pauper, id est altissime paupertatis secundum debitas circumstantias proportionatus, non est de substantia eius.” (LSA, 456)

186 “Di quel color che per lo sole avverso / nube dipigne da sera e da mane, / vid’io allora tutto ’l cielo cosperso” (*Par*. 27.28-30).
with St. Peter’s speech, the poet concludes a short narrative of the history of the world that started with Adam in the previous canto, continued with the mention of the years of the Old Testament, and with the thematization, from St. Peter’s perspective, of the primitive and contemporary ages of the Church, and ending with the eschatological prophecy of renovation and the apocalyptic command to write what has been shown: “…apri la bocca, / e non asconder quel ch’io non ascondo” (Par. 27.63-66).

After St. Peter has finished his chastisement of the present popes, Beatrice and Dante ascend from the Heaven of the Fixed Stars to the Crystalline Sphere (or Primum Mobile). This is an important structural moment in Dante’s narrative, for it signals the passage from the realm of physics to that of metaphysics, and from history to eternity. While the first eight spheres belong—in medieval cosmology—to the physical world, the Crystalline Sphere, or Primum Mobile exists only in the divine mind: “non ha altro dove / che la mente divina” (Par. 27.109-110). The reader thus literally leaves the real world to enter into God’s mind along with Dante. The transition is marked significantly by the aforementioned tercet, from which we started our argument.

E come il tempo tegna in cotal testo
le sue radici e ne li altri le fronde,
omai a te può esser manifesto. (Par. 27.118-120)

“Omai a te può esser manifesto,” ‘now it can be evident to you’: Beatrice implies in her declaration not only an understanding of the Chrystalline Sphere, but also an understanding of the Imaginative Tree that Dante, like Ubertino, has progressively come to give shape. Like that of Ubertino, the image of the tree proposed is all but naturalistic. But the term “omai,” ‘at this point,’ indicates that if one has followed Dante step by step—servando mio solco—one should now be able to feel at ease even

187 Dante had received the same order from St. John, “…questo apporterai nel vostro mondo” (Par. 25.129), and Beatrice, “Fa’ che tu scrive!” (Purg. 32.105).
with the anti-naturalistic—or as Ubertino would say, “imaginative”—quality of such tree: “facio tibi unam arborem imaginativam” (AV, Prologus, 9a). Like that of Dante, Ubertino’s Imaginative Tree has its roots—so differently from the trees of Bonaventure and Joachim, whose radix is always temporal—planted in the eternity of God’s mind: cuius radix est eterna et temporalis origo. The poet and the friar share the same metaphorical system, the concept of the roots planted outside of History, before History, and actually before Time even existed: but with its fronds developing in History. The Imaginative Tree allows the poet to create a seamless transition between two crucial sections of the poem.

The imagery of Paradiso 28 can help us to understand the quality of such an Imaginative Tree. Here, Beatrice illustrates the system of the angelic Intelligences. The readers enter a metaphysical space, characterized by the description of God as a geometrical point—“un punto […] che raggiava lume” (Par. 28.16)—surrounded by the orbits of the love-driven angelic orders. Dante is surprised because the real world seems to have been reversed, as the largest spheres are now in fact the smallest, and God does not contain them but is contained, as a punto. To Dante’s astonishment Beatrice responds that a point and circles are not contradictory concepts. “…se tu a la virtute circonde / la tua misura, non a la parvenza / de le sustanze che t’appaion tonde” (Par. 28. 73-75). One must in fact consider not the dimensions (la parvenza) but the essence (la virtute), not the quantity but the quality. What matters is the amount of love these orbits contain, and by which they are moved and, in turn, move. But I do not want to talk as much about the actual symbolism of

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188 M. REEVES, B. HIRSCH-REICH, The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore. “Joachim’s trees are all emphatically rooted in time: each springs from a historical personage or order and grows upwards through time. This is true not only of the strictly historical ones whose growth is measured by generations, but also of the more mystical ones. The crown of each tree varies considerably, but not one grows beyond the end of time,” p. 322.

189 The symbolic meaning of this canto is explained with great clarity in A. MELLONE, Il canto XXVIII del Paradiso, in A. MELLONE, Saggi e letture dantesche, (Editrice Gaia: Salerno, 2005): 285-305.
Paradiso 28 as to underline the fact that Dante here reproposes, just in different terms, the logic of reversion that lies behind the image of the Tree of the previous canto.

In both cases Dante “deceives” the expectations of the readers, and provokes in them a radical stretch of imagination. First we are confronted with the image of a reversed plant whose roots are expanding infinitely into the Crystalline Sphere and whose leaves are instead growing on earth; then we are confronted with the image of the equally reversed cosmology, described as a punto surrounded by the angelic revolutions, instead of—as a medieval man would expect—a geocentric cosmos.

Certainly, the concept of reversibility is not uncommon in the Commedia and it is grounded, as John Freccero has demonstrated, in Dante’s theological and aesthetic project.

The narrative structure we have been describing, like the verse pattern [terza rima], privileges the ending, the moment of closure and makes it coincide with the beginning. This logical reversal is theologically the movement of conversion, of death and resurrection.¹⁹⁰

The circular movement of reversion/conversion that runs through the whole project of the Commedia reaches its peak with the reversed tree of Paradiso 27, but Dante actually proposes other variants of the figure of the reversed Tree. One case is to be found in the cantos of Cacciaguida. In Paradiso 18, the metaphor of the Tree is applied by catachresis to the whole heavenly system, viewed as a “tree that lives from above, and gives fruit always and never loses its leaves”: “albero che vive de la cima / e frutta sempre e mai non perde foglia” (Par. 18.29-30). The heavens are here described “as a tree whose supernatural essence can only be expressed by the biological miracle of growing downwards from the top.”¹⁹¹ A similar image is also in Purgatorio 22, and in the Garden of Eden,


where Dante sees the Tree of Adam that will become the center of his allegory of history. These trees feature a special crown that “widens the more the more it rises up”: “tanto si dilata / più quanto più è su” (Pur. 32.40). But in the cantos of Cacciaguida, Dante specifies that this Tree does not just unusually expand upwards, but actually “vive de la cima,” receives its life from above, not from below. The more Dante ascends towards God, the less naturalistic is his choice of poetic metaphors.

The tree “che vive de la cima” is a clear anticipation of the more radical inversion of the Tree of Time in Paradiso 27; actually the two images overlap. In both cases the top of the plant miraculously gives life to the stem, which “here begins as from its endpoint”: “quinci comincia come da sua meta” (Par. 27.108). Life comes from above, from a top that extends its extremities “in cotal testo”—in “such a vase,” that is, into the endless circle of the Primum Mobile. As the roots of such a tree fill up the Crystalline Sphere, they visually appear as an infinite circle. Quite interestingly, Ubertino also describes the roots of his Imaginative Tree as an infinite circle in a vision that requires some imaginative effort by the reader, given its peculiarity “Ex premissis superiori libro, patuit quod infinitus sit circulus quem facit huius sacre arboris radix” (AV, II, 80a), “As we said in the previous book, it was patent that the circle, that the roots of such tree form, is infinite.”

Ubertino, who spent nine years at the University of Paris, was not unaware of the metaphysical overtones of his statement, as he explains that a circle “est figura perfecta non habens finem vel principium” (AV, II, 81a). Ubertino makes the roots then coincide with the double birth of Christ, as Christ is the perfect symbol of the coincidence between divinity and humanity, as he is Creator and Creature: “[radix] in utraque nativitate dilecti Iesu est declarata consistere” (AV, II, 80b). The Tree of the life of Jesus has its roots in the endlessness of the Father, in a time before Time, and

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192 Olivi says in the LSA, that “circulum autem significatur unitas et eternitas Dei” (LSA, 302).
spans “ab eterne generatione Iesu de patre, usque ad gaudiosam nobis temporalem nativitatem” (AV, Prologus, 7a-7b), “from the eternal begetting of the father, up to the joyful temporal birth [of Christ].” The adjectives associated with Jesus’ double birth (eterna/temporalem) are the same employed in describing the Imaginative Tree, “cuius radix eterna et temporalis origo.” The concept of the double birth of Christ is not contained in Dante’s image of the reversed tree, but certainly—and all the more so if one connects it to the passages of Paradiso 26 (tutto l’orto / de l’ortolano eterno)—it holds together the act of creation and things created, Creator and creatures, History and Nature, sovrasenso statico and sovrasenso dinamico, as it is simultaneously eterna and temporalis.

But there is a second aspect that might confirm my hypothesis—that Dante had in mind Ubertino’s Imaginative Tree. Dante suggests, in devising the endless circularity of the roots planted in the Primum Mobile, that there is a proportion between the roots and branches, as he describes in proportional terms the system of the heavenly spheres, whose motion is not measured but rather measures all other motions, “as is ten by its half and its fifth”: “Non è suo moto misurato da questo / ma li altri son misurati da questo, / si come dice da mezzo e da quinto” (Par. 27.115-117).

Ubertino also says that all the parts of his Tree develop “proportionally, according to the roots”, “secundum proportionem radicis” (AV, III, 275a); and again that “in corrispondentia ad immensitatem radicis iam nunc, modo consimili, [arbor] dilatari incipit ingratissimos ramos” (AV, III, 135b), “proportionally with the vastness of the root, in a similar way, [the tree] began to expand ungrateful branches.” Ubertino’s Imaginative Tree is thus so conceived: the roots constitute an infinite circle, and the growing foliage expands upwards proportionally with the roots, because everything in the production of the “machine mundialis” must be done “according to a certain number, weight, and measure,” “in certo numero pondere et mensura.”193

193 “Universitas enim machine mundialis ab ipso dilecto iesu dei filio simul cum patre et spiritu sancto, producta est ex tempore in esse de novo, ab his tribus tamquam ab uno principio primo solo et summo, cuius potentia, licet sit immensa, disponit tamenomnia in certo numero pondere et mensura” (AV, I, 14b).
Ubertino’s iconography can be assumed as a hypothetical source for Dante’s trees, along with, or instead of, the one proposed by Marjorie Reeves, who compares the tree of Paradiso 27, the “albero che vive de la cima” of Paradiso 18, and the reversed trees of purgatory that “come abete in alto si digrada / di ramo in ramo, così quello in giuso” (Purg. 22.133-134), to Joachim’s so-called Tree-Circle.\textsuperscript{194}

2. “Esto legno dolce al gusto”

I have tried so far to clarify that no commentator has taken into account Ubertino’s metaphorical system of the Tree in deciding whether the friar had an influence on Dante—and to what extent—although many elements of the trees that Dante includes in the Divine Comedy have some counterparts in Ubertino. As we said, Ubertino conflates together multilayered semantics in the image of the Tree: devotional and Christological symbolism, biographical and mystical experiences, history, eschatology, and ontological paradigms. Many of such things are present in the Commedia. But I will now put aside the metaphysical and metaphoric issues related to this image, and I will take a closer examination of the ideological aspects that link Dante and Ubertino. I will do so by starting with a few considerations upon Ubertino’s syntagm ingratissimos ramos, aforementioned.

The adjective ingratissimos, ‘most ungrateful,’ by hypallage referring to the branches, refers in fact to the Synagogue, because the priests of the Synagogue opposed and prevented Jesus’ preaching and led to his death: “[Liber tertius] explicat huius arboris ramos in virtuoso predicationis decursus Iesu et […] in die palmarum, in qua pro nobis [Iesus] se deo patri obtulit holocaustum” (AV, Prologus, 7b). Ubertino (on the same wavelength of Olivi) establishes a parallel between the rejection of the Gospel by the Synagogue, and the rejection of the renovation of the Gospel by the carnal Church.

\textsuperscript{194} M. Reeves, B. Hirsch-Reich, The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore, p. 319.
Both the Synagogue and the carnal Church are responsible, so to speak, for the gran rifiuto of Jesus’s Gospel: thus they are ingratiissimos. On the literal level, “ungrateful branches” means, of course, branches with no fruit, like those that we encountered in Purgatorio 32. The Tree of Life is here at first completely dispogliata, naked, and it has “le ramora si sole” (“its branches so bare” [Purg. 32.60]). Actually it oscillates between barrenness and abundance. First deprived of any fruit, the Tree blooms as the Griffin attaches the chariot to the trunk; then the Eagle divests it of its leaves and flowers, but—as Mazzacurati suggests—Dante foresees its ultimate flourishing, in the final part of the canto and cantica, in his being “rifatto si come piante novelle / rinovellate di novella fronda” (“remade like new plants, renewed with new leaves” [Purg. 33.143-144]). This last passage might be in fact understood as a prophetic reference to the eschatological blooming of the Tree.

What is interesting though is that in Dante’s allegory of history we do not actually read of the second renovation of the plant. Benfell noticed that in Purgatorio 32 no special role is assigned to Francis or the Franciscans, a major point of Olivi’s eschatology, and in Ubertino who in fact, after the ingratiissimos ramos, talks about the renovation of the Church and its abundant fruits.

Abundantem fructum et desiderabilem arboris memorate, in quo inchoat quintus liber, ut sic deveniamus, ordinato progressu, ad illum quem principaliter intendimus evangelicum statum per minimum minorum Franciscum, immo per ipsum Iesum in Francisco, in ecclesia, renovatum. (AV, V, 409a)

Actually, Benfell’s opinion is only partially correct. There is in fact a loose reference to the Franciscans in Purgatorio. The pilgrim witnesses the descent of the Eagle into the Chariot and the ascent of Dragon from below, which breaks the car, and literally removes a piece of it. Disarrayed as


it now is, abundant plumage grows over the Chariot and covers both the wheels and the shaft: “e l’una e l’altra rota e ’l temo” (Purg. 32.139). But such abundance is not—as in Ubertino—abundance of spiritual fruits, but of temporal wealth. If the temo may easily be a symbol for the papacy, the two wheels allude to the two mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans (l’una e l’altra rota); the same metaphor of the wheels is used in the Heaven of the Sun, in the cantos dedicated to St. Dominic and St. Francis.197 Purgatorio 32 does thus contain a reference to the Franciscans, but it is not as special as in Olivi or Ubertino.198 In any case, no second renovation is included in the proposed allegory of history of Purgatorio 32, unless one accepts Kaske and Mazzacurati’s reading of the penultimate line of Purgatorio: “rinovellate di novella fronda” (Purg. 33.144). Yet, strictly speaking, the “…pianta / ch’è or due volte dirubata quivi” (Par. 33.56-57), remains deprived of its fruits, despite the ensuing prophecy of a fast approaching divine punishment. But what has this pianta been deprived of? By whom?

In Paradiso 26, with his usual and elusive irony, the pilgrim addresses Adam as pomo, ‘apple,’ and shows his desire to have some doubts clarified. By providing the requested explanation, Adam mentions the sinful transgression that caused his expulsion from the Garden of Eden: the fatal “gustar del legno” (Par. 26.115).199 Gustar is to be intended in Ulyssian terms, as Barolini observes:

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197 “Se tal fu l’una rota de la biga / in che la Santa Chiesa si difese / e vinse in campo la sua civil briga / ben ti dovrebbe assai esser palese / l’eccellenza de l’altra…” (Par. 12.106-110).

198 An acceptable interpretation according to Peter Armour only “if the procession is taken to represent the guides and guardians and retinue of Christianity not only at the time of Christ but ideally at all times.” In P. ARMOUR, Dante’s Griffin and the History of the World. A Study of the Earthly Paradise (Purgatorio, canto XXIX-XXXIII), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 7.

“Adam’s sin conceived not literally as the eating of the tree but metaphorically as a transgression, is one that Dante cannot discount.”

Yet, the tasting of the tree in some respect goes beyond the *trapassare del segno*.

Actually, the expression “gustar del legno” is present in Bonaventure’s *Hexaemeron*, where we find the syntagm *in gustum ligni*, but it can also be found in Ubertino. To the negative meaning of such contexts must be added a more positive meaning, for the metaphor of taste was becoming a recurrent one in contemplative literature, especially Franciscan. The traditional Victorine symbolism of sight (*per visibilia ad invisibilia*) was coming to be complemented—if not replaced—by the Franciscan symbolism of taste. As David Burr has remarked, with Olivi and Ubertino this kind of imagery becomes extensive and closely associated with contemplative and transcendental practices. The metaphor of taste is likely the second most used metaphor of the *Arbor*, and it is often strictly interwoven with that the metaphor of tree. Ubertino takes it a step further. The “tasting of the tree”—*gustus ligni*—actually becomes —losing its traditional metaphorical filter—the “tasting of Christ”: *gustus Christi*.

O anima devota prolonga tibi istum *gustum Christi*. (AV, *Prologus*, 8b)

Oh devout soul, prolong this taste of Christ for yourself.

Non solum homines sed etiam angeli suscipiunt excellentissimum divine bonitatis *gustum*. Quia in ipso et per ipsum *gustant* Deum ut suppositum personale. Et non

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202 See **D. Burr**, *Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom*, see especially p. 114. **E. Pastor**, “Giovanni XXII e il gioachimismo di Pietro di Giovanni Olivi.” Pastor underlines that one of the passages censured by the pope, contains Olivi’s conviction that the new status of the Church will not only be one of greater spiritual intelligence and understanding, but an experience “palpativa et gustativa.” In her discussion of the trees of *Purgatorio* Anna Pegoretti also reminds us of “il doppio significato di sapere, ‘conoscere,’ ma anche ‘gustare,’” in **A. Pegoretti**, *Dal “lito diserto” al giardino. La costruzione del passaggio nel Purgatorio di Dante* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2007), p. 110.
solum a Christo suscipiunt angeli *gustum* novum sed etiam a reverendissima matre eius, in qua et per quam omnes beati *gustant* Deum ut filium naturalem. (AV, I, 37a)

Not just men but also the angels received the supreme taste of divine goodness, because in Him and through Him they taste God as personal *suppositum*. And not only the angels receive from Christ the new taste but also from His most reverend mother, in whom and through whom, all the blessed taste God as natural son.

Ubertino’s *gustus* is not just a similitude, but also a real experience of ecstatic sweetness, and an anticipatory taste of the heavenly glory. Jesus’s *suppositum* is the true sweet fruit to be tasted. Therefore it can be said that the ambivalent aesthetics of taste assume negative and positive aspects, as it signifies spiritual advancement as well as regression: on the one hand it thematizes Adam’s fall; on the other hand it describes the spiritual experience, and as we shall see, it is strictly connected with the theme of poverty. Ubertino resorts to it to describe his notion of poverty.

Qui veram paupertatem in fervore spiritus imitantur, necesse est de celestibus vivant, quia de bonis terrenis non curant, et *dulces micas que cadunt de mensa angelorum, in presenti exilio, felici palato, degustant*. (V, 3, 425a)

Those who follow true poverty with passion of the spirit, it is necessary that they live out of celestial things, because they do not care about earthly things, and *taste the sweet crumbs falling from the table of the angel, with a happy mouth, during the present exile*.

Dante will use the same image, as we shall see, in *Paradiso* 2 and in the *Convivio*. If bitterness is a sign in the *Commedia* for spiritual death, loss, and disorientation (the dark wood of the incipit “tant’è amara che poco più è morte” [*Inf.* 1.7]), such bitterness extends to the whole of humanity, for Adam is later described as: “…il padre per lo cui ardito gusto / l’umana specie tanto amaro gusta” (Par. 32.122-123). With his rebellious “gustar del legno” Adam is responsible for the loss of the spiritual union between God and men, and for such reason, the tree of *Purgatorio* 32 bears no fruit. On the other hand, sweetness is a sign for spiritual acquisition (besides the fundamental quality of the *dolce stilnovo*), as becomes clear when Dante meets the his first soul in *Paradise*. 
O ben creato spirto che a’ rai
di vita eterna la docezza senti
che, non gustata, non s’intende mai. (Par. 3.37-39)

As sweetness is the heavenly reward for the souls, the readers can have a taste of it only by following Dante, “sevando mio solco” (Par. 2.13-15), “…ché forse / perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti” (Par. 2.5-6). Yet, only those who ate the bread of the angels on time, will be able to navigate on the deep “sea-salt” of paradise. Dante resorts here to the same image used by Ubertino to describe true Franciscan poverty: “qui de bonis terrenis non curant dulces micas que cadunt de mensa angelorum, in presenti exilio, felici palato, degustant” (V, 3, 425a).

Voi altri pochi che drizzaste il collo
per tempo al pane de li angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo. (Par. 2.10-12)

That echoes a passage of Convivio.

E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa […] a piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade.

As Ubertino suggests, the issue of spiritual nurture is strictly connected with that of poverty, and in Paradiso 26 St. Peter and St. Paul are said to be “magri e scalzi / prendendo il cibo da qualunque ostello” (Par. 21.128-129). I intend here to slightly moderate the weight of pauperistic ideology in the Commedia, to propose a different approach.

There are three aspects that one should keep in mind when investigating the poverty theme in the Commedia. The first is that of Franciscan poverty, of which St. Bonaventure speaks in

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203 Interestingly, while in Inferno 1 the pilgrim is smarrito, ‘lost,’ “che la diritta via era smarrita” (Inf. 1.3), in Paradiso Dante warns the readers that if they are not going to follow him closely they will probably be smarriti.

204 D. ALIGHIERI, Convivio, p. 10.

205 See CH. T. DAVIS, Poverty and Eschatology in the Commedia. N. HAVELY, Dante and the Franciscans. A. MELLONE, Saggi e letture dantesche.
Paradiso 12, accusing the friars of having gone astray. The second is the poverty of the Church. The third is Dante’s poverty.

With respect to Franciscan poverty, I believe that Dante’s position is close to that of St. Bonaventure. That Ubertino (and Olivi behind him as the initiator of the usus panper) must be blamed for having constrained (coarta) the Rule is probably the only passage of this section that can be taken literally. As mentioned in the first chapter, Niccolò Mineo, in substantial agreement with other commentators, posits that Dante does not share Ubertino’s opinion on the Antichrist, but fully accepts the radical notion of poverty dear to the Spirituals, such that poverty should be “non solo interiore, ma anche materiale.” In my opinion it is quite the opposite. Dante shares Ubertino’s idea on the Antichrist (we will see this later), but applies the concept of material poverty to the Church rather than to the Franciscan Order. Dante is actually close enough to the institutional perspective of Bonaventure on this point, as he envisions an Order made of humble friars living in fair convents and owning books to study. In Paradiso 22, for example, Francis is said to have started “umilmente il suo convento” (Par. 22.90). Remarkably Dante emphasizes humility over material poverty, a prerogative that he associates instead, in the very same passage, with St. Peter, who started “sanz’oro e sanz’argento” (Par. 22.88), and with St. Benedict, who started “con orazione e con digiuno” (Par. 22.89). Convento was at this point a controversial term, one that had divided the Order

206 N. MINEO, “Gli spirituali francescani e l’Apocalisse di Dante...”

into opposite factions. Dante did not use it *a caso*: he seems to choose it against the conception of poverty in the Spirituals.

As for the Church, poverty is not a moral value as much as it is a prerequisite for spiritual governance. Ecclesiastical poverty is a necessary prerequisite for the ruling of the Church as much as absolute wealth is necessary for the universal monarchy. Poverty here is rather *lack* than poverty. Franciscan poverty in fact conveys a moral value as it is voluntary, but the leaders of the Church need to be poor by definition, because “tutto è de la gente che per lei dimanda,” and alms “sunt pauperum Dei” (*Par.* 12.93). This adds to Dante’s concept of poverty a “social” or “sociological” dimension which also belongs to Ubertino who had expressed the same concepts, with much virulence, in the *Arbor*. “Pauperum sunt ecclesiastica bona [. . .]. Quicquid ultra usurpatur, furtum est, rapina est, sacrilegium est” (*AV*, I, 63a).

Actually, I believe Dante does not endorse radical (material) poverty as much as he struggles to prevent a “fatal gustar del legno,” the illegitimate appropriation of the fruits of the Tree of Life. Dante integrates the traditional *gustus ligni* in his poem as a sort of aesthetics of theft which in *Purgatorio* 33 will be concisely epitomized in the “pianta due volte dirubata qui vi”—the plant that has been twice despoiled. In this section of the poem, says Havely, “Recurrent [. . .] are acts of greed, rapacity and theft.”

As for Dante, his personal idea of poverty is very connected to the metaphor of taste that takes us back to the beginning of *Paradiso* and *Convivio*, and to the image of the angelic bread.

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208 The universal Monarch is not subjected to cupidity because he owns everything, and thus he cannot desire to have more: “Ubi ergo non est quod possit optari, impossibile est ibi cupiditatem esse. [...] Sed monarcha non habet quod possit optare: sua namque iurisdicatio terminatur Ocecanum solum: quod non contigit principibus alius, quorum principatur ad alios terminatur.” D. ALIGHIERI, in P. SHAW (ed), *Monarchia*, (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), I, xi, 11-12.


210 N. HAVELY, *Dante and the Franciscans*, p. 113.
Ubertino resorts, as we said, to a very similar image: “dulces micas que cadunt de mensa angelorum, in presenti exilio, felici palato, degustant” (V, 3, 425a). Ubertino thus specifies that such bread is spiritual nurture in presenti exilio. This is a biblical theme indeed, for the Jews also received bread from the sky during their forty-years-long wandering in the desert, but it is also a possible reference to Ubertino’s forced confinement on Mount Alverna. The theme of the exile (or rather the theme of the Odyssian return from exile), connected with the theme of food and taste, is also present in the grandiose metonymy of Paradiso 2.13.

Voi altri pochi che drizzaste il collo
per tempo al pane de li angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
Metter potete ben per l’alto sale
vostro navigio, servando mio solco (Par. 2.10-14).

“You may indeed commit your vessel / into the deep sea-salt, following me.” Eating the bread of the angels, per tempo, constitutes a prerequisite to eat such more food and be able to follow the poet in his poetical periplus on the “alto sale.” Salt and bread cannot but evoke, or rather preannounce, by attraction, the cantos of Cacciaguida, and the famous prophecy of exile there contained.

tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
lo scendere e ‘l salir l’altrui sale. (Par. 17.58-60)

Florentine and Tuscan bread is made with little or no salt. As an exul immoritus, during the infinite anabasis through the “deep sea-salt” of the courts of Italy, Dante was to eat the bread of others—pane altrui—which was salty, as it was produced outside of Tuscany. However, if one follows him closely—servando mio solco—sailing with him the deep sea-salt of the Commedia, he/she will be eventually able to have a taste of the angelic food.
Let us now return to where we started. Ubertino says that *vera paupertas* is the prerequisite to taste “the sweet crumbs of bread falling from the table of the angels,” and those who do so “in the present exile, with happy palate, taste [such sweet food].” Ubertino’s explanation of *vera paupertas* is provided within the ideological framework of *usus pauper*, one of Olivi’s most recognizable traits. Ubertino describes it as a prerogative of St. Francis, who lived “with a restrained use of other people’s things,” “*alienarum rerum vivere restricto uso*” (V, 3, 426a).

In Cacciaguida’s prophecy the word *altrui* is repeated twice and thus is part of a double, complicated rhetorical device (anaphora and chiasmus): *pane altrui / altrui scale*. Dante thus seemingly represents himself as the new Francis living “*alienarum rerum restricto uso*.” Yet, Ronald Herzman correctly points out that Dante has learnt to do so by *force majeure*, and not voluntarily, an important feature of Franciscan poverty. Nick Havely also stresses in his book that the exiled poet came to appreciate the value of poverty only later, for at the time of his *tenzone* with Forese Donati (around 1296), he considered it to have a social stigma. Actually, in the letter to the Counts of Romena, Dante still calls poverty *effera persecutrix*, ‘bestial persecutor,’ (*Ep.* II, iii, 8) while in the letter to the Cardinals—among whom also is Cardinal Orsini, protector of Ubertino—he claims authority precisely on the ground of his being poor: “*Nulla pastorali auctoritate abutens, quoniam divitie mecum non sunt*” (*Ep.* XI, v, 9). I would thus correct Havely in this way: Dante despises poverty, and continues to do so even after his exile. Finally, in the *Commedia*, he does take advantage of his poverty to authorize his poetical discourse, but that should not authorize us, as Mineo did, to think that Dante fully consented to the idea of Ubertino’s *coartazione*, or that Dante had a very idealized notion of material poverty, especially as applied to himself. Instead, he conveniently resorted to a wide range of ideas on poverty, whenever it fit his agenda.

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Finally, I think that the aesthetic of *gustus ligni* becomes in the *Commedia* a sort of aesthetics of lack, or aesthetics of theft. But this theme, already set off by Nick Havely, does not refer to a general deprecation of cupidity, if we understand cupidity as a vice to be morally tamed by poverty of spirit. In *Purgatorio* 33, the Tree of Adam is “due volte dirubata quivi” (*Purg*. 33.57). These two instances refer to two, precise, illegitimate acts of *gustus ligni*. But which ones? Adam’s taste of the forbidden apple (which Dante does not actually describe)? The descent of the Eagle into the chariot that left the tree again naked? Maybe the dragon’s snatching off a piece from the chariot? Or maybe the giant’s kidnapping of the chariot tied to the tree? Or perhaps, I suggest, one of such untold thefts should be connected to the next canto, *Purgatorio* 33, when Beatrice calls the Harlot with the term *fuia*, she-thief. Who (Havely argues that we should ask ourselves not “who,” but “what”), *who* then is this *fuia*, and *what* did she steal?

3. Dante’s partition of History

In his essay on Dante’s eschatology, Benfell—relying on Manselli and Davis—proposes a reading of *Inferno* 19 and *Purgatorio* 32 with an emphasis on the indebtedness of the poet to Olivi: “Dante is closer to Olivi than Ubertino.” Yet, Benfell acknowledges that there are some idiosyncrasies between the poet and the Provençal friar.

There remains [...] the more general question of the extent to which Dante *may be indebted simply to Ubertino rather than to Olivi*. This is a question that deserves a separate and much more careful study than I have space for here.

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212 V. S. BENFELL III, p. 34, a passage of note 65.

213 Ivi, p. 35.
The expression “simply to Olivi” is recognition that, while Dante might have read Olivi, or met Olivi during the years of his lectureship in Florence (1287-1289), it seems likely that he had known of his ideas through the filter of the *Arbor Vitae*. Time and place of composition of the *Arbor* are closer to the time and place of the making of the *Commedia* than Olivi’s *Lectura*; also Ubertino da Casale remained in Florence longer than his mentor (four years), and had been involved in the political and religious life of the Italian peninsula. In 1305 Ubertino’s protector, the Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, to whom Dante addressed [“Tu pre omnibus, Urse (Ep. xi, x, 24)]214 the eleventh *epistola*, was involved in a diplomatic effort to facilitate the return of the White party to Florence (including Dante). Despite Forni’s attempt to detect clusters of words in the *Divine Comedy* that could allegedly be traced in the *Lectura*, the mention of Ubertino in the *Commedia*, the quotes from his book, and the extension of the metaphor of the Tree, make it probable that Ubertino’s *Arbor* constituted a filter between Dante and Olivi. The correct perspective to address Dante’s indebtedness to Olivi is to not dismiss Ubertino as unoriginal, as Manselli did, but to understand what, if anything, Ubertino added to—or took away from—Olivi’s eschatology, through active mediation.

Robert Kaske underlined that the allegory of the history of the Christian Church at the end of *Purgatorio* relies heavily on the division of history into seven ages proposed by most commentators in the twelfth and thirteenth century, starting with the Victorines and Joachim of Flora.215 Kaske offers a hypothetical partition of Dante’s allegory into seven parts that should tentatively reproduce the seven periods of the Church, along the lines of earlier commentators. Among them, Kaske records Jacopo della Lana, *L’ottimo*, Francesco da Buti, Benvenuto da Imola, Pietro, and the *Anonimo*.

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[The first age of the Church represents] the time of the Apostles, with the Church in its original condition of innocence; the second as the time of persecutions and martyrs; the third as the time of heretics; the fourth as the time of ‘false brothers,’ or hypocrites; the fifth as a comparatively undefined time, most often involving consolation for past hardship; the sixth as the time of the Antichrist; the seventh as the time of peace following the death of the Antichrist.\footnote{R. Kaske, p. 93.}

Benfell fundamentally accepts the interpretation of Dante’s allegory of history in Purgatorio 32 and 33 as one disguised in a seven-folded structure. Yet, he emphasizes, over Kaske, the Franciscan/Olivian quality of such partition. Benfell argues that there are important similarities between Olivi and Dante, for they both see the history of the Church as a progressive decline towards a final restoration.

According to such an interpretation, the “bird of Jove” falling through the Tree striking the chariot (lines 109-117) represents the persecution of the church of the martyrs (second status). The fox that enters the chariot and is in turn chased by Beatrice (lines 118-123) represents the church of the fathers fighting against heresy (third status).

The subsequent action of the eagle descending once again onto the chariot, which in Dante signifies the Donation of Constantine (124-129), has no correspondence in the seven-fold partition of history, and it seems to be Dante’s original interpolation. Olivi himself considered the donation of Constantine a useful and rational (utiliter et rationabiliter) fact of the history of the church.\footnote{“Pontificatus Christi fuit primo stirpi vite evangelice et apostolice in Petro et apostolis datus, ac deinde utiliter et rationabiliter fuit ad statum habentem temporalia commutatus, saltem a tempore Constantini usque ad finem quinti status” (LSA, 261).} Olivi connects here somehow the Donation of Constantine to the fifth status, and not to the fourth one, but it should be kept in mind that in Olivi’s scheme the statuses are not only chronological periods but, more precisely, mystical moments of the history of the Church (for example even in the time of
the Apostles there are martyrs and doctors, and so on). So the forth status might be represented, in Dante’s allegory, by the dragon breaking out from earth and tearing away a piece of the chariot with its tale (line 130-135). This part of the allegory might be interpreted as the time of the hypocrites (Kaske), or more likely as Mohammed’s schism and the growth of Islam (Benfell), a point on which Olivi greatly insisted.

The fifth status comes after the dragon’s assault. The feathers originally offered “with good intention” to the Church grow now out of control and cover the shaft and the wheels of the chariot: “…l’una e l’altra rota e ’l temo” (Purg. 32.139). This represents Olivi’s time of condescensio, which in the fifth status started “to permeate every part of the Church, resulting in corruption.”\(^{218}\) Dante connects the fifth status with the Donation of Constantine, something unheard of in any commentary on the Apocalypse, and links this section to that of the eagle descending into the chariot. Even if Dante ever followed Olivi, he interpolated and accrued the density of the symbols by making them overlap.

The corrupted Church that results from this situation is the carnal Church of the end of the fifth status and the beginning of the sixth, because “initium quarte visionis non sic expresse distinguitur a fine tertia, nec initium sextae a fine quinta. […] in fine quinti status et initio sexti debet Babilon maretrix condemnari” (LSA, Notabile V). The sixth status, in Olivi’s scheme, will be characterized by the punishment of the meretrix magna, symbol of the carnal Church, the battle of the Antichrist, and the attack of the clergy and the Parisian masters on Franciscan poverty: “evangelice vite impugnatorum et philosophantium Antichristorum, fere omnes principales articulos fidei exterminantium” (LSA, 246). This period will include, according to Olivi and Ubertino, three great evils: “effrenata laxatio,” “hereticorum, manicheorum et valdentium […] pestifera inundatio,” and “aliorum ypocritalium religiosorum cum primis multiplicatio et spiritus Christi et vite eius ab

\(^{218}\) [Benfell III, p. 50.]
omnibus impugnatio, quamvis sub diversis modis et fraudibus” (AV, V, 447a). Laxism, heresy, and the attack against the spirit of Christ “sub diversis modis et fraudibus” are characteristics of the apocalyptic _meretrix magna_, which Ubertino also applies to the Antichrist, who attained spiritual authority “modo fraudolenti et fallaci.” But in the Apocalypse the _meretrix magna_ is described as a woman “ebriam de sanguine sanctorum et de sanguine martyrum,” sitting on a seven-headed beast, a detail that Dante also integrates in his allegory (lines 142-147). Also she prostitutes herself with king of the world.\(^\text{219}\) According to Benfell this period is contained in the following lines of Dante.

\begin{quote}
Sicura, quasi rocca in alto monte,  
seder sovresso una _puttana sciolta_  
m’apparve con le ciglia intorno pronte;  
e come perché non li fosse tolta,  
vidi di costa a lei dritto un _gigante_;  
e baciavansi insieme alcuna volta. (Purg. 32.148-153)
\end{quote}

Finally, the seventh status of the Church, that of peace after the battle of the Antichrist, is in fact, like the first status, not present in Dante’s allegory of history, that of the primitive Church of the Apostles. Kaske, however, correctly argues that we can see a representation of the first stage of the Church in the act of the Griffin tying the chariot to the base of the Tree of the Garden of Eden, which in fact is, in Ubertino, the symbol of history and the life of Jesus.\(^\text{220}\)

\(^{219}\) “Et venit unus de septem angelis qui habebant septem fialas et locutus est mecum dicens veni ostendam tibi damnationem meretricis magnae quae sedet super aquas multas cum qua fornicati sunt reges terrae et inebriati sunt qui inhabitant terram de vino prostitutionis eius. Et abstulit me in desertum in spiritu et vidi mulierem sedentem super bestiam coccineam plenam nominibus blasphemiae habentem capita septem et cornua decem; et mulier erat circumdata purpura et coccino et inaurata auro et lapide pretioso et margaritis habens poculum aureum in manu sua plenum abominationum et inmunditia fornicationis eius. Et in fronte eius nomen scriptum mysterium Babylon magna mater fornicationum et abominationum terrae; et vidi mulierem ebriam de sanguine sanctorum et de sanguine martyrum Iesu” (Ap. 17.1-6).

\(^{220}\) “E volto al temo ch’elli avea tirato, / trasselo al piè de la vedova frasca / e quel di lei a lei lasciò legato.” (Purg. 32.49-51)
Dante ostensibly identifies the papacy with the *meretrix magna* of Apocalypse 17, but this is hardly a proof that Dante had taken the seven fold partition from Olivi. Actually there are two important elements in Dante that are missing in Olivi but not in Ubertino da Casale.

First, no special role is bestowed upon Franciscans or St. Francis. There is a loose reference to the Franciscans line 139, “e l’una e l’altra rota e ’l temo” (*Purg.* 32.139), but as we said, it is indeed vague. *Purgatorio* 32 does thus contain a reference to the Franciscans, but it is not as special as in Olivi. Ubertino instead, while understandably spending many pages talking about St. Francis, also explicitly recognizes an equivalent eschatological role of St. Dominic. Maybe it is not by chance that the part of the *Arbor* where Ubertino suggests as much (beginning of book 5) has been considered by Cosmo, the first to notice it, one of the most likely sources of inspiration for the tercet of *Paradiso* 11.

L’un fu tutto serafico in ardore  
l’altro per sapienza in terra fue  

The second element, more decisive, is that the pilgrim *is* part of the allegory.

Ma perché l’occhio cupido e vagante  
*a me rivolse*, quel feroce drudo  
l’flagellò dal capo infìn le piante;  
poi di sospetto pieno e d’ira crudo,  
disiolse il mostro, e trassel per la selva. (*Purg.* 32.154-158)

There are three main actions here performed. First, the Harlot looks at Dante with an ambiguous, flattering gaze. This is the moment in which eschatology dissolves into history.

How can the harlot who personifies the Church incite the giant to jealousy by looking at Dante? The poet break the frame of his symbolic drama by insertint the first person singular of the figural mode, first callin Beatrice “la donna mia” in 32.122, then having the harlot turning her lascivious gaze “a me” in 32.155. Dante
thus causes the two types of allegory to intersect and creates an emblem for the Commedia’s trademark intersecting of the universal with the singular.\textsuperscript{221}

Second, as a consequence of the eye contact with the pilgrim, the Giant beats the woman. Third, the Giant steals the chariot, now transformed into a seven-headed monster, and takes it away. Whatever this sequence means, it contradicts Mazzacurati’s opinion that the role of Dante in the poem here switches from that of a protagonist to being a sheer spectator and external witness. It is rather the contrary. Dante makes the curve of his private biography cross that of history, thus bestowing upon himself a historical role made nobler by the eschatological connotation of the narrative. Whatever the Harlot’s gaze \textit{exactly} means, in the economy of such a vast allegory of history, it certainly signals Dante’s personal involvement in the events that the said allegory signifies. And the passage offers a further consideration to my general thesis of consonance between Dante and Ubertino: while Olivi makes the greatest effort to de-personalize and objectify his writing, Ubertino and Dante do exactly the opposite. I argue that this is one of the meanings that we can infer from the eye contact that occurs between Dante and the Harlot.

4. \textit{“Et miror si iam non est”}

The allegory of Purgatorio 32 is not the only moment in the Commedia in which history is presented according to Olivian partitions. A “condensed,” so to speak, history of the Church is provided in Paradiso 22, where themes and ideas that we have just encountered are interwoven with the narrative of the Sphere of Saturn, of contemplative wisdom.\textsuperscript{222} St. Benedict decries the decline of

\textsuperscript{221} T. BAROLINI, \textit{The Undivine Comedy}, p. 158.

monastic life and compares modern times to the good old days, when the monks “tennero il cor saldo” (Par. 22.51).

The reasons of St. Benedict’s discontent are two-fold, and are the same that St. Bonaventure had already anticipated in Paradiso 12: nobody seems to follow the Rule any longer, and the religious consider the “decimas, quae sunt pauperum Dei” (Par. 12.93) as their own private possession. We have previously associated this last point with Ubertino. But the friar also laments the behavior of his brothers, for once raised to high ecclesiastic positions, they do not care about the poor anymore, but only care pro se et parentibus: “Parentes ditant et de pauperibus non curant, et [...] solum ad congreganda temporalia pro se et parentibus anelare” (V, 3, 424a), “They make their relatives wealthy, and they don’t care about the poor, as they just aspire to gather riches for themselves and their relatives.” Dante uses the same arguments in Paradiso 22, as St. Benedict complains about the corruption of the Church.

ché quantunque la Chiesa guarda, tutto
e la gente che per Dio dimanda;
non di parenti né d’altro più brutto. (Par. 22.82-84)

For the said reasons, says St. Benedict, monasticism seems on the verge of decline. As true religious life seemingly undertakes a severe degeneration, the poet expresses the gap between the initial uncorrupt start of St. Benedict and later developments, by resorting again to arboreal motifs.

La carne d’i mortali è tanto blanda
che giù non basta buon cominciamento
dal nascere de la quercia al far de la ghianda. (Par. 22.85-87)

223 “Pauperum enim sunt ecclesiastica bona. Divitum fidelium devotione collata, quicquid ultra usurpatur, furtum est, rapina est, sacrilegium est” (AV, I, 63a).
Not all good things, says Dante, continue in a good way, for even good seed can develop into bad plants and fruits. This image is not uncommon in the *Commedia*, and in fact will be exploited two more times in the ensuing cantos: significantly, he will open and close with it the section dedicated to the encounter with St. Peter.

ché tu intrasti povero e digiuno  
in campo, a *seminar la buona pianta*  
che fu già vite e ora è fatta pruno. (Par. 24.109-111)

e vero frutto verrà dopo 'l fiore. (Par. 27.148)

In this case too we find a possible, if not likely reference in Ubertino, who applies the same metaphorical concept to St. Francis, whom he compares to a good root from which bad fruits are born.

Clare patet que perfectissimus zelator fuerit altissime paupertatis et illius qui vere evangelica dici. Et ex his aperte claret, que ex tune *mala cepit pullulare radix* que nunc in *pessimus fructus* excrevit. (AV, V, 430a)

[Francis] was a perfect seeker of the highest kind of poverty, that which can be really said “evangelica.” Thereby it openly appears that, since then, iniquities began to sprout out off the root, which now yielded worst fruits.

Ubertinian motifs in *Paradiso* 22 are abundant, and in fact they all seem a prelude to Dante’s adherence of Ubertino’s conception of history. We should notice first that the arboreal metaphor applied to the development of monasticism—*dal nascer de la quercia al far de la ghianda*—transcends in fact its naturalistic effectiveness. Trees, as I noted previously, signal the intention to delineate an eschatological discourse. The coincidence is again proven true. As Ubertino associates the image of
the good root with St. Francis, Dante associates it, in the following tercets, with St. Benedict, St. Francis himself, and St. Peter.  

\begin{quote}
*Pier cominciò sanz’oro e sanz’argento,*
\*e io con orazione e con digiuno,*
\*e Francesco umilmente il suo convento.* (Par. 22.88-90)
\end{quote}

Dante learned from Olivi and Ubertino that the history of the Church undertakes many alternating phases of decline and renovation, held together by seminal junctions. “Dal nascer de la quercia” is thus a mystical moment of renovation recurring multiple times during the course of history. As Dante warns us to direct our attention to such seminal joints in order to understand the whole course of the history of the Church—“…se guardi ’l principio di ciascuno…” (Par. 22.91-93)—he also makes sure to outline for the readers the moments of such progression: “*Pier… / e io… / e Francesco…*” Two things must be preliminary noticed. First, the relevance of Franciscan language and themes. Second the order of the three names.

As for the first point, poverty becomes a mark to designate not so much exclusively St. Francis, who is rather described as “humble,” but of his predecessors, who are explicitly “without gold and without silver”: “sanz’oro e sanz’argento.” However, contrary to what happens in the allegory of *Purgatorio* 32, where the role of Francis is not exemplified, to *Francesco* in *Paradiso* 22 is attributed a clear eschatological role.

Here we come to the second and most important point. The three listed names—St. Peter, St. Benedict, and St. Francis—are not chosen to (merely) signify their exemplary lives (“sanz’oro e sanz’argento,” “povero e digiuno,” “umilmente”), but to signal the eschatological stages of the universal Church, as milestones progressively disposed to occupy a full tercet. The three names mystically and respectively represent the stage of the *ecclesia fondativa* (the primitive and Apostolic

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224 In the *candida rosa*, the poet will also have St. Peter and Adam addressed as “due radici” (Par. 32.120), two roots.
Church), that of the *ecclesia contemplativa* (the Church of the anchoretic life), and that of the *ecclesia spiritualis* (the Church endowed with the *intellectus spiritualis* that fully understands the sacred Scriptures, as opposed to the carnal Church described above in the practice of nepotism, avarice, and perversion of religious Rules and the Gospel). Olivi and Ubertino summarize the seven statuses of the Church in the following manner.

Primis status est fundationis primitive [ecclesie], et precipue in giudaismo ab apostolis facta.

Secundus confirmationis probative per martyria facta a paganis in toto orbe.

Tertius doctrine illuminative ad clarificandum fidem et hereses confundendas.

Quartus fuit anachoritice vite in solitudine viventi austerissime.

Quintus fuit condescensive sub monachis et clericis temporalia possidentibus.

Sextus est renovationis evangelice vite et expugnationis secte anticeristiane sub pauperibus voluntarius nihil possidentibus in hac vita.

Septimus [...] glorie future. (AV, V, 409b)

The stages that are of greatest interest for us are the first, the fourth and the sixth. The first and last are clear enough, for the stage of the Apostolic Church is instituted on the primacy of Peter (fondationis), whereas the time of the spiritual Church is instituted on Francis (renovationis). With respect to the fourth status of the Church, however, there are problems. Olivi explains it briefly.

Secundum tamen Ioachim, libro III° Concordie sue, quartus status ecclesie non sumitur proprie a primo tempore priorum anachoritarum sed solum a tempore Justiniani Augusti usque ad tempus Karoli. (LSA, 273)

According to Joachim in the third book of his *Concordia*, the fourth status of the Church does not begin precisely from the first time of the first anchorites, but only from the time of Justinian Augustus up to the time of Charlemagne.

In fewer words, for Joachim the fourth status of the Church begins with the Emperor Justinian and ends with Charlemagne, whereas for Olivi (and Ubertino) “quartus [tempus] cepit a tempore magni Antoni” (V, 1, 409b). The reason the fourth status should start with Anthony the Great (ca. 251–356) is because in the Apocalypse, “dicitur que date fuerunt mulieri due ale aquile ut volaret in
desertum. Nam, Antonius magnus et doctor Athanasius simul fuerunt” (AV, V, 413b). The two saints, Anthony and Athanasius, lived a hermitic life in the desert, so they are like the two wings of the eagle mentioned in the text of the Apocalypse.

In sum, for Joachim, the fourth status of the Church begins in the fifth-sixth century and is contemporary to the Emperor Justinian; for Olivi it begins in the third-fourth century, and thus chronologically overlaps with the third status of the Church beginning with the Emperor Constantine. (But again, in Olivi, we should not forget, the statuses of the Church are mystical moments rather than purely chronological ages.) From Dante’s perspective however, both of these interpretations work, and both perfectly apply to St. Benedict, the champion in the Sphere of Saturn of Paradiso. If we accept Joachim’s chronology, St. Benedict (ca. 480–547) is coeval with the Emperor Justinian (ca. 482-565); if we accept the Olivian partition, then St. Benedict is the one who spread the life of the Fathers of the desert in the West, starting a long-lasting monastic and contemplative tradition. Thus, by choosing St. Benedict, Dante actively brings these two different interpretations to a convergence point and resolves the contradictions. St. Benedict remains the main representative and initiator of the contemplative Church that connects the primitive Church (Peter) with the spiritual Church (Francis).

Let us then move a step further. This three-fold partition—primitive, contemplative and spiritual Church (first, forth, and sixth status)—corresponds to a further grouping, developed by Olivi and accepted by Ubertino with some adjustments. The statuses of the Church can be compared to the moments of the day.

Sicut omnis dies habet mane, meridiem et vesperam, sic et omnis status populi Dei in hac vita. (LSA, 263)

In that same way that the day has morning, midday, and evening, so every status of God’s peoples in this life.
The first two statuses are like the morning of the Church. The third and the fourth status (chronologically overlapping) seem to be of high spirituality, and shine as a midday sun. The last two statuses show the decline of the Church, in the waiting for the eternal New Day of the seventh status.

Ubertino’s correction of this scheme relates again to his eschatological impatience, to his ability to make eschatology bend into ideology. We shall here compare the two texts, Olivi’s _Lectura super Apocalipsim_ and Ubertino’s _ Arbor Vitae_.

Nam eius mane commixtum tenebris idolatrie fuit ab initio conversionis gentium usque ad Constantinum. Eius vero meridies fuit in preclara doctrina et contemplatione et vita doctorum et anachoritarum. Eius vero vespera circa finem quinti temporis nимis apparet. _Et cum Babylon meretrix et bestia portans eam erit in suo summo_, tunc _erit_ nox eius tenebrosissima. (LSA, 263)

Nam eius mane conmixtum tenebris idolatrie fuit ab initio usque Costantinum. Eius vero meridies fuit in preclara doctrina e contemplatione e vita doctororum et anachoritarum. Declinatio vero huius solis fuit in quinto tempore cuius vesperam et iam quasi noctem [...] cum nimis doloribus exprimimur. _Et cum Babylon meretrix et bestia portans eam fuerit in suo summo—et miror si iam non est!—[...]_ tunc _dicitur_ nox eius tenebrosissima. (AV, V, 414b-415a)

Olivi’ future tense (_erit_) becomes present (_dicitur_), and Ubertino’s insertion of “et miror si iam non est,” not to be found in Olivi, is almost like a warning that Ubertino will push forward, in the ensuing pages, to identify the Antichrist as Boniface. That moment that for Olivi belongs to the near future, for Ubertino belongs in fact to the present.

In _Paradiso_ 22, the history of the Church is thus described with arboreal exactitude, “dal nascer de la quercia al far de la ghianda” (_Par. _22.87_), and summarized by the tripartite scheme: morning, midday, night. But for Dante—as for Ubertino—the “far de la ghianda,” is _bic et nunc_, here and now: “nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.” If we go back just one canto, St. Pier Damiani reveals to Dante that the eschatological promise of the renovation of the Church, and the vengeance
against the “moderni pastori” \((Par.\ 21.131)\) is nigh. Modern pastors—unlike St. Peter and St. Paul—say St. Pier Damiani, instead of going “magri e scalzi / prendendo il cibo da qualunque ostello” \((Par.\ 21.128-129)\), ride expensive horses, and cover the horses and themselves with heavy mantles, like “two beasts under one skin.” Yet, God’s vengeance will come. And it will happen during Dante’s lifetime, as the following is Beatrice’s gloss to Pier Damiani’s speech.

\[
\text{se ’nteso avessi i prieghi suoi,} \\
\text{già ti sarebbe nota la vendetta} \\
\text{che tu vedrai innanzi che tu muoi. (Par. 22.13-15)}
\]

‘You will see God’s vengeance’—says Beatrice to Dante—’before you die.’ Dante’s “sense of an ending,”\(^{225}\) is thus much more similar to Ubertino’s than to Olivi’s. Eschatological time and historical time (if not existential time), coincide in Dante as they coincide in Ubertino.

Dante, we could summarize, integrates the partition of history proposed by Olivi \((\text{mane, meridiem et vesperrami})\) through the ideological filter of Ubertino, from whom he derives the metaphoric system of the tree \((\text{dal nascere de la quercia})\) and the eschatological impatience of his analysis \((\text{et miror si iam non est})\).

5. “Anciderà la fuia”

During the trial against Olivi, in 1317, the inquisitor Bernard Gui testified that many French beguins had Olivi’s work available in vernacular translation, and that many of his followers had understood that Olivi had intended to identify the institutional Church with Babylon, the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse, riding the seven-headed beast. Ubertino himself seems to understand so in the \textit{Arbor Vitae}, except that, when summoned in Avignon—aware of the consequences of such a

position—he, as Havely says, “was publicly concerned to rebut this reading.” According to Charles Davis, however, “only Olivi, and not Richard or Joachim or Ubertino, connected the words of the Apocalypse unmistakably with Christian Rome.” Paulo Vian and David Burr on the other hand expressed doubts that the real intention of Olivi was to identify the Curia with the meretrix magna. As a matter of fact, while Olivi never explicitly linked the papacy with the apocalyptic image of the Great Harlot, the text of the Lectura allows room for the most radical interpretation. It is through this fracture that Ubertino smuggles in his most controversial thesis.

Ubertino does not directly associate the Curia with the meretrix magna; he actually does much more than that. He connects the mystical Antichrist not just “with Christian Rome,” but with the pope himself, and the battle of the Antichrist and the image of the meretrix magna appear to be strictly connected. The meretrix magna represents the carnal Church, and the carnal Church includes the followers of the Antichrist: “Tota multitudo ecclesie carnalis reverente ei [bestia] fuit subiecta” (AV, V, 466a). Among such multitudo Ubertino includes with no hesitation the prelates of the Curia, “Vidimus quasi omnes prelatos curie characterizatos signo bestie” (AV, V, 464b). In sum, on the one hand, Ubertino identifies the Antichrist as Pope Boniface VIII, on the other hand, the meretrix magna comprises the multitude of the Antichrist’s followers, including quasi omnes prelatos curie. The two are strictly connected, almost as if the Antichrist and the carnal Church were two sides of the same coin. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that the term “carnalis” refers not only to life conduct based on cupidity and carnal desires, but also—and most importantly—to the inability to read (thus understand and put into practice) the Sacred Scripture. This is the point that actually distinguishes

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226 N. Havely, Dante and the Franciscans, p.115.


the spiritual Church from the carnal Church, because spiritual men received the gift of spiritual intellect; carnal men did not. For this reason, the true spiritual men, says Ubertino, live almost hidden in the bosom of the carnal Church, and only to them is given the opened book (liber apertus datur) of God’s mysteries

Hi sunt viri seraphici legitimi filii Francisci qui dicuntur fructus vestris, quia in ventre carnalis ecclesie sunt absconsi et non apparentes. […] Istis datur liber apertus ut predicent populis tribubus et linguis quia eis datur intelligentia scripturarum. (AV, IV, 304b)

These are seraphic men and legitimate sons of Francis, who are said [to be] your fruit, because they are hidden in the bosom of the carnal Church, and they do not appear. […] To them it is given the open book, so that they prophesy to peoples, tribes, and all languages, because to them it is given the intelligence of the Sacred Scripture.

Of course, the intelligentia scripturarum implies, among other things, the full understanding of true poverty, of which carnal men have no knowledge (ignorant): “Virtuose mendicitatis spirituale solatium viri carnales ignorant” (AV, III, 197b).229

In conclusion, if the carnal Church is the part of the Church deprived of the intelligentia spiritualis, and the Antichrist is he who attacked the spiritual men living in true poverty in the bosom of the carnal Church (a clear reference, I argue, to Boniface’s attack on the Poor Hermits of Angelo Clareno and Pietro da Macerata, of which I wrote in the previous chapter), then the two apocalyptic images—that of the meretrix magna and that of the Antichrist—in Ubertino seem indeed to overlap and almost coincide: the friar associates their eschatological epiphany with the name of the Benedictòs, and more precisely, that of Boniface VIII.

Olivi did not dare to mention any name. But is it a legitimate question to ask who (or what) is Dante’s puttana sciolta? Kaske thinks that the Giant is the Antichrist and the Harlot is the Roman

229 The passage cannot but recollect Dante’s definition of poverty as “ignota ricchezza” (Par. 11.82).
Church. Benfell does not specify the eschatological role of the Giant, but associates him with Philip IV. Nick Havely, in line with Olivi’s paradigm of the Double Antichrist, suggests that the couple of Purgatorio 32—the Harlot and the Giant—represent, respectively, the mystical and the great Antichrist. Instead, if we accept Manselli’s opinion, that the mystical Antichrist was not an individual but rather a concept, or (as David Burr proposes) a combination of a lay king and a pseudopope, one might conclude that the couple formed by the Harlot and the Giant, together combined, is the mystical Antichrist.

I will here limit myself to note two basic, but fundamental, considerations. First, precisely because he is working within a poetical code, Dante combines signs of diverse provenance in single images of greater symbolic density; therefore, all the aforementioned characters can actually simultaneously signify more than one thing. For example, I think that the puttana sciolta could be the mystical Antichrist and the meretrix magna at the same time. Similarly, the Giant and the Harlot can together represent the mystical Antichrist; but if from a different perspective, the Giant could also represent the great Antichrist, and the puttana (could represent) the apocalyptic meretrix magna, for in Ubertino’s system it is the great Antichrist that will punish Babylon, the meretrix magna: “Apertus Antichristus faciet iudicium de Babilone” (AV, V, 461b). The same could also be said of the Cinquecento diece e cinque that “anciderà la fuia”.

Secondly, in assessing the identity of the puttana sciolta, an historical approach seemingly fits better than an eschatological one. I would rather ask who rather than what is (or: who are) the puttana sciolta. The Harlot’s very gaze at Dante proves that, implicitly, the poet allegorizes historical characters. Actually, whatever the apocalyptic meaning of the Giant and the Harlot is, the historical identification seems easy enough. The Giant can be identified, if Jacopo della Lana is correct, as I
think he is, as Philip IV: “Per lo gigante intende quelli della casa di Francia.”

The Harlot can be indentified as a pope, or some popes.

On this last point, should the readers have any doubt about the candidates, Dante provides some clues in *Inferno* 19, where the same apocalyptic image of the *meretrix magna* is again employed. “Colei che siede sopra l’acque / puttaneggiar coi regi a lui fu vista…” (Purg. 19.107-108). The popes mentioned or alluded to, in *Inferno* 19, are Nicholas III, Boniface VIII, and Clement V. Although Dante is addressing Nicholas III, I will focus on the last two, because the expression *puttaneggiar coi regi* suits better the allegory of *Purgatorio*, if the identification of the Giant as Philip IV, king of France is correct. Also, in Dante’s pro-imperial ideology, the worst of all possible wrongs is precisely that of *puttaneggiar coi regi*, because temporal and spiritual powers, which are supposed to remain separated, would dangerously overlap. In his writings, Dante actually unwaveringly pinpoints the decadence of the Church to the perverse coincidence of the two jurisdictions—temporal and spiritual—that occurred with the Donation of Constantine. It is not by chance that harsh invectives against the Donation of Constantine are found in *Inferno* 19 as well as in *Purgatorio* 32. Dante makes clear that jurisdictional confusion of the powers is more nefarious to social and spiritual life than ecclesiastic wealth in itself. This is an important point because behind the issues of legalism, Dante conveys the notion of the carnal Church that we discussed above: the carnal Church is a group of people that not only indulges in simony or other earthly behaviors (*concupiscenza*), but most importantly, is destitute of spiritual intellect, a prerequisite of any spiritual authority. Should the pope be among them—or worse: the leader of them—that would create a “political” problem within the Church.

Interestingly, in the *Monarchia*, in a passage dedicated to the papal decrees, Dante employs an image very close to that of the growing plumage of *Paradiso* 32. Those founding their authority, says

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Dante, not on the Gospel, but on the false authority of legal documents, are far from the truth: “Excludendi sunt alii qui, corvorum plumis operti, oves albas in grege Domini se iactant” (Mon. III, iv, 17). Those purely relying on papal decrees are like sheep covered with feathers. Going back to Purgatorio 32, we should mention that the Donation of Constantine is not a papal decree (although the humanist Lorenzo Valla will eventually prove that it was in fact a forgery of the papal chancellery). Yet, this is the seminal legal document on which the Church had wickedly, according to Dante, founded its access to temporal wealth. The feathers covering the chariot of the Church in Purgatorio 32 could thus be as much a symbol of temporal wealth as the nefarious practice of legalism that had become common within the Church, to the point of being detrimental to the knowledge and practice of the Gospel itself. In this respect, the growing of the feathers on the chariot, in Purgatorio 32, seemingly anticipates the open condemnation of legalism of Paradiso 9.

Per questo l'Evangelio e i dottori magni
son derelitti, e solo ai Decretali
si studia, si che pare a' lor vivagni.
A questo intende il papa e ' cardinali.\(^{231}\) (Par. 9.133-136)

Harsh condemnation of the Donation of Constantine is also present, not surprisingly, in Inferno 19, as a sure sign of Dante's intention to thematize possession of spiritual intellect as opposed to sheer spiritual power. This will result even more clearly if we link this last point to other details of the canto, which will make the sin here punished—simony—seem almost a mere pretext or starting

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\(^{231}\) This passage might be an echo of Ubertino, although the friar does not talk about papal bulls, but about the fact that the Gospel of Christ is ignored or misunderstood: “Nam totus mundus plenus est verbis et quasi ad hoc solum studere videntur religiosi istius temporis, ut discant loqui, non facere” (AV, III, 181b). “Et quanto [magna pars religiosorum] ligunt in scriptis non intelligunt” (AV, III, 229a). Also, one of the first references to the mystical Antichrist in the Arbor Vitae hinges precisely on the issue of legalism and vain knowledge: “Sicut incarnata veritas [Iesus] in predicatone sua elegit pauperes, idiotas et simplices, sic Antichirsti astutos et dulces et huiusmodi scientia habentes electurus est, quod videmus esse completum in mystico antichiristo” (AV, III, 166a).
point. The feet of Pope Nicholas, in a sort of reversed Pentecost, are surmounted by the tongues of flames (of the kind that the first Apostles had received on their head along with the divine gift of the Holy Spirit). Clement and Boniface, being doomed to the same punishment of their predecessor, are equally responsible for lacking spiritual intelligence. Thus, their spiritual authority is as void as their hunger for temporal goods, and Dante presents them not so much as simoniacs as illegitimate leaders. Clement is “lawless shepherd”—“un pastor sanza legge” (Purg. 19.83)—the greatest possible deficiency for one who bears the responsibility to lead others (“pensa che ’n terra non è chi governi…” [Par. 32.27-140]). Boniface took “a ’nganno la bella donna” (Inf. 19.56-57), so he is here presented as an illegitimate pastor who is later unable to absolve Guido da Montefeltro.

Dante starts here to undermine Boniface’s spiritual authority. In Purgatorio 32, by associating him with the puttana sciolta, he takes his argument a step further. Let us outline again the three main action in which the puttana sciolta is involved. First she looks at Dante. Then the Giants beats her. Finally the Giant takes her—along with the chariot-monster covered with feathers—into the wood. I will start from this last point, which seemed to most commentators a clear reference to the transferral of the papal curia to Avignon, and thus relates to Clement V, a French cardinal who actually never bothered to make it to Rome. The second point, “la flagellò dal capo infin le piante” (Purg. 32.156), seems rather, a reference to the ill-famed schiaffo di Anagni, the episode in which William of Nogaret, sent by the French king, occupies Boniface’s palace, and keeps him prisoner, thus causing great scandal in the whole of Christendom. (Boniface will die a month afterwards.) But the most striking, ambiguous, and interesting of all the above points is the first, which actually, in

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233 Ubertino also closely resembles Dante on this point, as he affirms that carnal prelates eventually lead astray the souls entrusted to them, dantes mala consilia. Dante’s readers will notice some consonance with the language of Inferno 27. “[Viri carnales] occidunt ad litteram, et si non manu propria, tamen aliena, et si non gladio, tamen lingua et consilio. Occidunt etiam animas dantes mala consilia, et non curantes aliquin furgere de lecto vel de mensa ut ministrent pauperibus sacramenta, parum curantes de anima, multum curantes temporalia” (AV, III, 176b).
the economy of the allegory, starts the whole chain of events that will lead to the final kidnapping of the Harlot: “l’occhio cupido e vagante / a me rivolse…” (Purg. 32.153-154).

Whatever the gaze signifies, it defines contours of eschatological exactitude; it denotes immanency over imminence. First of all, it relates directly to the pilgrim, and thus to unspecified circumstances of Dante’s life. Secondly, and consequently, it locates the time of the eschatological events not in the near future (like Olivi) but in the now (like Ubertino).

We need to go back to Ubertino. As we said in the utterance of his desperate cry “et miror si iam non est,” Ubertino implies that the time of Great Harlot riding the seven-headed Beast is not just coming, but is now: *tunc dicitur nox eius tenebrosissima*. But if Ubertino had referred only to the Harlot that would have been an unnecessary specification, because the carnal Church, which the Harlot represents, is actually the mystical outcome of the fifth status, which Ubertino already believes to be in the sixth (the two partially overlap). What Ubertino is really doing is implying that the battle of the Antichrist is actually ongoing, the battle between the spiritual men endowed with spiritual intellect, and those (the Antichrist and his followers) who are deprived of spiritual intellect, indulge in carnal lives, fraud and malice, and who attack the renewed spirit of Christ, whose true poverty, initiated by Francis, is the highest and most bright manifestation.

Dante’s most prominent achievement, in his relentless and continuous thematization of poverty and eschatology in the *Commedia*, as Nick Havely magisterially showed in his book, is that of the “authorizing of the Dante persona as poet and prophet.” Thus, at the end of *Purgatorio*—that is to say, at the end of the long *bildungsroman* that took him through hell and purgatory—Dante certainly sees (and presents) the pilgrim as a qualified member of the spiritual Church, the Church of those gifted with spiritual intellect. At the moment then, in which the Harlot looks at him, Dante

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recreates the dicothomy *ecclesia spiritualis/ecclesia carnalis*, which is the context of the battle of the Antichrist.

6. Antichrist

In *Purgatorio* 33 Beatrice offers a prophetic, thus obscure, exegesis of the allegory just described.

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io veggio certamente, e però il narro,
da darne tempo già stelle propinque
secure d'ogn' intoppo e d'ogn' sbarro,
nel quale un cinquecento diece e cinque,
messo di Dio, anciderà la *fuia*
con quel gigante che con lei delinque. (Purg. 33.40-45)
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Two things must be noticed. First, Beatrice’s words—“che io veggio certamente, e però il narro, / a darne tempo già stelle propinque…” (Purg. 33.40-41), and Ubertino’s cry—“et miror si iam non est!”—give shape to a parallelism that embodies the same sense of ongoing circumstances (*miror/veggio : iam/jà*). While this is not evidence for any direct influence, it signals a comparable eschatological awareness. The second point to be noticed is the attribute given to the Harlot: *fuia*. The *puttana sciolta* is thus a she-thief, and this could be, I argue, additional evidence that the image of *puttana sciolta* also represents the mystical Antichrist, and further pushes Dante away from Olivi and closer to Ubertino.

Havely correctly emphasized that Dante’s poetics of theft runs through *Purgatorio* 32 and 33. Yet, he is less correct, I believe, in dismissing the term *fuia* as a general reference to cupidity: “The entire process […] recalls the kinds of cupidity and theft that have been associated with avaricious
‘pastors’ and the corrupt Papacy in *Inferno* 19. Precisely the reference to *Inferno* 19 should make us aware that there is more than a general association with “avaricious pastors.”

In *Inferno* 19 Nicholas III mistakes Dante with Boniface, and accuses his unexpected interlocutor, Dante/Boniface, of having taken the Church with deception: “non temesti *tòre a ’nganno / la bella donna*” (Inf. 19.56-57). It is a strong statement, and one that is to be found only in Ubertino, who says of Boniface that “ad gradum summi pontificio non canonice sed *fraudolenter* ascendit, quia sic tyrannice *usurpavit*” (AV, V, 457a).

Ubertino’s wording (*fraudolenter*, *usurpavit*) cannot but make Dante’s reader think of the apocalyptic monster Gerione (*sozza imagine di froda*), and of St. Peter’s speech in *Paradiso* 27. Let us start from the latter.

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Quelli ch’*usurpa* in terra il luogo mio,
il luogo mio, il luogo mio che vaca
ne la presenza del Figliuol di Dio
fatt’ ha del cimitero mio cloaca
del sangue e de la puzza; onde ’l perverso
che cadde di qua su, là giù si placa. (Par. 27.22-27)
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The final reference to Satan, “…’l perverso / che cadde di qua su,” creates a symmetrical opposition with Christ “…la presenza del figliuol di Dio,” which alone allows us to situate this discourse within the dichotomous range of the battle of the Antichrist. Moreover, the expression “Quelli ch’*usurpa,*” besides recalling Ubertino’s wording, is a clear reference to Boniface VIII. Havely also correctly sees in it an allusion to John XXII, but “cimitero mio” and “luogo mio” are obvious metonymies for Rome, and during the pontificate of John XXII the papal court had been already established in Avignon. Boniface is thus openly accused of having usurped the papal throne, and of having made St. Peter’s tomb a sewer of blood and stench, whereby Satan is satisfied and satiated. In the same

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way that the concept of Boniface’s usurpation of the papal authority is spelled out clearly only in
Ubertino’s *Arbor*, so too is the subsequent concept of the vacancy of the papal throne. Ubertino
considered illegitimate the election of Boniface because he maliciously induced Celestine V to resign,
but Ubertino also considered illegitimate the election of his successor Benedict XI, because Boniface
had (illegitimately) excommunicated the Cardinals Colonna, so they could not take part of the
election of his successor, “Oves omnes non fuerunt vocate ad gregem, sed malitiose contempte, et
ideo pastor non est nec fuit hic qui sic fuit electus” (AV, V, 467b).

In conclusion, effectively explains Potestà, “dal tempo di Celestino la vera Chiesa si trova di
fatto separate da Cristo, né ancora si è ricongiunta con lui.” It is interesting to notice that, like
Ubertino, Dante also shows, this time not in *Paradiso* 27 but back in *Inferno* 27, the emptiness of
Boniface’s spiritual authority by evoking Boniface’s war against the Colonna family. In the very
moment in which Boniface proves to be strongest, taking the Colonna fortress of Palestrina, his
spiritual authority proves to be null. The preventive absolution given to his fraudulent advisor is
invalid. As the soul of Guido is disputed between St. Francis and a black cherub, the latter eventually
takes Guido to hell, providing, not without irony, a strict Aristotelian explanation.

‘…ch’assolver non si può chi non si pente,
né pentere e volere insieme puossi,
per la contradizion che nol consente?
O me dolente! come mi riscossi
quando mi prese dicendomi ‘…forse
*tu non pensavi che io loico fossi!* (Inf. 27.118-123)

Dante, who shows all along a great talent for creating unity through contradictions, in the
episode of Guido da Montefeltro eagerly resorts to the inescapable law of non-contradiction, and

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237 T. BAROLINI, *The Undivine Comedy*, especially the final chapters on *Paradise*. 
makes God’s justice prevail over God’s mercy. We cannot but notice that Ubertino also attacks the spiritual authority of the pope by resorting to the same kind of Aristotelian logic.

Volo absolvi a peccatis meis a papa, sed non ab observandis consiliis Iesu Christi. […] Et licet Papa possit facere de monacho non monacho, tamen numquam potest facere quod monachus observet regulam et habeat proprium. (AV, V, 448a)

I want the pope to absolve me from my sins, but not from the advices of Jesus Christ to be observed. […] And although the pope could make a non-friar out of a friar, still he cannot make a friar to [simultaneously] observe the rule and have possession.

Both Dante and Ubertino resort to the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction by which they define the limits of the spiritual power of the pope. What is even more interesting is that they equally seem to do so in a sort of ironic way, as if lampooning the kind of Aristotelian logic that really constituted the non plus ultra of scientific achievements of the time, and which moreover they never endorse unconditionally. In any case, Boniface’s absolution to Guido is null. This whole episode, as we said, happens in the context of the battle against the cardinals Colonna, whose so-called Manifesto di Lunghezza had been signed by Angelo Clareno, Pietro da Macerata (and also Iacopone da Todi).

From Ubertino’s point of view this context perfectly epitomized the struggle of the carnal Church against the spiritual Church, of the Antichrist against the renewers of the life of Christ.

In sum, Dante accuses Boniface of having taken “a ’nganno / la bella donna” (Inferno 19), of having taken a ’nganno Palestrina (Inferno 27), and of being an usurper of the papal authority (Paradiso 27). It appears beyond any doubt that Boniface took the papal throne by deception, and without any legitimate right. And actually Dante is even more explicit than this, as he has St. Peter say that his

238 Signed in 1297, the Manifesto di Lunghezza declared the illegitimacy of Boniface’s election. The document has been published in H. DENIFLE, Die Denkschriften der colonna gegen Bonifaz VIII, und der Cardinale gegen die Colonna, ALKG, 5 (1889): 509-515. On this point Olivi, already back in Provence, distinguished himself from the Italian Spirituals, and expressed his ideas in his letter to Conrad of Offida (1295) and in the later quaestio “De renuntiatione Papae Celestini” (1297), both published in L. OLIGER, Petri Iohannis Olivi. De renuntiatione Papae Celestini v. Quaestio et Epistola, AFH, 11 (1918).
throne is vacant: “il luogo mio che vaca” (Par. 27.23). One may argue that Dante’s lines of Purgatorio 20 constitute evidence of the contrary: “veggio in Alagna entrar lo fiordaliso / e nel vicario suo Cristo esser catto” (Purg. 20.87). Yet, it is not really so, for this passage seems directed towards the prerogatives of the French crown rather than those of the pope. Philip, being a simple king, did not have any right to challenge Boniface’s authority, although empty and illegitimate. However, this interpretation might be wrong, and in such a case we have to accept—and it is possible to accept, for poetry and Dante’s poetry especially, is in its very essence the place of coincidentia oppositorum—that we are facing a contradiction. But one thing is sure: as certainly as Dante in Purgatorio calls Boniface Vicar of Christ, he alludes to the vacancy of the papal throne in Paradiso 27. Charles Davis resolved the ambiguity by suggesting that St. Peter “was speaking only in a moral sense.” I doubt that St. Peter is speaking in the moral sense, as the multiple references to “real” popes and apocalyptic literature to be found in this section of the poem are, as we have shown above, radically historical, not moral.

To all these considerations we should add that Dante’s Boniface, like Ubertino’s Boniface, is depicted as a man devoted to deception, malice, fraud, and a usurper of papal authority, and that as such he resembles very closely the guardian of the malebolge, Gerione, with whom he shares many of the said characteristics.

E quella sozza imagine di froda
sen venne, e arrivò la testa e ’l busto
ma ’n su la riva non trasse la coda.
La faccia sua era faccia d’uom giusto,
tanto benigna avea di fuor la pelle,
e d’un serpente tutto l’altro fusto;

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239 “The contradiction certainly exists. I think it due to the fact that Dante was a poet and not a theological computer, as many would have him nowadays. Dante scholars are all too often driven to try to explain everything away.” J. A. SCOTT, “Imagery of Paradiso XXVII,” Italian Studies, 25 (1970): 6-29, p. 12.

240 CH. T. DAVIS, “Poverty and Eschatology in the Commedia,” p. 81.
due branche avea pilose insin l'ascelle;
lo dosso e 'l petto e ambedue le coste
dipinti avea di nodi e di rotelle. (Inf. 17.7-15)

Nel vano tutta sua coda guizzava,
torcendo in sù la venenosa forca
ch'a guisa di scorpion la punta armava. (Inf. 17.25-27)

The source for this section of the poem is the ninth chapter of the *Apocalypse*, where John describes the vision of the fifth trumpet, which includes the invasion of the locusts. Almost certainly Dante had also in mind the commentary on these versicles written by Olivi and retained by Ubertino, as we noted in the previous chapter.

Facies earum [erant] sicut facies hominum, quia fingunt se humanus et modestos. (LSA, 451)

*(AV, 456a)*

*Scorpio appareat facie blandus et quasi branchiis ad amplexandum expansis, sed cauda retro pungit et nocet suum toxicum infundendo.* (LSA, 449) (V, 455b)

Both Dante and Ubertino show a special interest in this part of the *Book of Revelation*. Dante uses the images of the locusts to devise the character of Gerione; Ubertino uses the images of the locusts to prove that Boniface is the Antichrist, by making his fraudulent intrigues for the throne overlap with the description of the apocalyptic monsters. Both hinge on concepts of fraudulence, malice, deception, and hypocrisy, which while not absent in Olivi, are never applied openly to any historical character. Dante and Ubertino eagerly do so. A connection between the two fictional personae of Boniface and Gerione seems to be confirmed by common features, and the numerous references from the *Book of Revelation* found in relation to their figures.

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241 "Super capita earum tamquam coronae similes auro et facies earum sicut facies hominum, et habebant capillos sicut capillos mulierum et dentes earum sicut leonum errant, et habebant loricas sicut loricas ferreas et voc alarum earum sicut voc currum equorum multorum curruntium in bellum, et habebant caudas similes scorpionum" (Ap. 9.7-10).
The text of the *Apocalypse* says that the locusts had faces *sicut facies hominum*. Olivi and Ubertino added three adjectives to this description: *humanos, modestos*, and *facie blandus*. Gerione is described as having a “faccia d’uom giusto.” Dante thus summarizes the three attributes (*humanos, modestos, blandus*) in just one: *giusto*. This word adds to the three prerogatives of humanity, modesty, and flattery, the etymological significance derived from the Latin “ius.” By emphasizing in *Inferno* 19 that Boniface has attained his position “*a ’nganno,*” Dante underlines that Boniface acts out of the limits of the *ius*, and that Gerione resembles him in appearing “facie blandus,” or *giusto*. If Gerione represents the physical, tangible expression of fraud—“sozza imagine di froda”—Boniface represents the epitome of its moral and historical counterpart. Boniface in the *Divine Comedy* seems to correspond perfectly to the apocalyptic image devised by Ubertino. I argue that Dante could have suggested implicitly that Boniface was the Antichrist.

7. “Uno la fugge e altro la coarta”

Boniface claimed in the bull *Unam Sanctam* that St. Peter’s successors had received from Jesus two keys, symbols of the fullness of power. It is the so-called doctrine of the *Plenitudo potestatis*, according to which both temporal and spiritual powers belonged, *de iure*, to the pope. Dante will write a treatise, the *Monarchia*, to confute the premises of this idea, and to reaffirm that temporal power in fact belongs, *de iure and de facto*, to the Emperor. In the *Monarchia* Dante faces the issue through a theoretical approach based on the logical method of Aristotelian argumentation. In the *Commedia* the poet challenges Boniface’s claim more indirectly, assuming Franciscan language and stances of pauperism, as Havely has demonstrated. This is all correct, except that Havely does not

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specify which Franciscan ideals Dante endorses, for Franciscan ideals were all but homogeneous, especially when intersecting with issues of papal power.

While on the one hand the Franciscan Ubertino had depicted Boniface as a usurper, on the other the Franciscan Cardinal Matteo d’Acquasparta was one of the greatest supporters of Boniface’s doctrine of *Plenitudo potestatis*, and greatly contributed to the drafting of Boniface’s bull *Unam Sanctam*, where the doctrine is expounded. A few months before the extension of the bull, in the spring of 1302 (when Dante coincidentally started his exile), Matteo gave a speech at the papal court, the so-called *Sermo de Potestate Pape*, directed against the King of France. Matteo declares he is ready to give up his own life for the *Plenitudo potestatis*, and goes as far as to say that those who held different opinions (a group that would include Dante) were nothing but heretics.

> Ita sentio pro ista veritate, quod auderem cam defendere contra totum mundum, et auderem *exponere vitam meam*, quod Summus Pontifex, qui est vicarius Petri, habet *plenitudinem potestatis*, quia certum est quod Christus, qui fuit dominus universorum, dimisit potestatem suam Petro et successoribus eius. [...] Unde qui dicunt contrarium *haeretici sunt*. [...] Unde *iurisdiction temporales competit Summo Pontefici, qui est vicarius Christi et Petri, de iure*.

I am so certain of such truth that I would dare to defend it against the whole world, and put my own life in danger, that is that to the High Pontiff, who is the Vicar of Christ, belong the *plentitude of power*, because it is certain that Christ, who was universal Lord, gave His power to Peter and his successors. [...] Therefore those who hold the contrary are *heretics*. [...] Therefore temporal jurisdiction is of *de iure* competence the High Pontiff, who is Vicar of Christ.

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244 The *casus belli* for the dispute was a contrast over the taxation of the French clergy, of which there also remains a vague echo in *Paradiso*: “Li si vedrà il duol che sopra Senna / induce, falseggiando la moneta, / quei che morrà di colpo di cotenna” (Par. 19.118-120). Dante seems to blame Philip IV for the fiscal and monetary politics that he imposed upon the French population and the clergy, causing no little turmoil, which eventually initiated a violent quarrel with Boniface, which ended with the publication of the bull *Unam Sanctam*. See G. GARRANI, *Il pensiero di Dante in tema di economia monetaria e creditizia*, (Palermo: Cassa di Risparmio di Palermo, 1965).

Of course, Matteo’s speech does not relate to a single person. Ubertino as well, although apparently directing his discourse to Boniface as an individual, at many points trespasses into general considerations. For example, when Ubertino celebrates Philip IV’s intention to start a posthumous trail for heresy against Boniface, he is in fact taking a part in the dispute over Plenitudo potestatis. Also, although Ubertino does not directly address the problem of the temporal power of the pope, he proves to be very “loīco” when he comes to define the limits of papal power and its spiritual contours: “licet papa possit facere de monacho non monacho, tamen numquam potest facere quod monachus observet regulam et habeat proprium.” While absolute, the authority of the pope is determined on the one hand by logical arguments, and on the other hand, by its adherence to the Gospel. Moreover, Ubertino’s thematization of the apocalyptic locusts, where he comes to compare Boniface to the rex locustorum, features word choices that include the key words of the dispute over papal authority: namely an eloquent allusion to the usus clavis, and references to the universality of power supposedly belonging to the prince of the locusts.

Ultra hoc possit dici quod prout per has locustas significatur mali prelati in quibus non est legitimas auctoritas, nec legitimus usus clavis. (AV, 456b)

These locusts represent wrecked prelates in which there is neither legitimate authority, nor legitimate use of the keys

Hic talis [Rex Locustarum] est princeps, vel per excellentiam malitie, vel per immensitatem potentie vel universitatem. (V, 456b)

This person is leader either for the excellence of his malice or for the greatness and universality of his power.

In the first book, Ubertino also calls the Antichrist plenitudo omnis malitie: “Sicut in Christo omnis divinitatis plenitudo inhabitat, ita et in Antichristo plenitudo omnis malitie” (AV, I, 36a), thus creating, by contrast, a verbal echo of the doctrine of Plenitudo potestatis.
Dante emphasizes in *Paradiso* 12 the contradictions determined by so profound a contrast: in the short space of a line the diverse ideologies of Ubertino and Matteo are formally polarized in the toponymic opposition Casal/Acquasparta.

ma non fia da Casal né d’Acquasparta,
là onde veggion tali a la scrittura,
ch’uno la fugge e altro la coarta. (*Par.* 12.121-127)

I said before that the discussion over the interpretation of St. Francis’ Rule is only the visible surface of St. Bonaventure’s speech. Actually, if we look at this passage simply from the point of view of the discussion on Franciscan poverty, we realize that the dichotomy Ubertino/Matteo is an “unbalanced” one—a *simmetria imperfetta*, to use an expression of Franco Fido.\(^{246}\)

While Ubertino was the recognized spokesperson and charismatic leader of the so-called Spirituals, Matteo d’Acquasparta was not directly involved in the quarrel over the Rule. Also, as Minister General (1287-1289) he lifted the censorship imposed on Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, the father of the doctrine of *usus pauper* that the leaders of the Community so much challenged during the *magna disceptatio*. Matteo even appointed Olivi lecturer in Florence.\(^{247}\) One may argue that Matteo’s name must have resounded in the ears of the first readers of the *Commedia* not as much as that of an official representative of the “Community,” but rather as an envoy of Boniface VIII. Matteo had been sent to Florence by Boniface in order to support the political faction opposed to Dante’s, during the time of Dante’s *priorato*, the highest public office of the commune.\(^{248}\)


circumstances were surely well impressed in Dante’s mind, as they are recalled the first substantial political discussion of the *Commedia*. In canto 6 of *Inferno*, Boniface’s duplicitous intervention in Florentine political affairs is foreseen in the coming of “tal che testé piaggia” (*Inf.* 6.69), a circumlocution indicating Charles of Valois, brother of the French King who, pretending to pacify the city, favored the Black party against the White. Likewise, Matteo had also been sent to Florence to help the Blacks. Matteo returned to Florence in December 1301. Immediately afterwards, Dante received the first charge of baratry that later led to his perpetual exile. While Dante was leaving his beloved city forever, Matteo entered Florence with all his shady intrigues. Thus, if we are to historicize Matteo’s figure, one cannot but register on the one hand his insignificant activity with respect to the theoretical debate over the Rule, and on the other hand, his fundamental role in defining and implementing Boniface’s ideological agenda. Matteo’s role as counterpart of Ubertino in *Paradiso* 12 thus becomes significant only inasmuch as we see Boniface’s presence beyond the two friars, and we read the dichotomy Ubertino/Matteo in terms of the dispute over the *Plenitudo potestatis*.

From this angle, Dante’s choice of Ubertino assumes a clearer focus. While Ubertino’s ideas on poverty are Olivian (and in this respect we cannot say, as many commentators do, that Dante is Olivian but still condemns Ubertino for assuming Olivian restrictive positions on poverty: only one of the two is true), Ubertino’s eschatology is way more radical, ideological, and historical than Olivi’s. My impression is that Dante is not at all convinced of Ubertino and Olivi’s idea of *usus pauper*. Yet, by mentioning Ubertino (and Matteo’s) names, Dante evokes eschatological and ecclesiological themes, in which he is much more willing to follow heterodox and original opinions.
The censure of Ubertino (non fia da Casal) in this respect, assumes a different light and a different raison d’être.

I can sum up my analysis in the following manner. While Ubertino associates Boniface with the Antichrist, Matteo is willing to give up his own life to support Boniface’s claim to Plenitudo potestatis. The dichotomy is far from being just theoretical. While Matteo had concretely acted as Boniface’s envoy to Florence, in order to implement his political agenda, Ubertino was part of the entourage of Napoleone Orsini, who had been negotiating the return to Florence of the Whites, and had been the protector of the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, the dissident Franciscans that Boniface (see chapter 2) had punished. Ubertino and Matteo are both Franciscans, and yet their ideologies and their political militancy cannot be more different. In Dante’s line “non fia da Casal né d’Acquasparta…” we should then read, behind the surface, as a sort of sinopia, a dichotomy of an ecclesiological kind: plenitudo omnis malitie vs. plenitudo potestatis. It is Pietro Alighieri himself to implicitly confirm such an “ecclesiological” reading, when he comments upon Paradiso 12.124-126.

Dicendo de fratre Mathaeo de Aquasparta, qui super sententiiis scripsit diminuendo; et de fratre Ubertino de Casali, qui composuit libellum vocatum Proloquium de potentia Papae, coarctando scripturam. Dicendo quod ad hoc ut Papa esset, Papa vere debeat habere quae Petrus habuit.249 Dante talks about Matteo d’Acquasparta, who wrote about the Sententiae constraining them, and [talks about] about Ubertino da Casale, who composed a booklet called Proloquium de Potentia Papae, constraining the Scriptures. [Ubertino] said that the pope, in order to be pope, should have that which Peter had [i.e. nothing].

I could find no information about Ubertino’s Proloquium mentioned by Pietro. However, Pietro and Benvenuto confirm that the real issue at stake here is not Franciscan poverty, but the

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249 Similar ecclesiological reasons can be found also in Benevenuto da Imola who, like Pietro di Dante, does not even mention poverty, and seems to associate Dante’s term “scrittura” not with the Rule but with the last book of the Bible! “iste [Ubertinus] siquidem nimius stringebat scripturam sacram in exponendo; scripsit enim suprimum librum Apocalypsis, ubi fecit fructissimas expositiones, et multa et magna mala dixit de ecclesia, iverse de pastoribus ecclesiae, propter quod liber eius damnatus est et prohibitus saepe in omni capitulo.” BENEVENUTI DE RAMBALDIS DE IMOLA, in J. P. LACAITA, Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam, (Florentiae: G. Barbéra, 1887).
power of the pope. And on this point, as for we can read in the *Monarchia* and the *Commedia*, Ubertino and Dante seem to be closer than the lines of *Paradiso* suggests. That said, why does Dante condemn Ubertino if, as we said before, he integrates some his most controversial thesis in the *Commedia*?

8. Dante’s censure of Ubertino

By evoking the presence of Pope Boniface behind the figure of Matteo, Dante operates a switch as subtle as it is powerful. He changes the focus from the issue of Franciscan poverty to that of the obedience due to the pope. The dichotomy Ubertino/Matteo is thus redefined in ideological and ecclesiological terms, and assumes fuller significance. Moreover, if one resorts to Havely’s logic that St. Peter’s reprimand in *Paradiso* 27 referred as much to Boniface VIII as, prophetically, to John XXII, we can equally infer a similar polysemy in *Paradiso* 12, for the canto was probably written around the years of persecution of the Spirituals (1317-1318). Pope John XXII persecuted Olivi and his followers, whom he derogatorily called *fraticelli* in the bull *Sancta Romana* of 1317. John also opened a new investigation on Olivi’s *Lectura*. In 1318 four friars from Beziers, Olivi’s hometown, were burnt at the stake because they refused to recant the opinion that the pope and the ministers had the power to impose on them a standardized form of poverty (for example, commanding them to wear longer clothes, or have cellars in the convents): the friars refused to obey the pope.

Following these traumatic events, the dispute over the issue of Apostolic poverty exploded in 1321. This was in fact an evolution of the dispute over Franciscan poverty started in Avignon with the *magna disceptatio*. Once John XXII had reduced to obedience the rebellious followers of Olivi in France, and Angelo Clareno in Italy, the fracture within the Order, instead of being healed, widened to a point where leaders of the Order such as Michael of Cesena and Bonagrata da
Bergamo, who first had supported the pope, declared him a heretic. In contrast to this, important Franciscan Cardinals such as Bertrand de la Tour stood on John’s side as resolutely as Matteo had done with Boniface. It was as if instead of reducing and diminishing, the quarrel over Franciscan poverty grew out of control and overflowed its delimited contours to come to submerge the whole Church. The risk that that might happen was so high that Ubertino, during the magna disceptatio, had to specify that he did not want to extend his arguments to the whole Church. The seed of contradiction, however, was contained in the Rule itself.

Regula et vita minorum Fratrorum haec est, scilicet Domini nostri Jesu Christi sanctum Evangelium observare, vivendo in obedientia, sine proprio, et in castitate. (Regula bullata, I)

This is the Rule and life of the Friars minor. That is to observe the holy Gospel of our lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, with no possession, and chastely.

By declaring the apostolic essence of their poverty, St. Francis and his followers indirectly challenged the successors of the Apostles to rethink their prerogatives in different terms. If Franciscan poverty was voluntary, the poverty of the Apostles was mandatory!

Nota quomodo definitio ipsa primo ponitur sub relatione ad Christum et eius evangelicam vitam in se ipso observatam, apolistis impositam, et in suis evangelis conscriptam. However this very definition is posited in relation to Christ and His evangelical life, it is observed by Himself, imposed to the apostles, and written in the Gospel.

During the years of Bonaventure’s generalate many detractors of Franciscan poverty held that the vow of poverty not only was not apostolic but might also lead to mortal sin, because it was

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impossible to respect. Bonaventure did a lot to refute these opinions. Nicholas III, in the attempt to end this dispute, affirmed in his bull *Exiit qui seminat* that Christ and the Apostles possessed nothing in common or individually (1279); thus officially endorsing the apostolic quality of Franciscan poverty. Nicholas also commanded that nobody discuss any part of his document, under the penance of excommunication.

But the embers lived on under the ashes, and the controversy finally became a conflagration, exactly one century after the approval of the *regula bullata* (1223). In 1321, John XXII lifted Nicholas III’s interdiction to discuss the content of his bull. The decision caused great turmoil at the Franciscan Chapter of the same year, which led to new hearings in front of the pope. Ubertino himself seems to have been summoned. Finally, John XXII asserted in the bull *Cum inter nonnullus* (1323) that the idea that Christ and the Apostles possessed nothing individually or in common was heretical, openly contradicting his predecessor Nicholas. He in this way removed one of the foundations on which the whole idea of Franciscan poverty was grounded, i.e., its apostolic quality, which Nicholas affirmed in order to defend the Order from its enemies, clergy and Parisian masters especially. Leading figures in the Order—among whom Michael of Cesena (the Minister General), Bonagratia da Bergamo, William of Occam—came to a complete breakup with the papacy, and later even accused the pope of heresy. On the other side, the Cardinal Franciscan Bernard de la Tour endorsed and promoted John XXII’s agenda and dicenda. Michael, Occam, and possibly Ubertino himself then found refuge at the imperial court. There they endorsed a filo-imperialistic campaign (also with the theoretical support of Marsilio da Padova’s *Defensor Pacis*) that often found and used many arguments of Dante’s *Monarchia*.

Although the dispute over Apostolic poverty had not yet exploded, at the time of the composition of *Paradiso*, Franciscan poverty and issues of papal power already completely overlapped, with significant eschatological overtones and with direct consequences for the groups in
which those ideas circulated. Olivi’s Lectura had been finally condemned, four Franciscan friars were executed, the Italian Spirituals were hunted down all over the peninsula. Ubertino himself seems to have been induced (or allowed) to retire in the Benedictine monastery of Gembloux, although he might have never made it there. Having been the spokesman of the Spirituals during the magna disceptatio, and having copied and radicalized Olivi’s Lectura in his Arbor Vitae, Ubertino with all likelihood was a suspicious character.

Dante’s condemnation in Paradiso 12 can thus be easily explained with the intention to remove or limit the possibility that somebody could associate him with the friar. In the very cantos in which Bonaventure condemns Ubertino, Dante in fact quotes the Arbor, and he endorses some of his most controversial theses, such Ubertino’s inclination to transform eschatology into ideology and vice versa, and the characterization of Boniface’s persona. Furthermore, the exaltation of St. Dominic and St. Francis does not end with an apology of their respective orders in Paradiso 11 and 12, but rather with a severe reprimand against them.

This helps us also to put Bonaventure’s persona in the right perspective. The “historic” Bonaventure, was, according to Manselli, “prudente e conciliante.” While Gian Luca Potestà describes his generalate thus:

Per Bonaventura, la garanzia del senso complessivamente positivo dell’evoluzione dell’Ordine, era fornita innanzitutto dal suo accrescimento e potenziamento, dal peso sempre più rilevante, da esso esercitato nella Chiesa e nella società.

Bonaventure defended with great vigor the idea of Franciscan poverty, against the attacks of the clergy and the Parisian masters, and no doubt lived a saintly life. In the circular letters sent to the

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Order he reaffirms clearly the necessity to live according to the vows with no indulgence. However, although he did not spare his brethren his fatherly rebukes, he never expressed the idea that the Order, of which he was minister general, was undergoing a general decline. On the contrary, Bonaventure exalted the expansion of the Order in terms of God’s approval. Consequently, if deviations from the genuine life of the *fraternitas* existed, they were to be understood as individual failures, and so punished.

St. Bonaventure’s speech in *Paradiso* 12 thus takes on a certain complexity, for it seems to hold together both these aspects. It is subjective as he indicts by name (Ubertino and Matteo) and as he encourages looking carefully for the good: “Ben dico, chi cercasse a foglio a foglio…” (*Par.* 12.121); yet, corruption is so epidemic that Bonaventure presents it as a structural problem.

The poetic of conversion becomes here a poetic of perversion, or—if one prefers—of inversion. St. Francis’ *famiglia* is going in the direction opposite to the one that St. Francis had indicated.

I found extremely interesting that Dante’s powerful expression of walking backwards is also present in Ubertino, as his brothers are “recedentes a via primorum patrum et a regule promisse.”

Ubertino frames this accusation against the Order in a long digression on the theme of walking, which also includes a major point of distinction between Ubertino and Bonaventure. As the latter
insisted upon individual responsibility, the former maintains that individual failures are in fact connected to the laxity of the community, and made more numerous and common by insufficient or shortsighted leadership. In fact, Ubertino seems to provide Dante with the image of the reversal of direction, in the verses “La sua famiglia che si mosse dritta / coi piedi a le sue orme, è tanto volta, / che quel dinanzi a quel di retro gitta.” As Ubertino discusses Moses’ vision of the burning bush he compares it to the Rule, “Quod in regula et paternis exemplis est ignis divini amoris et lux veritatis, que propter malitiam filiorum non potest comburere spinas deformationis […] regule” (AV, III, 147a), “The fire of divine love and the light of truth is embedded in the rule and in the examples of the fathers, but he cannot burn the thorns of the deformation […] of the rule, because of the malice of the sons.” The friars should consider done to themselves God’s commands to Moyses to remove his shoes.

Solve calciamenta tua. Id est, dissolve a te exemplum imitande exemplaritatis transgressionis et relaxationis communis, quia eorum exemplo male calciatus recedis. (AV, III, 147a)

Remove your shoes. That is to say: free yourself from the example of common laxity and transgression, because based on example [of the community], with your shoes unconveniently on, you move backwards.

If one does not get rid of his shoes, male calciatus, he ends up moving backwards, recedis.

Ubertino’s novelty in expressing what could seem like a platitude—that friars should not follow bad examples—is that he makes here an argument that is going to have a great importance in the future division of the Order, and comes to play an important role in the circumstance associated with the Pauperes Celestini. Ubertino denies that a friar should calibrate his poverty and life upon the standards of his community, because singularitas is not per se more reprehensible than communitas. If the community indulges in laxity the individuals become more easily inclined to break the Rule.
In the fifth book, Ubertino will be even less lenient. As he underlines on the one hand that Francis “calcaverit mundum et calcandum mandaverit proli sue” (AV, III, 421b)—a passage that Emilio Pasquini relates directly to the Divine Comedy: “corse e, correndo, li parve esse tardo...” (Par. 11.81)—and on the other hand, Ubertino continues to develop the metaphor of inversion/perversion of the Rule as backward movement.

Claudus (licet male) per viam gradatur! Non ergo hii sunt filii alieni, quia nec bene nec male per viam regule gradiuntur. Hii sunt subversores, et proprie regule scorpiones. (AV, V, 431a)

A limping person, although with some trouble, can walk on the street. Therefore, the illegitimate sons [of St. Francis] are not even like that, because they walk on the street of the rule neither well nor bad, as they are subverters and scorpions of their own rule.

Very effectively Ubertino notices that even a limping person can walk—licet male—on a path. But those who do not follow the Rule are not even limping; they are actually subversores and scorpiones, because scorpions move backwards.

Both attributes seem to recall the reversion/perversion indicated by Dante for the Order—quel dinanzi a quel di retro gitta—in a very interesting way. Not only do the friars walk in a direction that is opposite to that of the founder (subversores), but also they are like scorpions. As we have shown before, scorpions are apocalyptic beasts that Ubertino associates with the Antichrist and Boniface. Dante employs the same passages for Gerione (“ch’a guisa di scorpion la punta armava” [Inf. 17.27]), and says that once the pilgrim and Virgil mounted on the back of the beast, Gerione “là ’v’ era ’l petto, la coda rivolse” (Inf. 17.103). Through Ubertino the inversion of Gerione and that of
the Franciscan “familia,” seem to respond to each other as in a textual echo: if the Franciscan Order “quel dinanzi a quel di retro gitta,” Gerione *gitta davanti quel che ha dietro*.\(^{254}\)

A few lines after the aforementioned passage (*ibi sunt subversores, et propri regule scorpiones*), in an effort to refine his argument of reversion of the Rule, Ubertino opts for another metaphor, that of color, and so describes the irreducible distance between the Rule and what the Order is actually doing. Ubertino’s censure is “political,” not moral, “*Video tantam convenientiam inter regulam et vitam, inter patrem et filios, quantum inter album et nigrum*” (AV, V, 341b), “I see as much agreement between the rule and life, between father and sons, as between white and black.”

In *Paradiso* 22, a canto that, as shown before, contains references to the *Arbor Vitae* as well as connections to *Paradiso* 12, Dante actually seems to reproduce the very same concept of reversal, resorting to the same image of the colors.

\[\text{Pier cominciò sanz’oro e sanz’argento,} \\
\text{e io con orazione e con digiuno,} \\
\text{e Francesco umilmente il suo convento;} \\
\text{e se guardi al principio di ciascuno,} \\
\text{poscia riguardi là dov’è trascorso,} \\
\text{tu vedrai del bianco fatto bruno. (Par. 22.88-93)}\]

Besides metaphoric sameness (*quantam inter album et nigrum*), this coincidence is interesting because if Dante took the said image from Ubertino, he actually extends it not only to the Franciscan *familia*—as he did in *Paradiso* 12—but also to the whole Church (St. Peter) and to monastic life (St. Benedict).

The direction in which Dante seems to point at is thus not one of moral renovation, or moral inversion/conversion, but a “political” one, because his criticism does not refer to single individuals—although he does talk about single individuals—but to a general situation of diffuse

\(^{254}\) Ubertino says also that “*scorpio apparet […] quasi branchiis ad amplexandum expansis, sed cauda retro pungit*” (V, 7, 455b). Dante describes Gerione thus: “*Nel vano tutta sua coda guizzava, / torcendo in sù la venenosa forca / ch’a guisa di scorpion la punta armava*” (*Inf.* 17.25-27).
corruption. In political terms a historic approach is always more subversive than a moralistic one, as for example the popes of *Inferno* 19 are not just simoniaes but deprived of the spiritual intellect: “Sono i simonia da costituire l’antimodello dello spirito evangelico, e non si tratta di singoli tralaignanti, poiché la simonia ha contagiato la istituzione ecclesiastica nel suo complesso.”

Ubertino and Dante are aware of the revolutionary essence of their vision.

> E tu figliuol che per lo mortal pondo
> ancor giù tornerai, apri la bocca,
> e non ascondere quel ch’io non ascondo. (*Par.* 27.64-66)

> Tutta tua vision fa’ manifesta;
> e lascia pur grattar dov’è la roagna. (*Par.* 17.128-129)

> Ho io appreso quel che s’io ridico,
> a molti fia sapor di forte agrume. (*Par.* 17.116-117).

> Deus meus, quam durus est hic carcer veritatis tue, quod non solum veritas vinculatur et in plateis occiditur, sed ipsa veritas compellitur se ipsam negare, et sub dominio mendacii profiteri. Si hec mee confessionis contritio ad manus illorum qui regunt populum tuum deveniret, *tota huius libelli scriptura, puto quod non deficerem scarpellum scribe ad dilacerandum librum*, […] nec rabies furiosa ad comburandum ipsum, nec mihi nervus nec locus lutuosus deficeret. (AV, V, 439a)

> How hard is, my Lord, this prison of your truth! Because truth is not only tied up and killed in the piazzas, but this very truth is forced to deny itself, and to speak under the aegis of falsehood. If the sorrow of this admission of mine should ever fall in the hands of those who rule the people, I think that the whole writing of this book would not be lacking a scalpel of [some] scribe to destroy this book, […] nor furious wrath to burn it, nor I would be lacking a whip and a muddy prison.

> For these reasons Ubertino’s censure in *Paradiso* 12 is no impediment for Dante to say “quel che s’io ridico / a molti fia sapor di forte agrume,” but on the contrary, it works as a necessary ideological screen and obliged path, as important as Bonaventure’s apparent ideological endorsement. St. Bonaventure’s discourse actually has been always assumed as the *intectio auctoris*, the

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very ideology of the poet. Therefore, Dante’s apparent rejection of Ubertino led to a variety of justifications that ranged from the friar’s alleged lack of self-control and eccentricity (Kraus, Pasquini), to his opposition to the construction of Santa Croce church (Mineo), or to his supposed neutrality in conveying first Joachite ideas (Huck), and then Olivi’s eschatology (Manselli, Davis, Forni, Benfell). The possibility that Dante could have used Ubertino as a genuine source has not yet been accepted.

The purpose of this chapter was to get as close as possible to a better understanding of how Dante incorporates, not just Franciscan—or even Spiritual Franciscan—suggestions into his poetry, but how he handles the *Arbor Vitae* as a literary source, and how in fact Dante distinguishes the destiny of the book from the destiny of its author.

Actually, if we correctly locate St. Bonaventure’s condemnation of Ubertino at the level of narrative fiction—and correctly distinguish the *intentio auctoris* and *intentio operis*—we will see that such censure not only prevents Dante from using the *Arbor Vitae*, but facilitates its use. The ostentatious disapproval of a partisan man such as Ubertino paves the way for the poet to discreetly absorb Ubertino’s most extreme ideas elsewhere in the *Commedia*.

By assuming the point of view of acknowledged authorities—such as St. Peter and St. Bonaventure himself—Dante can make heterodox assertions as if they were orthodox; by rejecting ambiguous characters Dante can integrate heterodox opinions without being associated with them, and labeled accordingly. Language, sources, and characters, in the *Commedia*, are continually disguised as something else. In the pit of the thieves, snakes and souls exchange features and still remain the same. The same happens at the narrative level. In *Inferno* 19 the pilgrim is mistook for Boniface VIII, and stands next to the inverted soul of Nicholas come il frate che confessa. In *Paradiso* 27, St. Peter’s language is attuned to that of the Spirituals, but in the very same way, in *Paradiso* 24, St. Peter’s language is attuned to that of the Parisian masters: two opposed languages indeed, but poetically
associated with the same fictional persona. This allows Dante to ingeniously take advantage of St. Peter’s historicity while devising a character that is essentially anti-historical, for in fact Peter was a fisherman, as Ubertino said: “Iesus [...] non per oratores docuit piscatores, sed mira potentia, per piscatores subegit oratores!” (AV, III, 166a).

In Paradiso 12 St. Bonaventure’s speech, while containing a strong attack against Ubertino, employs important Ubertinian notions such as that of the reprimand against his own Order. Now, if we are to “break out of the hermeneutic guidelines that Dante has structured into his poem” and thus detheologize our reading of the Commedia, then we should be aware that Ubertino’s censure, non fia da Casal, functions in the same way; that is to say, as a sort of ideological disguise for a poet able to conceal the sources of his inspiration, and to bend them all to his purpose.

256 T. BAROLINI, The Undivine Comedy, p. 17.
Conclusions

As certainly as Olivi has influenced the eschatological debate in the first decades of the fourteenth century, Ubertino has provided mediation between him and Dante, and the nature of such mediation I hope I describe well in this dissertation. Scholars have always dismissed or diminished Ubertino’s importance in the Commedia for many reasons, but especially because, as is often the case in history, the most important, productive and recognized personalities drag into their field of attractions minor authors, who thus see their role and contribution, with greater difficulty, recognized. As Ubertino was certainly inferior to Olivi with respect to exegetical and theological production, scholars assumed that such inferiority could be enough to explain St. Bonaventure’s condemnation in Paradiso and assume that his role, in the Commedia, was thus limited to that furtive apparition beside Matteo d’Acquasparta. Ubertino was certainly more ideologically ambiguous than Olivi, and that may be the cause of the major difficulties in explaining why Dante still cites him. But if we look beyond limits, instead turning our attention to Ubertino’s eschatology, to his characterization of Boniface, to his development of the metaphor of Tree, then the links between his work and Dante’s poetic effort emerges more neatly, as I have tried to show. I just need to briefly recall here the major points of my research.

First, Dante, I argue, is much less inclined to accept Ubertino’s radical vision on poverty, for the Franciscan Order and for himself, than Mineo and other scholars assume he is. In fact, he applies a kind of material, non-voluntary, and thus non-Franciscan poverty only to the Church, and more precisely, to the hierarchy of the Church. Actually, I will not be out of place here to underline that Ubertino himself explains that his vision on poverty is not based on Olivi’s writing, but on Hugh of Digne’s commentary on the rule and Bonaventure’s Apologia pauperum (AV, III, 189); in
addition, the words often used then are arctare and its denominative arctitudo. One may think that Dante’s accusation of Ubertino of restraining (coarta) the rule, by the mouth of St. Bonaventure, was a response to this kind of passages of the Arbor, in which Ubertino claims to hide behind the authority of Bonaventure. It is as if Dante censured Ubertino’s misappropriation of Bonaventure on this point. But as Ubertino claims to hide behind Bonaventure’s authority on the usus pauper, he later accuses him of having failed to tell the real story of St. Francis and of the Franciscan Order, leaving out strategic sources such as the Commercium and the Scripta Leonis, in which the decline of the Order as a whole is described. This last point, which Ubertino makes clear in many passages, is in fact integrated by Dante into St. Bonaventure’s discourse, almost as a sort of compensation: the Order is undergoing a structural, fundamental decline.

Second, with respect with Ubertino’s eschatology and his description of Boniface, I underline the striking similarities between the Commedia and the Arbor, also based on the same wording: Boniface is a fraudulent usurper of the papal throne. Did Dante think that Boniface was the Antichrist? Dante never says so. However, he is certainly aware that there is potential room for that: “…se non fosse ch’ancor lo mi vieta / la reverenza de le somme chiavi / che tu tenesti ne la vita lieta / io userei parole ancor più gravi” (Inf. 19.100-103). What are the words that the pilgrim avoids using? Whatever words the Dante-the-personage avoided, they were nonetheless present in the mind of Dante-the-author. I am not going to make any argument ex silentio here, yet I cannot but emphasize enough that Boniface’s description in the Divine Comedy is strikingly similar to that of Ubertino’s, including the declaration of Paradiso 27 that the papal throne is vacant.

To finish, Ubertino’s metaphor of tree, with all of its ramifications, seems to sustain Dante’s allegory of history in Purgatorio 32, and to extend its roots to Paradiso, and especially in Paradiso 27, where Ubertino’s remarkable image (Facio tibi unam arborem imaginative, cuius radix eterna et tempolis origo), is echoed in Dante’s description of the physical cosmos.
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