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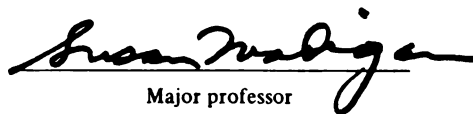
Pope Nicholas IV: Franciscan Influence
on Late Thirteenth-century Art

presented by

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POPE NICHOLAS IV: FRANCISCAN INFLUENCE ON LATE THIRTEENTH-
CENTURY ART

By

Kristin M. Casaletto

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ABSTRACT

POPE NICHOLAS IV: FRANCISCAN INFLUENCE ON LATE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ART

By

Kristin M. Casaletto

Nicholas IV (1288-92) was the first Franciscan pontiff, a pious figure. Yet he was well-traveled and educated, hence able to establish a papal policy that undertook spiritual goals (e.g., conversion, crusade) as well as pragmatic ones: restoration of papal strength and of Rome as the Church's central authority.

As a Franciscan, Nicholas had great faith in Francis of Assisi, viewing him as a savior of the Church and role model. Hence Nicholas made Francis and Franciscanism the keys to both facets of his policy and prominent elements in art commissioned for the Lateran, Liberian, and Assisian basilicas, among other works. By choosing to patronize works of art that lent themselves to Franciscan interpretation and including Franciscan iconography in them that was sometimes a complete departure from accepted types, he revealed his interest in promoting his Order.

To utilize Franciscanism, Nicholas had to relax the strict Franciscan stance on poverty which prohibited development of a Franciscan iconography. He did this using political means and by changing iconography in art he patronized.

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To Laura, who is back,
and to Joe,
who is far away

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Everyone should know that the people of Ascoli Piceno are more than kind, as is Robert, who carried all those books in the heat and explained how the invention of pizza was but one great moment in the proud Dutch heritage.

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Chapter One: Girolamo d'Ascoli

Saint Francis of Assisi was hairy and scrawny, worn and ragged, and an extreme personality, and yet he was spiritually profound. His tattered appearance resulted, in large part, from his commitment to Lady Poverty, of whom he spoke in the terminology of courtly love and whom he named as his bride. He was absolutely faithful to her, and his commitment to his symbolic spouse ran deep. In her name, he became the poorest of the poor. He allowed his simple clothing to become threadbare. He gave away all his material possessions; anything he held was kept only long enough to give away, and he stored nothing to provide for the future. His poverty was extreme, but to Francis, it was simply a result--and one he accepted joyously--of his conviction to live in a manner strictly in accordance with the councils of the Gospels. No matter that he had nothing; faith in God was enough, and He would provide.¹

¹ Biographical information about St. Francis of Assisi used here comes in large part from Tommaso da Celano's *Vita Prima* and *Vita Seconda* and from St. Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior*, all thirteenth-century works. They can be found in *Fonti Francescane*, Biblioteca Franciscana di Milano, 3rd. ed. (Padua: Grafiche Messaggero di S. Antonio, 1977). More recent biographies are innumerable. Some I have found useful are Otto Karrer's *Saint Francis of Assisi: The Legends and Lauds*, trans. N. Wydenbruck (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948) and Paul Sabatier's *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans.

Francis's unshakeable faith and his joy for living attracted followers. He eventually established a new religious order, based on an exhortation to live the Gospels in unassuming and absolute faith. The Franciscan Order blossomed. What began as eight men grew exponentially, changing the lives of thousands and becoming one of the major religious forces of the Middle Ages and beyond.²

Francis met his death at age forty-four, in 1226, with his characteristic spiritual joy: he invited all the creatures of the earth to praise God with him, and welcomed even death, calling it "Death, my sister."³ When he was canonized a saint only two years later, the groundbreaking was already under way for his memorial church.

The members of the Friars Minor--or "lesser brethren," as they called themselves--pursued his vision of a life fulfilled by simple faith. They led an existence of total poverty and deep humility, governed by strict observance of the Gospels.

Louise Seymour Houghton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930).

² The Franciscans quickly recruited and maintained a large membership; they were unusually active in missionary activities in countries as far afield as China; and they produced such noted members as the saints Anthony of Padua, Clare, Bonaventura, and the blessed, Corrado d'Ascoli and Margherita Colonna. Their theology affected art and architecture as well as popular philosophy even into the twentieth century. Francis was named a patron saint of Italy in 1939. On the eight hundredth anniversary of his birth, five million visitors made the trip to Assisi. For the history and achievements of the Order, see Raphael M. Huber, *A Documented History of the Franciscan Order* (Milwaukee: Nowiny Publishing Apostolate, Inc, 1944).

³ Tommaso da Celano, *Vita Seconda*, chap. 163, sect. 217.

Pope Nicholas IV, head of the Catholic Church from 1288 to 1292, was a member of the Friars Minor. It is hard to imagine a follower of the humble St. Francis (who refused even to build shelter for himself) being sufficiently worldly to meet the complicated political and spiritual demands of the great house of the Church. How was Nicholas, who modeled himself after a saint who was too modest even to become a priest, to rule as pope? How was this new pope who came from the Order that stood for humility, meekness, and poverty to run what had become the veritable business of the Church?

By the time Nicholas ascended to the papacy, Francis had been gone for just over half a century, and the Franciscan way of life was evolving rapidly. As the Order had grown, it had also changed, and to understand why Nicholas's behavior no longer always closely resembled Francis's, the Pope needs to be examined in the context of the late thirteenth century.

Girolamo d'Ascoli (as Nicholas IV was called before he became pope), like so many other people from the region of Le Marche in that epoch, grew up under the inescapable influence of Francis of Assisi. Francis had died in the Umbrian hills about fifty miles distant just twelve months before Girolamo was born on September 30, 1227.⁴ Francis, immensely popular in the area, had already been declared a saint by the time

⁴ There is some dispute over this date. See Antonino Franchi, *Nicolaus Papa IV* (Ascoli Piceno: Cassa di Risparmio di Ascoli Piceno, 1990), p. 13. I consider Franchi's biography of Nicholas the most reliable of the many I consulted. The biographical information in this chapter (with exceptions, which are cited) is derived from his work.

Girolamo had reached his first birthday.

Girolamo's surname, d'Ascoli,⁵ refers to Ascoli Piceno, the town in hilly central Italy nearest Lisciano, the *paesino* of his birth. He spent his childhood in Ascoli and its environs, raised by his humble parents. Local legend would have it that the family was of noble rank, and this tale has found its way into many of Nicholas's biographies, but documents fail to bear out such a story.⁶ Noble or not, it is certain that Girolamo was immersed in *Francescanismo* from a very early age.

In 1215, St. Francis himself had come to Ascoli Piceno, creating such a fervent religious atmosphere ("*il clero gioiva, si suonavano le campane, gli uomini esultavano, si congratulavano le donne, i fanciulli applaudivano, e...canta[vano] dei salmi*"⁷) that thirty young people had begged to be permitted to take up his habit and follow in his ways. He favored their request and presented them with the

⁵ His surname is often given as "Maschi," but no reliable documents support this. See Franchi, pp. 15-16.

⁶ Franchi, p. 18. In the sixteenth century, a young Maschi with noble Ascolano roots was rising within the Catholic hierarchy and wanted the surname placed on Pope Nicholas's tomb in Santa Maria Maggiore in order to enhance his own importance. The bloodline between the two was unsubstantiated, but many of Nicholas's biographers now proclaim his nobility, basing it on this false inscription from the 1500s. (Personal interview with Antonino Franchi; see also Franchi, p. 17.)

⁷ Tommaso da Celano, *Vita Prima*, in *Fonti Francescane*, chap. 22, sect. 62. Translation: the clergy rejoiced; the city bells rang out; men exulted him; women congratulated him; youths applauded and...singing psalms, ran to meet him. (The translation is mine.)

Franciscan habit, a rough, brown robe tied by a cord with three knots representing the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These thirty young Franciscans founded Ascoli Piceno's first small mendicant outposts. It was one of these early little hermitages, probably Santa Maria Maddalena, that was Girolamo's point of entry into the Franciscan Order.⁸

His next *tappa* on the road to ordination, as is revealed by his later letters,⁹ was the Sacro Convento at Assisi. Here he was trained in the spirit of St. Francis and gained a great love for his Order's founding saint, for Assisi, and for its churches.

Several biographers claim that Girolamo next went to the university at Perugia and acquired his doctorate in theology.¹⁰ This, however, presents a problem: the University of Perugia was not formally founded until 1308, fifteen years after Nicholas's death. Yet the claim is not as outrageous as it may first appear. By 1200, a number of loosely organized schools had been established in Perugia which were to become the core of the later university, and

⁸ Probably between 1245-1250. See Franchi, p.25.

⁹ One dated 24-25 February, 1288, and the other, 7 August, 1289. See Franchi, p. 28, note 12. Original letters are at Assisi in the Biblioteca Comunale Archivio Sacro Convento.

¹⁰ To name a few: Gustavo Parisciani, *Nicoló IV: Fra Girolamo Masci d'Ascoli Primo Papa Francese* (Ancona: Frati Conventuali delle Marche, 1988); Joseph S. Brushers, *Popes through the Ages* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1959); J.M. Muldoon, "Nicholas IV, Pope," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 443.

"before 1300, there were several 'universitates scholarum.'" ¹¹ Perhaps Girolamo completed some form of study at one of these universitates.

That Girolamo was quite a learned man, however, is beyond doubt. In addition to being a "philosopher and theologian, a lover of teaching and of writing," ¹² he also had an impressive gift for languages: he spoke Latin, Greek, and French. ¹³

The years from 1255 to 1272 were most likely a time of movement for him. It is probable that he spent time in Rome and perhaps also Viterbo and Orvieto, near the papal curia. He probably also lived for a period in some of the hermitages in his home region, Le Marche, almost certainly at Fermo and at San Francesco d'Ascoli. ¹⁴

By 1272, he had distinguished himself within the Order sufficiently to be entrusted with a mission to Dalmatia (a region of western Yugoslavia on the Adriatic). Here he was to take up duties as the new provincial-minister of Slavonia, a region of northern Yugoslavia in east Croatia.

While minister of Dalmatia, he was sent by Gregory X to Constantinople to obtain, through the influence of Byzantine

¹¹ C. F. Wemyss Brown, "University of Perugia," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, p.737. See also Hastings Rushdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1895), vol. 1, pp. 40-43.

¹² Franchi, p. 35.

¹³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

Emperor Michael Paleologus, the union of the Greek and Latin Churches. He worked at this task with no little success, impressing his superiors within the hierarchy of the Church. His reputation was strong and growing. While he was conducting his business in Constantinople, the General Chapter of the Franciscans was being conducted at Lyon. There, in his absence, Girolamo was unanimously elected to the position of minister general of the Franciscan Order, succeeding St. Bonaventura. He successfully completed his duties in the East and arrived in Lyon on July 4, 1275, in time for the closing of the General Chapter and to assist in the ceremony of the union of the two Churches. It was a triumphant moment, both for Girolamo and for the mended Church.

He had no time to rest on his laurels, however. He spent the next five years as an exceptionally active minister general. Indeed, within two years of his election, he found that he was called so often to act as legate of the Apostolic See that it became impossible for him to perform his duties effectively. Not wanting to neglect his obligations to the Franciscans, he tendered his resignation of the minister generalship. The friars not only refused to accept it, but reelected him.¹⁵

Thus practically forced to retain the position of minister general, he was sent in 1278 to act as papal legate on a mission to France to help restore peace between that

¹⁵ Huber, p. 168.

country and Castile. While he was at work there, he received word of yet another duty: Nicholas III had made him a cardinal and assigned him to the church of Santa Pudenziana in Rome. Finally the Friars Minor saw that they must relinquish their minister general to Rome, and in 1279, he was at last permitted to give up the Franciscans' head position in order to move to Rome and take up his duties as cardinal. His work for the Franciscans, however, was far from ended. He never forgot them, and, interestingly, one of his first duties as cardinal was to assist the pope in preparing a bull, *Exiit Qui Seminatur*, clarifying the Franciscan Rule and, in particular, expounding on the delicate issue of poverty. The *Exiit* had important implications for the Franciscan community; a discussion of it will follow.

Girolamo worked closely with Nicholas III, but the Pope's death was near at hand, and, by 1281, his successor, Martin IV, gave him yet another new title: cardinal-bishop of Praeneste. Despite his attraction to the contemplative life, Girolamo's abilities had consistently prompted his superiors to place him in active positions of leadership.

The call came yet again on February 15, 1288. Pope Honorius IV had been dead for nearly a year, and the election of a successor had dragged on for months. Discord prevailed amongst the cardinals, and disease during that steamy summer also took a major toll. "Death so thinned the ranks of the

cardinals that their number was reduced to nine."¹⁶ Six cardinals died during the intense summer heat, and most of the others fell sick, so the conclave, realizing no headway was being made and that the health threats were all too real, suspended its meetings. Only Girolamo stayed on in Rome, and when the cardinals reassembled in February of 1288, he was elected unanimously. Girolamo protested, saying acceptance of the post was against all his wishes. Although he had always "been kept in the midst of the whirl of business,"¹⁷ his only desire was to lead a retired life of contemplation. He would rather be his brethren's cook, he declared, than a cardinal,¹⁸ and now he was loathe to be elevated to a position of even more responsibility. The cardinals, however, would have none of it, and the following Sunday, they unanimously voted again for him. This time he acquiesced.

Perhaps election to the papacy did cause the pious Girolamo the mental disturbance he claimed. Or perhaps his reluctance was the first known instance of many that was to reveal his effort to emulate St. Francis, either in true piety or with the desire to enhance his own stature within the Order

¹⁶ Horace K. Mann, *The Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 5; Franchi, p. 91. For more on this subject, see Angelo Celli, "La Malaria nella Storia Medievale di Roma" in *Archivio della R. Società Romana di Storia Patria* 47 (1924), p. 36; and by the same author, *The History of Malaria in the Roman Campagna from Ancient Times* (New York: AMS Press, 1977).

¹⁷ Mann, p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

and the Church--because Francis, too, was known to have felt himself drawn to a strictly contemplative life,¹⁹ though he had been continually called to action because he knew himself to be the "herald of the great King."²⁰ But whatever the case, Nicholas was as ambitious in tackling problems as pope as he had been as minister general and papal legate. His piety was not to hinder his ability to come to terms with the power and potential of the papacy.

¹⁹ A. McDevitt, "Franciscan Spirituality," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. 6, p. 37.

²⁰ Celano, *Vita Prima*, chap. 7, sect. 16.

Chapter Two: The Papacy and Franciscanism

Girolamo's record of ecclesiastical assignments would seem to speak for itself, but how did the elevation to the papacy affect him? Historians have been less than kind in assessing his papal prowess. There seem to be two general schools of thought. Horace K. Mann, one of Nicholas's biographers, represents the more common line:

Timid in tackling the affairs of life that came before him, of narrow outlook and slow in the transaction of business, Nicholas lacked the qualities that make a successful ruler of men. He was...a pious monk, without thought of self; concerned only for the peace of the world, for a Crusade, and for the extirpation of heresy.²¹

Mann believed that Nicholas even aggravated problems during his reign "by his ignorance of the most elementary ideas of government. It is possible that he even failed to realize that a civil ruler must have material force behind him."²² Nicholas, according to Mann, had no aptitude for leadership.

Otto Schiff, another of Nicholas's biographers, seems to share this opinion, describing Nicholas as a weak man.²³ This attitude of dismissal permeates much of the literature.

²¹ Mann, p. 10.

²² Ibid., p. 180.

²³ T.F. Tout, "Studien zur Geschichte Papst Nikolaus IV" (review), *English Historical Review*, 14 (1899), p. 764.

The *Cambridge Medieval History* sums up the attitude well in its description of him: "Nicholas IV was among the least distinguished popes." This is no small discredit when one considers that the popes number two hundred and sixty-three. Why such a negative evaluation of Pope Nicholas? It is not irrelevant to note that Nicholas was a Franciscan, of the Order known for meekness of temperament and an eagerness to bow to higher authority. Nicholas himself had tried to refuse Peter's chair, as had Celestine V. Celestine, a Franciscan friar and Nicholas's immediate successor, could not bear the pressure of the Church's highest office and abdicated in 1294, after only five months as pope, in order to return to his life as a hermit.²⁴

But Nicholas was not so timid, and the harsh judgments of such as Schiff and Mann hardly seem fair. Indeed, some of the more recent scholars have given the underrated Pope Nicholas a second look. What James Ryan has discovered suggests anything but ineptness. Nicholas appears quite capable: he "directly intervened in affairs...making suggestions and settling disputes."²⁵ Daniel Waley, too, lauds Nicholas as one of the few popes of his era who, rather than falling into a drifting indecisiveness, constructed a definite policy and put it into operation. He states that Nicholas had "a

²⁴ Mann, pp. 313-320 passim.

²⁵ James Daniel Ryan, "Nicholas IV and the Eastern Missionary Effort," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 19 (1981), p. 84.

particular interest in the government of the State, to whose problems he dedicated himself with an energy and originality to which justice has never been done."²⁶

Furthermore, I would contend that, deceptive as his truly pious demeanor may have been (or may continue to be), Nicholas gained in strength and skill from the experience of his many Church-assigned, often politically delicate missions. Indeed, he became a capable politician and diplomat, able to set goals and determine means by which to achieve them. Being a Franciscan was not the hindrance to his politics that it would prove to be for the reticent Celestine V. Had it been, Nicholas would not have risen so quickly through the most significant posts of his Order and onward to the Chair of Peter, the most powerful position in the Catholic Church and, at that time, one of the most powerful positions in the world.

Nicholas fully recognized the seriousness (to say nothing of the unique possibilities) of his new position. He was also cognizant of the powerful opportunity for his Order that lay in being the first Franciscan ever to reign as pope. With the backing of the Holy See, the message of St. Francis could be proclaimed as never before. Was Nicholas, as Schiff and Mann would imply, too inept to be aware of his newfound prestige? Too bumbling to take advantage of such an opportunity? Hardly. Far from demure, Nicholas immediately began to demonstrate his worldly competence.

²⁶ Daniel Waley, *The Papal State in the Thirteenth Century* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1961), p. 212.

He consolidated power by recovering Church property.²⁷ He earned money by selling cities the right to elect their own magistrates.²⁸ He even increased funds available for his strategically chosen art programs. He found various methods to accomplish this last; for instance, in lieu of a wealthy but aged businessman's promised pilgrimage to Rome, Nicholas demanded that a monetary amount equivalent to the expense of the trip be put toward refurbishment of St. Peter's, assuring the man that the positive effect on his soul would be the same.²⁹ In another instance, Nicholas proved to be capable of concocting profitable punishments: a banking establishment that had profited through usury was required to pay one thousand ounces of gold in reparation. The money went, not to the used lenders, but to the papal treasury.³⁰

Early in his tenure, Nicholas established a papal agenda. As a Franciscan, he realized that the ideals of his Order lent themselves well to the support of the papacy. One of these ideals was Christocentrism, or the belief that man's destiny found its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus' teachings and acts were paramount to the Franciscans, who emphasized Christ's humanity as well as His godliness. Christocentrism made Franciscanism appealing to Nicholas in

²⁷ Mann, p. 188.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 206.

³⁰ Ernest Langlois, ed., *Les Registres de Nicolas IV* (Paris: Thorin & Fils, 1893), no. 6926.

his role as pope because a god who himself understood the trials of man was appealing both to the faithful and to potential converts.

As a result of the Franciscan veneration for Christ, the Blessed Virgin was also especially revered within the Order because she was the woman who brought the Christ Child into the world. Marian devotion was another appealing Franciscan tendency to Nicholas as pope because Mary was seen as a welcoming figure, and her popularity was increasing dramatically in his era. Nicholas shared in the Franciscan veneration of the Virgin, as he later demonstrated by refurbishing the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and manipulating the iconographical content of its mosaics in a manner designed to do the Lady honor.

A second important tenet of Franciscanism was ecclesiality. The Lesser Brethren believed that Christ was present in all creatures and thus that all were part of a greater brotherhood or *fraternit  * that was, in fact, the Church.³¹ The Franciscans thus had a great sense of loyalty to the Church as well as a desire to serve it and the pope who was at its head.

Nicholas needed to reinforce the Church and to restore the prestige of the papacy, and promoting the Franciscan beliefs was a useful means to that end. His goals were thus very much aligned with the ideals for which St. Francis had

³¹ McDevitt, p. 38.

striven sixty-odd years before: missions to spread the faith, peace making, and elimination of heresy. In keeping with these stated goals (at least to Nicholas's way of thinking) he made strong attempts at promoting crusades and unifying the Eastern and Western Churches. (As a cardinal, his success in mending the East-West schism had proven to be only temporary.)

He realized, too, that he needed to promote a consolidation and reaffirmation of Rome as an authoritative seat of the Church and as a central power. Rome was a most important center politically, economically, culturally, and spiritually. In fact, as Robert Brentano has observed, "one of the most important ideas about Rome in the thirteenth century was that Rome stood for government."³² A strong capital city was essential as an indicator of a strong and competent papacy. Yet Rome, and particularly papal Rome, had become weak. In the civic sector, diverse factions constantly squabbled for power (and Nicholas himself was a Roman senator for life).³³ But problems did not confine themselves to politics alone. The city suffered; it was plague-diminished, earthquake rocked, scandal shaken, and infected with heresy.³⁴ There were infidels to the east and discontented "faithful" in all other directions (including Rome) who were arguably just as dangerous as the infidels. Papal patronage

³² Robert Brentano, *Rome before Avignon* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), p. 80.

³³ Waley, *The Papal State...*, p. 214.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-208, *passim*.

of art (often an indicator of strength) had meanwhile declined since the time of Martin IV (1281-1285).³⁵ Martin himself had never even entered the city, ruling from Viterbo and thus further diminishing faith in Rome's role as a central authority. Doubts, aberrations, and outright heresies had developed. "What was most urgently needed at that time was...to wipe out the doctrinal deviations, rectify the faith of the believing masses."³⁶

Nicholas, who had already and often dealt in world church politics, was painfully aware of the situation. In a manner that was absolutely Franciscan, he immediately dedicated himself to the restoration of Rome's strength by employing Franciscan theology. In fact, Nicholas saw St. Francis as a key part of his program to restabilize the central authority of the Roman Church.

Nicholas had good reason to rely on St. Francis's doctrine. Nicholas knew that one of the Franciscan Order's main tasks was to function as an auxiliary and support for the primacy of the Roman Church.³⁷ This being an essential

³⁵ Julian Gardner, "Patterns of Papal Patronage Circa 1260-1300," in *Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities 1150-1300*, ed. Christian Ryan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989), p. 449.

³⁶ George Duby, *Age of Cathedrals: Art and Society*, trans. Eleanor Levieux and Barbara Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 144.

³⁷ Maria Consiglia de Matteis, "Girolamo d'Ascoli: Dall'Esperienza Francescana alla Politica Ecclesiastica," in *Niccoló IV: Un Pontificato tra Oriente ed Occidente*, ed. Enrico Menestó (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991), p. 99.

objective of his apostolate, it is quite understandable that "the empowerment of the Order and the accomplishment of that social role that is so exquisitely Franciscan, functioning for the centrality of Rome" was to be used to his advantage.³⁸

Franciscans, beginning with Francis himself, had fostered an attitude of utmost respect for and obedience to the pontiff. Recognizing himself to be humble and simple, Francis placed complete faith in the pope. He worked closely with his contemporary, Innocent III (1198-1216), traveling all the way to Rome to seek approval of the Rule he wrote for his Order.³⁹ Tommaso da Celano, Francis's contemporary and friend, wrote a biography within two years of the saint's death. The work reflects Francis's attitude toward the Pope, referring to him as "covered in glory," "rich in eloquence," a man capable of "mature reflection" on the difficult matters of the Church.⁴⁰ Francis felt that the popes, by the very nature of their position, were men close to God and could be relied on for wisdom and good judgment.

The alliance between Franciscans and Church was made clear when Francis declared his firm devotion in his *Regula Primitiva*. It commenced with a promise of obedience to the pope and all his successors and went on to say that "all brothers shall be Catholic and live and speak as Catholics.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

³⁹ Celano, *Vita Prima*, chap. 13, sect. 32-33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., sect. 33.

If any shall [stray] from the Catholic faith and life either by word or deed and shall not mend his way, let him be expelled from the brotherhood."⁴¹ As a man seeking to increase the stability of and respect for the Holy See, Nicholas astutely saw that the example of St. Francis was to be upheld, even showcased for the benefit of the Church's stability.

Nicholas was drawing on more than just Francis's personal example of commitment to the pope. The nature of the saint's teachings also advocated many of the same attitudes extolled by the Church, notably penitence, obedience, and humility. The Franciscan Rule also, at the same time, disparaged education and booklearning. All of these factors favored, in turn, the creation of a dependent faithful, meek in demeanor, in need of and willing to accept the central authority of Rome as ultimate mentor.

Nicholas thus regarded Franciscanism as essential to reinforcing the role of the Church; he also regarded St. Francis himself as a model for his own personal role at its head. He based this belief on the story of a miracle involving the saint and a previous pope, Innocent III, who had approved the Rule of the Franciscan Order. When Francis came to Innocent asking for authorization for his Order in 1209, the Pope hesitated. The request was nothing out of the

⁴¹ See "Regola Non Bollata" in *Fonti Francescane*, pp. 99-101, lines I:3-4, II:9, 11-12. The translation used here is from David Hugh Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 168.

ordinary: various sects often came to the pope seeking sanction. But such groups often evolved in an undesirable direction, even to the point of embracing heretical beliefs. Was the pauperous Francis any different? Pope Innocent was unsure about how to proceed. The answer came to him later that night, in a miraculous dream. He envisioned Francis, all alone, supporting the crushing weight of the falling Lateran basilica with only the strength of his spine.⁴² Innocent interpreted the dream as a sign that Francis of Assisi was capable of shouldering the burden of the weakened Church and that he would be instrumental in saving Western Christendom. Nicholas, too, held this interpretation.

The dream of Innocent was later represented in mosaic in Santa Maria in Aracoeli, a church in Rome which was, by Nicholas IV's time, a major administrative center for the Franciscan Order. The Lesser Brethren had been quick to recognize the prestige accorded their organization in connection with the Pope's dream. The implications were tremendously important. The dream was miraculous: it suggested divine favor for their Order. Not only did it imply that the group was ordained by God, but it also revealed that the Creator Himself was sending a message to no less a personage than the pope in order to proclaim the Franciscan Order's founder as savior of the Lateran. But the Lateran was

⁴² This story is first told by Tomasso da Celano, not in his first *Vita* of San Francesco, but in the *Vita Seconda* (2:17). It is also told by Bonaventura in his *Legenda Maior*, chap. 3, sect. 10.

the seat of the bishop of Rome (the pope), and saving a tottering Lateran was analogous to saving the crumbling Church itself. The Franciscans looked upon the dream as a mandate from God.

As a Franciscan theologian, Nicholas was well aware of the tale of Innocent's dream, and as a pious Franciscan, he believed in the potential of St. Francis's influence in sustaining the Church. In his role as pope, it now became *Nicholas's* duty to bolster the Church, and he soon began to draw parallels between himself and St. Francis. Nicholas IV "hoped to see completed during his pontificate the dream of Innocent III, the dream of the Poor One's becoming sustainer of the church."⁴³ Nicholas saw his Franciscanism as vital to his papal role. It offered a basis for his policies, a saint to be emulated, and a refuge for the weakened Church.

Employing Franciscan symbolism and theology in his political and pontifical roles--as well as in the role of art patron--was a natural means for Nicholas to address the problem of fortifying the Roman and papal reputations. Yet not all of Nicholas's Franciscan involvement was politically motivated. He held a true faith in St. Francis and his teachings and had a deep loyalty to them and the Order. He wanted to promote Franciscanism for its own sake because Francis was a great and holy saint and because he wanted to

⁴³ Irene Hueck, "L'Oreficeria in Umbria dalla Seconda Metá del Secolo XII alla Fine del Secolo XIII," in *San Francesco d'Assisi: Storia e Arte*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milan: Electa, 1982), p. 171.

see the Franciscan message spread to all men.

Already as a cardinal, Nicholas (then still called Girolamo) was promoting his beloved Francis in art. He commissioned a long, rectangular box surmounted by a cross to contain a relic of the True Cross (Figure 1). (It is now known as the Reliquary of Sant'Andrea.)⁴⁴ Neither artist nor patron has left any identifying mark on the piece, but the following evidence suggests it was created at Girolamo's command.

Stylistically, it can be placed before his ascension to the papacy in 1288; in fact, it probably was fabricated closer to the late 1270s.⁴⁵ In 1278, Girolamo was appointed cardinal-priest at the church dedicated to Santa Pudenziana, and this saint is one of the figures on the reliquary. Because her cult was relatively rare, it seems reasonable to date the work sometime between 1278 and 1281, the years in which Girolamo held a post at the church dedicated to her. The piece was probably a gift from Girolamo to Nicholas III in thanksgiving for having been elevated to the cardinalate.⁴⁶

Santa Pudenziana was one of the earliest female Christian

⁴⁴ Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, "La Committenza e il Mecenatismo Artistico di Niccoló IV," in *Niccoló IV: Un Pontificato tra Oriente ed Occidente*, ed. Enrico Menestó (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991), p. 197.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

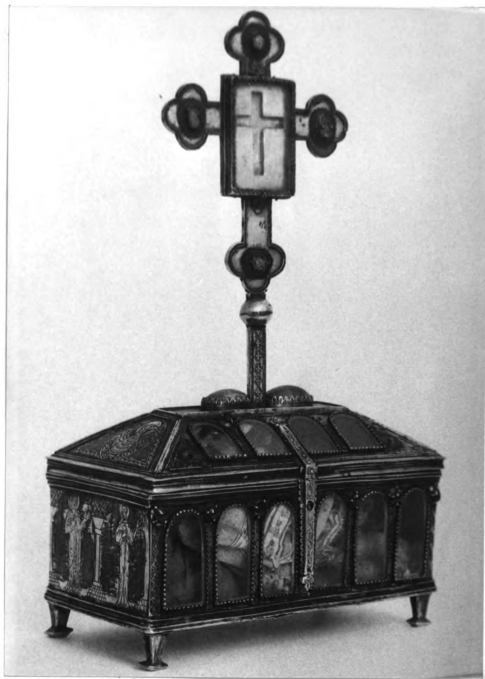


Figure 1. Reliquary of Sant'Andrea

martyrs, and Girolamo had depicted her on the reliquary box together with St. Agnes, another early Christian martyr. Other saints from the Church's early history, however, have not been chosen to accompany these martyrs. Rather, the Franciscan saints Francis and Anthony of Padua are represented.

This work came from Girolamo, the minister general of the Franciscans, and the choice of iconography sought to attest to the faith he placed in the Order. As a gift for Nicholas III, the reliquary was also to act as a tribute for the kind attention he had paid the Franciscans and as a remembrance of his years as cardinal-protector of the group. It is also significant for the fact that it combined very recent saints (there were yet men living who remembered Francis personally) with saints long established who had been canonized centuries earlier.

This practice of inserting the Franciscans amidst the revered saints from the early Church era would become an important and more pronounced element in Nicholas's later commissions, when, as pope, he intended to create a Franciscan iconography and artistic heritage that would serve to perpetuate the Order and proclaim St. Francis as one of the greatest saints, worthy of inclusion amidst even the likes of St. Paul, St. Peter, and the Blessed Virgin.

Chapter Three: Franciscan Poverty

As things stood when Nicholas ascended to the papacy, creation of a Franciscan artistic heritage was hampered by the way the Order was run. It is important to understand that the early Franciscans constituted a marginal society, an unstable entity. They held no jobs and were often essentially homeless, relying on charity for their very survival. Francis's ideal was that the brothers have no permanent possessions, fixed places of dwelling, or income.⁴⁷ In fact, they should possess nothing at all. Francis frowned on the use of money or on storage or planning for future needs.

The strict Rule doomed the friars to a precarious existence. And yet, such a stance on poverty was feasible while Francis was still providing a living example and while his disciples were relatively few in number. Growth, however, demanded change. In the beginning, Francis had had eight followers. But at the general chapter of 1221, three thousand friars attended.⁴⁸ By the time Girolamo (later Nicholas IV) took charge of the Order as minister general in 1274, there

⁴⁷ Huber, p. 265.

⁴⁸ C.J. Lynch, "Franciscans," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. 6, p. 40.

were some thirty-five thousand Franciscans.⁴⁹ As buildings and formal training became necessary, the rigid adherence to poverty was fast becoming an unrealistic burden. As St. Francis's first few companions multiplied into a considerable following, the ranks began clamoring for an organized Order, one that would have "to propagate itself in an orderly way."⁵⁰ Efficient management of larger numbers made strict adherence to the original Rule impractical, probably impossible. Modification of Francis's exhortation to poverty seemed unavoidable, and a gradual movement away from it soon began. Without a more defined structure, the Order could never gain prestige and command respect, nor approach the level of seriousness, progress, and power that rival groups, such as the Dominicans, could.

Some, though, dreaded the day that St. Francis's original intentions for his band of men would at last be abandoned. These followers resisted the move toward a more relaxed standard and came into conflict with their more liberal brethren. The dispute caused severe growing pains. With time, the Order's degree of asceticism became a major point of contention. By 1274, the seeds of the controversy between the "Spirituals," as strict adherents to the original Rule were called, and the "Conventuals," who were more lax in their

⁴⁹ Parisciani, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Huber, p. 266.

interpretation, were sown.⁵¹

Strict adherence to the poverty principle made life difficult, but the effect on Franciscan art was downright disastrous. The creation or possession of splendid artworks conflicted with Francis's ethic. He believed in following the word of the Gospels completely, and there he had found written, "If thou be rich, thou shalt not be free from sin" (Ecclesiasticus 11:10) and "No one can be my disciple unless he renounces all for me" (Luke 14:25-33). These commands precluded the possibility of luxury items, and even necessary goods, such as liturgical objects and clothing, were to express an absolute simplicity. As Hueck points out, speaking of early Franciscan chalices, "What do these objects reveal that can be considered specifically Franciscan? Not much. Only the wishes of the saint are manifested in the objects that arise from the time of Francis."⁵²

Thus a Franciscan iconography was hindered by the strictures put in place by the Order's founder himself. But Nicholas realized the potential importance of visual art in his time, an age in which illiteracy was the norm and society was heavily superstitious. In order to salvage Franciscan art, Nicholas found it necessary to align himself, if

⁵¹ These terms developed later, but for the sake of convenience, they will be used here.

⁵² Hueck, p. 168.

reluctantly,⁵³ with the Conventuals. As long as Francis's strict ideals of poverty and austere simplicity remained in force, the Order was excluded from artistic recognition and prestige.

The detrimental effects of *La Povertá* were evident well before Nicholas became pope. Nicholas III, who acted as cardinal-protector of the Franciscan Order from 1263 to 1279 and maintained close ties with it as pope, was interested in settling tensions within the Order as well as clarifying the position on poverty to outside critics. He chose Girolamo d'Ascoli, among others, to help him prepare a papal bull on the subject. After two months and clearance from "a committee of expert canonical lawyers,"⁵⁴ the bull, *Exiit Qui Seminavit*, was published on August 14, 1279.

The document Girolamo helped write was a vastly important one for his Order. It attempted to define precisely the proper way to pursue the life of poverty. The stance on the possession of money and personal goods remained quite strict, but the beginnings of a relaxation were apparent. The bull said, among other things, that the friars were not obliged to observe all counsels found in the Gospel, but only those

⁵³ Despite many authors' claims that Nicholas was an adamant Conventual, Franchi maintains that he remained a Spiritual at heart; circumstances alone forced him towards the former. (Personal interview, July 1992.)

⁵⁴ Huber, p. 173.

specifically named or implied in the Franciscan Rule.⁵⁵ It stated further that Christ Himself had occasionally accepted and handled money, and though complete poverty was meritorious, the friars were to be allowed to use temporal goods "moderately."⁵⁶ This represented a blow to the Spirituals. The Rule itself, quoting Matthew 19:21, asked that all Franciscans rid themselves of all possessions.

According to the new bull, the Friars Minor were still not allowed to receive loans, but they were permitted to appoint individuals to act, basically, as brokers: to sell goods for money to attend to the friars' needs and wants. The original Rule clearly forbid the friars to take money on loan, "*nè direttamente nè per interposta persona.*"⁵⁷ Even real estate was made available to them; rules were laid down outlining methods of dealing with its use and transfer.⁵⁸

This bull had been produced during Girolamo's cardinalate in close conjunction with Nicholas III, a pope who took a sincere interest in the Franciscan Order and saw the benefit of helping it work out its conflicts. Girolamo admired him and appreciated his efforts to help the Friars Minor. When he later became pope, it was after Nicholas III that he named

⁵⁵ Francesco's Rule quoted rather extensively from the Bible, especially from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

⁵⁶ Huber, p. 174.

⁵⁷ Francis of Assisi, "Regola Non Bollata," chap. 2, sect. 6. Translation: neither directly nor by means of a third party. (The translation is mine.)

⁵⁸ Huber, pp. 174-75.

himself. Then, as Pope Nicholas IV, he went further in trying to stabilize and unify the Franciscans.

On August 17, 1289, Nicholas issued the bull *Supra Montem*, now generally called the "Rule of Nicholas IV." This Rule actually served a twofold purpose. First, it helped ease tensions within the Order. This was desirable for Nicholas from both a personal and a professional viewpoint: personally, because he had great spiritual conviction in the Franciscan way of life; and, professionally, because as pope, he knew the strength of the Order was an asset to the Roman See. But Nicholas's Rule also helped create an environment that nurtured the possibility of a new Franciscan iconography.

The *Supra Montem* was a guideline for living the life of a mendicant friar. The text was very similar to the Rule written by St. Francis, but there were slight modifications. This bull detailed even mundane activities: visiting privileges, numbers of prayers to be said, and also such issues as decorative versus necessary vestments. This document, together with the bull of 1279 which he had helped Nicholas III to write, eased the Franciscan insistence on poverty in several ways. The friars no longer observed absolute poverty. Financial transactions could be enacted as long as they were handled by a third party. This latter provision effectively considered Francis's hatred of money and at the same time technically avoided falling into the sin of usury, which the Scriptures (e.g., Leviticus 25:35-37 and Exodus 12:25) denounce.

Even real estate could be dealt with, the possession of which had been anathema to St. Francis. Brother Leo, one of Francis's first disciples, illustrated the point with this story: the people of Assisi once constructed a house near the church of Santa Maria in Porziuncola for the use of the Friars Minor. When Francis discovered the building, he climbed onto the roof and began tearing off its tiles, offended that the friars had accepted such luxurious quarters.⁵⁹ Christ Himself had said, "Foxes have holes; birds, nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). The founder's opinion on the matter was eminently clear.

Nicholas IV in his papal bull had ingeniously managed to stay close to the spirit of Francis's ideals while simultaneously beginning to lessen their severity. This relaxation was welcomed by many of the Friars Minor. Before the Rule of Nicholas, many confraternities had already been operating under various modifications of the Rule. Some groups of Friars Minor had become quite diversified. Nicholas's bull served to homogenize the Order into a united force. As Olinger writes, "On the whole,...until Nicholas IV there was no [one rule] generally observed."⁶⁰ Having a clear indication of expected behavior from a higher authority

⁵⁹ Brother Leo, *Lo Specchio di Perfezione*, in *Fonti Francescane*, 3rd ed., Biblioteca Franciscana di Milano (Padova: Grafiche Mesaggero di S. Antonio, 1977), chap. 7.

⁶⁰ Livarius Olinger, "Third Order of St. Francis," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Gilmary Society, 1913), vol. 14, p. 641.

helped to reduce internal quarreling and thus eliminated one of the obstacles to a unified Order.

The stricter friars of Le Marche at one point called Nicholas a "heretical forger"⁶¹ because of his lax interpretation of the Rule. But even the Spirituals, as Huber has noted,

pressed by the necessity of seeking a daily existence, were soon obliged to relinquish by accepting the papal interpretations given the Order by Nicholas IV. They soon began to realize what the Conventuals had already experienced, that the Order was a living organization and resting on a foundation of absolute poverty as intended so ideally by St. Francis, was really a moral impossibility.⁶²

Nicholas had succeeded: he had injected a new unity of rule and direction into his ailing Order.

Having laid the groundwork, Nicholas wasted no time in launching papal art programs. His art, like his *Supra Montem*, was always cleverly calculated to keep the Franciscan Order at the fore. He used several methods by which to achieve a higher and more visible status for the Order. First he carefully selected which artistic projects to patronize, always choosing those with strong ties to Franciscan history or intentions or those that could be approached in a uniquely Franciscan manner. He also manipulated the iconography in his projects in order to proclaim Franciscan ideals or to promote the Order.

⁶¹ Huber, p. 196.

⁶² Ibid., p. 263.

Franciscan favoritism was not a specifically articulated policy of Nicholas's (though writings can be found that are definitely indicative of his inclinations⁶³), but his actions clearly reveal his Franciscan bent. He established a pattern of utilizing members of his Order as artists, architects, envoys, and messengers in all phases of his reign. He also issued decrees that acted as incentives to visit or contribute to Franciscan art. For example, to entice penitents to visit Franciscan churches, Nicholas issued a long series of bulls granting indulgences of one year and forty days to the pilgrim.⁶⁴ He also channeled monetary contributions toward projects he favored. For example, the bull issued May 14, 1288, near the beginning of his papal reign, stated the following:

*Dilectis filiis ministro provincie et. custodi Beati Francisci mandat quatenus omnia que in quibuscumque pecuniis seu monetis in ecclesiis Beati Francisci de Assisio et Sanctae Mariae de Potriuncula a christifidelibus offeruntur, per quasdam personas de praedictorum ordine non existentes colligi faciant et custodiri in conservationem ejusdem ecclesie Sancti Francisci ac subventionem fratrum ad ecclesias confluentium supradictas.*⁶⁵

⁶³ Notably in letters to members of the Tartar court, wherein Nicholas asks that the courtiers may be supportive of the Franciscan missionaries and their work (see J.D. Ryan, "Nicholas IV and the Eastern Missionary Effort," p. 88), and in such inscriptions as the one at St. John Lateran (see this text p. 43).

⁶⁴ Langlois, ed., nos. 5236-5282.

⁶⁵ Ibid., no. 73.

This bull made offerings given at the churches of San Francesco d'Assisi and Santa Maria in Porziuncola available for financing work performed at the basilica of San Francesco.

Such bulls as the one above reveal Nicholas's tendency toward Conventualism, and that tendency increased the possibility of artistic development by relaxing the call to a spartan lifestyle that precluded the creation of luxurious items. His introduction of iconographical changes (as will be discussed at St. John Lateran, Santa Maria Maggiore, et. al.) represents a carefully crafted program to create an artistic heritage for the Franciscan Order.

Chapter Four: St. John Lateran

The inscription in St. John Lateran, *Ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis Mater et Caput*, proclaims it to be the mother and head of all the churches in the city of Rome and in the world. As the cathedral (or bishop's seat) of Rome, it was also the domain of the popes. It was here that coronations usually took place and here, too, that ecclesiastical meetings were held. As one of Rome's oldest churches, it also had direct links to early Christianity and to Constantine, the Empire's first Christian leader.⁶⁶ Archeological work confirms that it was he who founded it, presenting it to Pope St. Melchiades as early as 313, the year in which Christianity gained the government's official tolerance.⁶⁷ By Nicholas's day, the building had stood for nearly one thousand years as a symbol of temporal power's cession to the higher authority of God.

The Lateran may owe its beginning to the human will of Emperor Constantine, but it became an even more revered locus when it received approval from the divine. A popular legend, generally accepted long before Nicholas's time, recounted a

⁶⁶ Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 21.

⁶⁷ Richard Krautheimer and Spencer Corbett, "La Basilica Costantiniana al Laterano: Un Tentativo di Ricostruzione," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 43 (1967), p. 125.

supernatural event: As Pope St. Silvester dedicated the basilica on November 9, 324, a vision of the head of Christ miraculously appeared in the vault of the apse.⁶⁸ A mosaic was soon installed to memorialize this sign God had sent of His satisfaction with the dedication of the new church.

It was this basilica that Nicholas selected as the subject of his first major artistic commission. It had suffered the negligence of preceding popes. Honorius III had lavished attention on St. Paul's outside the Walls and St. Lawrence outside the Walls, and Nicholas III had put his effort into work at St. Peter's and St. Paul's, and "thus a repair and redecoration of the Lateran...could well have seemed overdue."⁶⁹

At St. John's, Nicholas IV rebuilt the apse, added an ambulatory, and transformed the basilica into a cruciform shape by the addition of a transept, shortening the Constantinian nave to make room for it.⁷⁰ Nicholas's undertaking, however, was not simply a routine repair; his early decision to refurbish the Lateran was a calculated political measure. Repairing the church of the popes was a sign of the renewed vitality of the papacy and of commitment

⁶⁸ J. Wilpert, "La Decorazione Costantiniana della Basilica Lateranense," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* VI (1929), pp. 108-109.

⁶⁹ Gardner, "Patterns....," p. 450.

⁷⁰ Richard Krautheimer and Spencer Corbett, "The Building of the Nave Piers at S. Giovanni in Laterano after the Fire of 1361," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 43 (1967), p. 158.

to the Church in Rome. Nicholas proceeded to enlarge and beautify this building "to such an extent that it was reckoned the wonder of the age."⁷¹ As Gardner states, "For Nicholas IV, the restoration of [St. John Lateran] was...an affirmation of his commitment to Rome, and in a deeply personal way a symbolic statement of his own role in the unfolding of the Franciscan design."⁷²

There are several aspects of the transformation of St. John Lateran that reflect this "Franciscan design." God spoke to *Il Poverello* as he meditated on the crucifix at the church of San Damiano in Assisi, giving the saint a simple instruction: "Rebuild My Church."⁷³ Francis, in his characteristically unassuming manner, took this quite literally, immediately taking it upon himself to see to the repair of San Damiano.⁷⁴ Nicholas had now been chosen by God, via the cardinal electorate, and given the same charge. The fact that he literally repaired the building ("renewed" the church) can be viewed as a reenactment of the literal interpretation Francis made when he "renewed" San Damiano. That the simple Francis would obey the command literally is hardly surprising. Although he wanted nothing for himself, he had a deep respect for church buildings and hated to see them

⁷¹ Alta Macadam, ed., *Rome & Environs* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1989), p. 213.

⁷² Gardner, "Patterns...", p. 450.

⁷³ Bonaventura, *Legenda Maior*, chap. 2, sect. 1.

⁷⁴ Karrer, p. 62.

in disrepair. He had instructed his followers to pray, "*Padre nostro! Ti adoriamo in tutte le tue chiese che sono nel mondo.*"⁷⁵

But although St. Francis literally saved a few church buildings, he was regarded by Franciscans as a savior of the whole Church. The concept of Francis as savior existed even during the saint's lifetime as a result of Innocent III's dream,⁷⁶ later represented in Franciscan art, notably in a mosaic scene on the facade of Santa Maria in Aracoeli. That work, sadly now nearly destroyed, showed Pope Innocent in slumber at left, enclosed in a graceful array of arches and columns that formed the architectural space of the sleeping chamber, the blankets mussed by the Pope's fitful rest. On the right side, a very tall St. Francis was visible. He stood beside the Lateran basilica, which was depicted at an angle to suggest its impending crash. The saint used the crown of his head and his upraised arms to save the building from its fall.⁷⁷ Literally and figuratively, Francis rescues the church (Church) from collapse.

Because Francis was seen as savior of the Church and the

⁷⁵ Celano, *Vita Prima*, chap. 17, sect. 45. Translation: Our Father! We adore you in all your churches that are in the world. (The translation is mine.)

⁷⁶ See page 20.

⁷⁷ The work is well described by Pico Cellini, "Di Fra Guglielmo e di Arnolfo," *Bollettino d'Arte* 40 (1955), p. 224, and by Maria Andaloro, "Il Sogno di Innocenzo III all'Aracoeli, Nicolò IV e la Basilica di S. Giovanni in Laterano," *Studi in Onore di Giulio Carlo Argan* 1 (1984), p. 29.

Lateran was a symbol of the entire Church, Nicholas "As a Franciscan...could not avoid concerning himself with St. John Lateran."⁷⁸

The ways St. John's was related to Franciscan life did not stop there. For men living in Pope Nicholas IV's era, the Council of 1215 (at which time Innocent III was pope) was the most recent Lateran Council in memory. It was quite an important gathering from the Franciscan standpoint, since the future of their Order hinged on a decision made at the Lateran that year. Francis had written a *Regula Primitiva* in 1209 and had taken it personally to St. John Lateran, but he did not receive official written approval for it or for his Order immediately.⁷⁹ Five years later, the Lateran Council decreed that religious orders could not continue to form under new rules; they had to adopt a rule already in existence, such as that of the Benedictines or Cistercians. The Council's pronouncement would have put an end to the Order of the Franciscans, and yet, the Council members at the Lateran let the Rule of Francis stand as if it had been validated by written papal decree. The Rule of the Franciscan Order, on which Pope Nicholas IV based his life, had had its start at St. John Lateran.

Part of Nicholas's renewal of the church involved

⁷⁸ Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, "La Committenza....," p. 204.

⁷⁹ John R. H. Moorman, *The Sources for the Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (Farnborough, Eng.: Gregg Press, Ltd., 1966), p.27.

reconstructing the deteriorating, fifth-century apse mosaic that commemorated the miracle of Christ's appearance in the apse on the day of the church's dedication. Sadly, Nicholas's mosaic was intentionally destroyed between March 1883 and October 1884, when the choir was extended during the reign of Pope Pius IX. What is visible now is simply an eighteenth-century replica of the thirteenth-century original. Yet the reproduction is an unusually faithful one, judging from drawings in the possession of the Vatican done before Nicholas's mosaic was dismantled. The designs were made by placing paper on the mosaic surface and carefully recording the composition, tessera for tessera. Detailed color notations were made on the reverse sides.⁸⁰ Since the nineteenth-century mosaic corresponds well with these designs, the later version is thought to be a faithful reproduction of its predecessor.

But how faithful is Nicholas's mosaic to its fifth-century forerunner? Nicholas's apse shows four rivers flowing from a hill from which rises a bejeweled cross struck by rays that emanate from the dove of the Holy Ghost, who flies in golden space just above it. The upper region of the apse contains within an arc a bust of Christ flanked by two groups of angels that float in a heavenly realm (Figure 2).

Below, the central image is flanked by two groups of

⁸⁰ Alessandro Tomei, "New Acquisitions for Jacopo Torriti in S. Giovanni in Laterano," *Arte Medievale* I/1 (1987), p. 186.

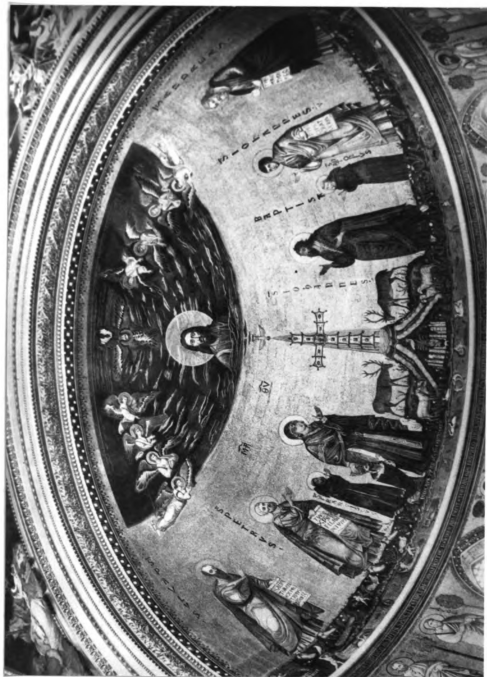


Figure 2. Apse mosaic of St. John Lateran

saints. On the left are Paul, Peter, a half-sized St. Francis and an even smaller, kneeling Nicholas, and the Blessed Virgin. On the right stand St. John the Baptist and a small St. Anthony of Padua followed by Sts. John the Evangelist and Andrew. Beneath lie aquatic scenes and animals.

There is no doubt that Nicholas's program emulated the paleochristian work that preceded it. The portion of the mosaic representing the head of Christ is attached to a slab of travertine about three feet in height and set into the Torriti mosaic: it was transplanted directly from the old apse mosaic into the new, emphasizing Nicholas's concern for restoring the head of Christ to the exact spot of its miraculous appearance on the day of the church's dedication.⁸¹

Other elements seem to be modelled directly on the predecessor. These include the jeweled cross, the four rivers springing from the mount, the lambs and deer which drink from the rivers, the aquatic scenes below, and the general composition of two groups of three saints each that flank a central depiction of the divine.⁸²

Nicholas, therefore, did not freely choose all iconographical content. But neither did he precisely recreate the old mosaic, and inspection shows that Nicholas managed an

⁸¹ Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici Medoevali delle Chiese di Roma* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1967), p. 347.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 349, 351; see also Walter Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 70, 94, and 312.

injection of his own iconographical elements that indicate the nature of his artistic commission was in part propagandistic, intended to bolster the Church's position and to promote the "Franciscan design" mentioned by Gardner.

The most obvious deviation from the original mosaic lies in the addition of the prime Franciscans saints, Anthony of Padua and Francis. Anthony is inserted on the right, between St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist; Francis is placed at left, flanked by the Blessed Virgin and St. Peter.

The inclusion of these two saints must have been shocking to the Romans who saw it. It is true that the Franciscan figures are but a little more than half the height of the others, less fair of face, and look the part of the tattered Friars Minor. But these concessions hardly diminish the difficult fact that St. Francis here stands on the same level as the majestic St. Peter and has taken Peter's place as the figure closest to Jesus' right hand.

Nicholas openly addressed the subject of St. Francis in an inscription to the left of the apse, in which he directly connects his restoration of the Lateran with the dream of Innocent III, in which Francis upheld the church:

Tertius ecclesiae pater Innocentius hora qua sese dederat sompno nutare ruina hanc videt ecclesiam mox vir pannosus at asper despectusque, humerum supponens, sustinet illam at pater evigilans Franciscus prospicit atque vere est hic inquit quem vidimus; iste ruentem ecclesiamque fidemque feret sic ille petitis cunctis concessis liber letusque recessit Francisci proles primus de sorte minorum Hieronimus quarti Nicolai nomine surgens romanus praesul partes circumspicit huius ecclesiae certam

iam dependere ruina ante retroque levat destructa reformat et ornat et fundamentis partem componit ad ymis. Postremo quae prima Dei veneranda refulsit visibus humanis facies, hec integra sistens, quo fuerat steteratque situ relocatur eodem. Presulis ecce tui, Deus, hec amplectere vota que tibi persolvit, domus huius amando decorem serva, vivifica, celo terraque beatum: effige nec manibus tradas hunc hostis iniqui: Ingrediens populus devotus munera sumat que bonus hic pastor dedit indulgendo benigne et larga pietate pater peccata remittens. Anno ab incarnatione Domini nostri Jesu Christi M.CC.XCI pontificatus eiusdem Domini Niccolai PP IIII anno III.⁸³

This inscription recalls the text of the *Legenda Maior*, the official biography of St. Francis sanctioned by the Franciscans and written by St. Bonaventura. In it, Bonaventura used three adjectives to describe Francis: "*pauperculus, modicus, despectus*." But Nicholas has changed the words in his inscription to "*pannosus, asper, despectus*" (meaning ragged, rough, despised). Perhaps Nicholas wished to soften the tone of his description of Francis to render less jolting the inclusion of the saint in the midst of Peter and the Virgin. But Bonaventura's description is already modest enough. By doing away with the word "*pauperculus*," Nicholas

⁸³ V. Forcella, *Iscrizioni* vol. 8, Roma, (1876), p. 15, no. 16. The most pertinent portion of the lengthy inscription comes in the opening statements, which say that Pope Innocent III, father of the Church, here dreamed of seeing the church tottering to ruin when he spied a ragged, rough, and despised man support the church on his shoulders, and that this man was truly the vigilant brother Francis. The inscription goes on to say that Girolamo, now Nicholas IV, first Franciscan pope, following the example of Francis, now sustains, refurbishes, and decorates the church, and replaces the miraculous head of Christ in its original position. (I thank Dr. Paul Deussen and Thomas Casaletto for their kind assistance with my interpretation of the passage.)

avoided the issue of poverty, a major point of contention in his day. The omission further reflects his policy of relaxing the Franciscan Order's view on riches.

In an inscription that borders the apse mosaic, Nicholas again speaks of Francis, describing himself as "a son of Blessed Francis."⁸⁴ This reinforces what is suggested by the mosaic itself, for next to the dwarfish St. Francis there kneels an even tinier Pope Nicholas. He does indeed appear to be a son of the mendicant saint. His hands are clasped in prayer, as are Francis's; in fact, save for the fact that he is genuflecting, his posture is very similar to the saint's. His face, too, has received similar treatment. The tilt of his head matches Francis's, as do the long, straight nose and the prominent beard. The Madonna rests a protective hand on the tiny pope's headdress, recalling the special devotion both Francis and Nicholas held for her.

Nicholas also chose to adapt the mosaic's composition to emphasize the clearly Franciscan concept of renewed spirituality. It is seen here in both its contemplative state (as represented by the deer drinking from the rivers of Paradise, a reference to the faithful's drinking in the Word of the four Gospels) and the active state. James the Less, who appears between windows amidst other apostles, challenges the viewer to the active life exemplified by St. Francis with words from his epistle, written here on his scroll: "Be ye

⁸⁴ Mann, p. 203.

doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"--a significant choice of words for a Franciscan pope.⁸⁵

In addition to recreating the mosaic in the apse, Nicholas also made structural changes to the church. He had a transept inserted into the Lateran basilica, a step he later repeated at Santa Maria Maggiore. According to Gardner,

The reasons for this are probably two in number. Primarily there was the desire to make the two ancient basilicas conform to the pattern of S. Pietro in Vaticano and S. Paolo fuori le Mura, two of the most honored churches in Rome. A secondary stimulus may have come from the recent example of the two mendicant churches in Rome, S. Maria in Aracoeli and S. Maria sopra Minerva.⁸⁶

It is obvious why Nicholas may have wanted to emulate the forms of St. Peter's and St. Paul's: They were two of Rome's most important churches. Also worth noting is the fact that "Peter's primacy (enhanced in medieval sentiment by Paul's closeness) and his presence in Rome were the assumed basis for the presence there of pope and curia."⁸⁷ St. John's represented the pope and curia, and Nicholas wanted to assure that the church compared favorably with Rome's other major basilicas.

The latter part of Gardner's statement, which relates the transept additions to Rome's mendicant churches, prompts

⁸⁵ Gardner, *Patterns...*, p. 450.

⁸⁶ J. Gardner, "Pope Nicholas IV and the Decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 36:1 (1973), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Brentano, p. 84.

further investigation. What about Santa Maria in Aracoeli and Santa Maria sopra Minerva?

These were the two Franciscan-run churches of Rome. It is interesting to note that S. Maria in Aracoeli, which some claim Nicholas consecrated,⁸⁸ was the site of the Tiburtine Sibyl's foretelling to Augustus of the imminent coming of Christ ("ECCE ARA PRIMOGENITI DEI").⁸⁹ The church's name derives from this incident, and such a "divine" revelation of the true God and Church is not unrelated to Innocent's dream of St. Francis sustaining the Lateran, the miracle that occurred in St. John's on the day of its dedication, or the miracle of the snow at Santa Maria Maggiore.⁹⁰ Generating similar building layouts helped to create a correlation among churches that each boasted a tale of direct, divine confirmation of the presence of Christ in Rome as head of the true Church.

The Aracoeli was a Benedictine church until 1250, at which time Innocent IV (1243-1254) entrusted it to the Franciscans, and it was soon partially rebuilt.⁹¹ The nave was slightly shortened in order to create space for a transept across it, and "thus the church was expanded to create its

⁸⁸ Luciano Bellosi, *La Pecora di Giotto* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1985), p. 29.

⁸⁹ Macadam, *Rome and Environs*, p. 70.

⁹⁰ See page 52.

⁹¹ C. Cecchelli, *Le Chiese di Roma dal Secolo IV al XIX*, 2 vols. (Rome: Edizioni R.O.R.E. di Nicola Ruffolo, 1942), vol. 1, p. 666.

new, cruciform shape."⁹² Santa Maria sopra Minerva, too, was rebuilt during Nicholas's lifetime, even more recently, in 1280.⁹³ The work at St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore that created a resemblance to the recently renovated mendicant churches makes the supposition of an intentional reference to the latter churches even more compelling.

The meaning of the cruciform plan itself suggests yet another level in Nicholas's iconographical program. The addition of a transept to a longitudinal basilica alters the building to resemble a cross, a shape reminiscent of Christ's passion and death. The basilica was a longstanding Roman building type that had survived from the Empire, but had at that time been used typically for secular buildings. It would be a much better reflection of the basilica's new function if the very shape of the building could bear some sign of the Savior. The architectural modification to include the transept could itself help to direct the faithful away, once and for all, from Rome's pagan past and remind them that Rome was no longer the center of a pagan empire but, rather, seat of the Church, the gateway to salvation.

The cruciform shape had come to be an increasingly important symbol under the influence of St. Francis. Bairati and Finocchi tell us that "To the Franciscans is owed the exceptional growth in the production of painted crucifixes,

⁹² Cellini, p. 223.

⁹³ Cecchelli, vol. 1, p. 593.

done in memorial of the one that, according to legend, spoke to St. Francis in the church of San Damiano, commanding him to renew the Church."⁹⁴ Francis himself instructed his disciples to pray with these words: "*Padre nostro! Ti adoriamo perche con la tua santa croce hai redento il mondo,*"⁹⁵ and he continually pointed out to his followers crosses or the forms of crosses that could be made out in shapes on the ground or walls or amongst tree branches.⁹⁶ Nicholas, as a mendicant friar, was well aware of Franciscan symbolism and wanted to renew his church under the sign of Christ that was so important to Francis. Even in architectural considerations, Nicholas was ever mindful of the Franciscan cause.

Another way his concern manifested itself was in his consistent use of Franciscans in every phase of papal operations. Nicholas employed Friars Minor to act as envoys, missionaries, messengers, confessors, and cardinals. He also understandably favored his Order when choosing men to execute his artistic projects. What artist could be more sympathetic toward Nicholas's desire to integrate the Franciscan message into his works than a fellow friar? It is no accident that Jacopo Torriti, a Franciscan monk, was Nicholas's preferred

⁹⁴ Eleonora Bairati and Anna Finocchi, *Arte in Italia* (Torino: Loescher Editore, 1988), II, p. 401.

⁹⁵ Celano, *Vita Prima*, chap. 17, sect. 45. Translation: Our Father! We adore you because with your holy cross you have redeemed the world. (The translation is mine).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

artist. Nicholas acknowledged the fact in the apse at the Lateran by representing Franciscan artisans at work. Added on, in very small scale at the feet of the apostles--one between Sts. Simon and James and the other between Sts. Bartholomew and Matthew--are two tiny Franciscan craftsmen. These figures represent the artists responsible for the work, Jacopo Torriti and Jacopo da Camerino, both Franciscans.

Their presence in the mosaic program accomplished two things: first, it pictured men working with their hands (and St. Francis had encouraged manual labor, considering it a means of avoiding evil⁹⁷) to create a work that would glorify God; second, by acknowledging that Franciscan craftsmen were responsible for such a sumptuous work of art (the mosaic medium was a most expensive one), Nicholas gained another small victory in his quest to alter the staunchly spartan Franciscan attitude. The pope himself, whom Franciscans highly respected, here communicates that the creation of an extravagant artwork in precious materials was permissible when undertaken for a divine purpose. Such was the modern view held by Nicholas, a product of the close of the thirteenth century, and one that St. Francis, active at the century's dawn, would have taken to task.

⁹⁷ Huber, p. 921.

Chapter Five: Santa Maria Maggiore

Nicholas immediately embarked on a second major commission: refurbishment of the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Several considerations convinced Nicholas that this edifice was a particularly good choice for patronage in his attempt to promote Rome's position as head of the Church.

As one of the four patriarchal basilicas (St. Peter's, St. Paul's outside the Walls, and St. John Lateran were the others), it was among the oldest--built between 432 and 440--and most venerated churches in Rome.⁹⁸ It was also one of the most visible: Santa Maria Maggiore was the first major Christian church to have been built within the city. Churches predating it had been relegated to Rome's periphery. And unlike the Lateran, this church was built, not at the behest of a civic power, but at the command of the bishop of Rome.

Santa Maria Maggiore came into existence at a time when, because of Christianity's new legal status, the bishops of Rome began to strive for more authority. These bishops had begun to call themselves "popes,"⁹⁹ and Sixtus III, Santa

⁹⁸ Richard Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 93.

⁹⁹ G. H. Joyce, "Pope," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 18 vols., ed. Charles G. Herberman, et. al. (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), vol. 12, p. 270.

Maria's founder--although legend would take us back eighty years further, claiming Liberius (352-356) as its founder--is described in the dedicatory mosaic inscription above the apse as bishop of God's people, "EPISCOPUS PLEBI DEI."

Santa Maria was also an important stopping point in many ecclesiastical processions, and it held a revered relic with a direct link to Jesus Christ: the *Santa Culla*, thought to be a fragment from the crib of the Christ Child.

This church, like St. John Lateran, was associated with the story of a miracle. On August 5, 352, so the story goes, Pope Liberius and a Roman patrician named Giovanni received word in a dream that the Blessed Virgin wished them to build a church for her on a site that she would indicate. The next morning, despite the heat, the men found a blanket of snow marking out precisely the area on which to build the foundations of the church. This miracle is significant because it claimed a divine inception of the church and marked it as, not simply a place of worship, but a site specifically and divinely designated within Rome, unlike its predecessors.

All of these factors combined to make Santa Maria Maggiore a wise choice for patronage by Nicholas, who needed to strengthen Rome's essential position in relation to the Church. Since Santa Maria Maggiore, unlike many of the other contemporary churches, was not associated with a martyr cult and its inscriptions speak of it as being dedicated to the

"POPOLO DI DIO,"¹⁰⁰ a move to restore the church would suggest "the unification of all the people of God under the new law and the identification of Rome as a new Jerusalem."¹⁰¹

Nicholas was motivated to favor this church for Franciscan reasons as well. Franciscans traditionally held a special devotion to the Blessed Mother, and their Order had expended much effort in furthering her stature within the Church. Bonaventura, the Franciscan minister general who preceded Girolamo d'Ascoli and who later was canonized a saint, was particularly devoted to her. He preached many sermons that lauded her and persuaded his congregations of the verity of her bodily assumption into heaven.¹⁰² Santa Maria Maggiore was the first church in Rome to be dedicated to the Virgin, making it a natural choice for attention from the Franciscan Nicholas.

In choosing to embellish Santa Maria Maggiore, Nicholas was once again placing himself in the role of a modern St. Francis. After receiving his commission to rebuild God's Church, Francis chose a building dedicated to Mary (Santa Maria in Porziuncula at Assisi) as his second restoration project. Nicholas, who felt he had received a similar commission from God and who had closely studied the life of

¹⁰⁰ Bairati & Finocchi, p. 190. Translation: people of God.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² S. Bonaventurae, *Opera Omnia*, (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1901), pp. 687-705.

Francis,¹⁰³ naturally wanted to emulate that saint.

The work commissioned at Santa Maria was similar to that executed at St. John's. At Santa Maria Maggiore, Nicholas installed a new apse some eighteen feet behind the existing triumphal arch, which was left intact, created a new mosaic to replace the fifth-century work in the Constantinian apse. He also added a transept across the eighteen-foot space between the new apse and the old one.¹⁰⁴

The new apse decoration consisted of a central scene of the Virgin, who shares the same seat with her son, Jesus, as he places a jeweled crown upon her head. The two are surrounded by starry heavens and enclosed in a circle bordered with more stars. They are flanked by two groups of angels who support the circle and by a group of saints on either side. To the left of the apse, from left to right, are St. Francis of Assisi, St. Paul, St. Peter, and the kneeling Pope Nicholas. At right kneels Cardinal Colonna (whose family took responsibility for carrying out Nicholas's plans for Santa Maria Maggiore after his death in 1292), St. John the Baptist, and St. John the Evangelist. Above, graceful scrollwork fills the apse, and below lie aquatic scenes. Two more scenes appear outside the curve of the apse: St. Jerome with Paula

¹⁰³ As minister general, in a letter dated May 5, 1276, Girolamo had ordered the collection of all "materials and testimonies" pertaining to the life of San Francesco and any other Franciscan saints. See Huber, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ H. Henkels, "Remarks on the Late Thirteenth-century Apse Decorations in Santa Maria Maggiore," *Simiolus* 4 (1971), p. 128.

and Eustochia at left and Mathias Preaching at right. (There were important relics of both Jerome and Mathias at the church.) Below the apse are five scenes from the Life of Mary: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Dormition, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Presentation in the Temple (Figure 3).

It is not certain to what degree Torriti's mosaic imitates the older one, but the Constantinian apse was not torn down until work on the new apse was well underway.¹⁰⁵ It was available to Torriti as a point of reference, and most believe his mosaic was directly influenced by its predecessor,¹⁰⁶ conceived of more as an updated version of a venerable antique mosaic rather than a completely new creation. Indeed, some motifs were directly transplanted from the old to the new. Walter Oakeshott reports that some passages, such as some of the curving scrolls, water scenery, and animals, were taken directly from the older work.¹⁰⁷

Christine Verzar Bornstein notes that medieval inhabited scrollwork motifs were sometimes derived from the pillars decorated with such designs that had been used in the ninth century to decorate a chapel dedicated to the Virgin in Old

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 134; see also Gardner, "Pope Nicholas IV...", p. 2, and Matthiae, p. 355.

¹⁰⁷ Oakeshott, p. 312.

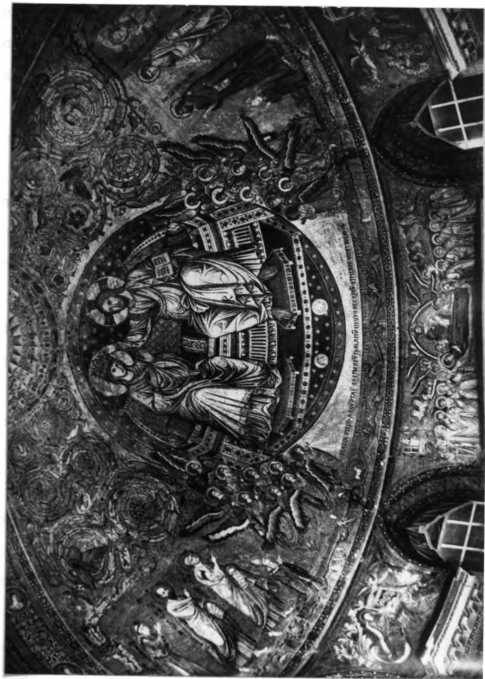


Figure 3. Apse mosaic of Santa Maria Maggiore

St. Peter's basilica.¹⁰⁸ Since the pillars were associated with the resting place of the first pope, the inhabited scrollwork design had come to be a symbol of papal Rome. Nicholas was anxious to employ such symbolism. This meaning and the added incentive of the scrollwork's presence in a chapel dedicated to Mary may have been factors in his decision to incorporate scrollwork from the older mosaic and to make such heavy use of the motif in the mosaic's overall design.

Also worth noting is the Franciscan devotion to nature, possibly indulged here by Nicholas in his utilization of the inhabited scrollwork motifs. The Franciscans believed that, since God had consented to become man, man and his world were both part of God's supernatural order; all natural things, even the animals and plants like those seen in Santa Maria's scrollwork, were thus holy things to be revered.

Henkels reports about Nicholas's new apse mosaic that "some pieces were transferred whole, some restored and re-constituted in the new apse,...others were copied" from the old.¹⁰⁹ Quite possibly copied were the groups of angels and the general composition. It is uncertain whether the saints depicted were those of the fifth-century work as well. Here, they all work coherently within the composition. The presence of Peter and Paul in medieval Roman mosaics was well nigh

¹⁰⁸ Christine Verzar Bornstein, *Portals and Politics in the Early Italian City-state: The Sculpture of Nicholas in Context* (Parma, Italy: Università degli Studi di Parma, Istituto di Storia dell'Arte, 1988), p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ Henkels, p. 143.

mandatory, and the two are placed side by side on the left. The saints who appear on the right side, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, allude to the Madonna's major biblical roles. John the Baptist retains the usual position held in *deesis* scenes, and John the Evangelist's presence recalls Mary's role at the foot of the cross during the Crucifixion.

Some elements of the mosaic were obviously completely new. As he had done at the Lateran, so too Nicholas now added at Santa Maria Maggiore the saints of the Franciscan Order. Francis stands left of Sy. Paul and St. Anthony of Padua is to the right of John the Evangelist. The inclusion of these recently canonized saints at the Lateran alongside such established and beloved ones as Peter and Paul had been without precedent. In that church, they were at least modestly reduced in size, but at Santa Maria Maggiore, Nicholas represented them on a scale nearly equal to the others. They stand just a few inches shorter than the rest and can certainly be considered as fully human in size as the other saints present. The increase in height of the Franciscan saints is countered by the modest gesture of their relegation to the end spaces, farthest from Christ and Mary.

The figure of St. Francis in particular exhibits a distinct change from the Francis portrayed in the program at St. John Lateran. At St. John's, the tiny saint appears bearded and hairy; his appearance borders on the disheveled (Figure 4). Here, he has experienced a transformation. He



Figure 4. St. John Lateran: detail of St. Francis



Figure 5. Santa Maria Maggiore: detail of St. Francis

has acquired a modest bow in his stance that perhaps serves to maintain a slight difference in rank between himself and his nearest pictured neighbors, Sts. Peter and Paul, but no longer is Francis the ragged pauper he was at St. John Lateran (Figure 5). His face has been transformed. It is more open and confident; the heavy crease in the brow is gone and the weary look in the eyes has disappeared.

Also radically new is the clean-shaven chin. This marks the first time St. Francis is portrayed without a beard.¹¹⁰ The artist is once again Torriti, Nicholas's preferred worker and the same man who created the bearded St. Francis at St. John Lateran about five years earlier. What occurred during the time between the mosaics at St. John's and Santa Maria Maggiore that accounts for this major iconographical change? Bellosi suggests Francis was "shaved" because there was a desire to represent him in a more respectable manner rather than as the "straccione sporco"¹¹¹ (or dirty ragamuffin) he was reputed to be.

Francis did, in fact, wear a beard. Tommaso da Celano described him this way:

Di statura piuttosto piccola, testa regolare e rotonda, volto un po'ovale e proteso, fronte piana e piccola, occhi neri, di misura normale e tutto semplicità, capelli pure oscuri, sopracciglia dritte, naso giusto, sottile e diritto, orecchie dritte ma piccole, tempie piane, lingua mite,

¹¹⁰ Bellosi, *La Pecora...*, p. 8.

¹¹¹ Pietro Scarpellini, "Iconografia Francescana nei Secoli XIII e XIV," in *Francesco d'Assisi: Storia e Arte*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milan: Electa, 1982), p. 94.

*bruciante e penetrante, voce robusta, dolce, chiara e sonora, denti uniti, uguali e bianchi, labbra piccole e sottili, barba nera e rara, spalle dritte, mani scarne, dita lunghe, unghie sporgenti, gambe snelle, piedi piccoli, pelle delicata, magro, veste ruvida, sonno brevissimo, mano generosissima.*¹¹²

By midcentury, depictions of St. Francis typically included reference to these characteristics.¹¹³

The iconographical innovation of shaving St. Francis can be directly attributed to Pope Nicholas.¹¹⁴ He was trying to upgrade the saint's image. Late thirteenth-century fashion demanded that men be clean-shaven. Wearing a beard had negative connotations and was harshly criticized.¹¹⁵ Men with beards were considered "*burberi*," or rough people of discourteous bearing.¹¹⁶ Nicholas, who had fostered the Conventual attitude at nearly every opportunity, now felt it permissible to make an iconographical change. Even though his

¹¹² Celano, *Vita Prima*, chap. 29, sect. 83. Translation: Rather small of stature; head regular and round; an oval and lengthy face; small, flat forehead; black eyes, of average size and complete simplicity; hair very dark; straight eyebrows; a just nose, thin and straight; ears straight but small; flat temples; a mild tongue, burning and penetrating; robust voice, sweet, clear, and sonorous; compact teeth, even and white; small, thin lips; *an exceptional black beard*; straight shoulders; worn hands; long fingers; jutting fingernails; skinny legs; small feet; delicate skin; a thin man of coarse clothing who slept very little and had a most generous hand. (The translation and italics therein are my own.)

¹¹³ Scarpellini, p. 94

¹¹⁴ Bellosi, *La Pecora...*, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

depiction did not coincide with historical record, Nicholas knew the Franciscan Order would be hampered in its quest for prestige with such a rough image of its founding saint. Nicholas left the less important Anthony of Padua bearded, but he ordered Francis shaved.

At the Lateran, Nicholas had himself represented next to his beloved Francis. Not only is Nicholas positioned closest to the saint, but he looks strikingly like him in body position and countenance. Did Nicholas really bear such a close resemblance to his spiritual model? It is unlikely. The concept of realistic portraiture in the Middle Ages was less important than symbolic impact. Clearly, Nicholas was here casting himself in the role of St. Francis.

A similar situation occurs at Santa Maria Maggiore. Again, a portrait of Nicholas is included, this time separated from Francis in order to allow the pope to appear, this time at less than half-size scale, just to the right of the central Coronation scene. The postures of Nicholas and his mentor remain relatively independent of one another; but, in imitation of St. Francis, Nicholas, too, appears clean-shaven, quite unlike his portrait at St. John's. Again, he is portraying himself as a little St. Francis. What brings the argument to rest in a striking fashion is the fact that the hands of Pope Nicholas's likeness actually bear what Clough

claims to be the stigmata,¹¹⁷ the wounds of Christ borne upon Francis at Mount La Verna¹¹⁸ in 1224¹¹⁹ (Figure 6). The other similarities are understandable, as perhaps they could be attributed to an active ego or even to the stylistic tendencies of the artist. But the inclusion of the stigmata, which Nicholas certainly never suffered, is a blatant sign of his assumption of a share in Francis's role as sustainer of the Church.

That is, it is blatant if the mosaic picture truly was intended to represent "the stigmata on the hands"¹²⁰ as Clough believes. It must be admitted that it closely resembles the stigmata shown on Francis's body nearby, and especially like the marks on the saint's feet at St. John Lateran.

Francis's stigmata is represented by a simple dot; Nicholas's is a dot with a small circle around it. I question whether Nicholas could have dared to specify inclusion of the stigmata in his portrait. Could he, the man who would have been happier as cook than as cardinal, really have changed this drastically? Certainly it is possible, but the question

¹¹⁷ Cecil H. Clough, "Papa Niccoló IV nella Sua Iconografia," in *Niccoló IV: Un Pontificato tra Oriente ed Occidente*, ed. Enrico Menestó (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991), p. 187.

¹¹⁸ Bonaventura, *Legenda Maior*, chap. 13, sect. 2.

¹¹⁹ Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, eds., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 8.

¹²⁰ Clough, p. 188.



Figure 6. Papal statue attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio

remains a relevant one. Nicholas appears to have been quite a pious man, but little serious work has actually been devoted to understanding his spirituality.¹²¹

Could the "stigmata" really have been a representation of a jewel embedded in a papal glove? Nicholas definitely wears gloves in his portrait at the Lateran basilica; the cuff is visible at his wrist. At Santa Maria Maggiore, neither wrist nor cuff is visible, so no gloves are readily identifiable, unless the "jewel" is to be read as part of a glove. A statue in a chapel at St. John Lateran, sometimes attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio,¹²² who was roughly a contemporary (c.1250 - c.1301) of Nicholas's, shows a papal figure wearing a glove with a prominent round gem surrounded by a small circle of woven embroidery (Figure 7). Perhaps it is this that Torriti intended to show on Nicholas's hand.

Clearly, though, regardless of the patron's or artist's intent, the lack of any other evidence of a glove, such as the inclusion of wrinkles or of a cuff, indeed makes the mark read like a stigmatization, especially when St. Francis, only two saints to the left, bears a similar stance and mark. Also, Nicholas wears a papal ring. Unless it is worn over the gloved finger, it, too, implies flesh beneath it. Nicholas

¹²¹ Claudio Leonardi, "Niccoló IV e la Fine della Chiesa Medievale," in *Niccoló IV: Un Pontificato tra Oriente ed Occidente*, ed. Enrico Menestó (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991), p. 224.

¹²² Clough, p. 188.



Figure 7. Santa Maria Maggiore: detail of Pope Nicholas IV

may have been aware of the impression the image made,¹²³ and perhaps he was favorably disposed.

The Coronation scene featured in the center of the apse was a relatively new subject. Many factors contributed to the rise of the cult of the Virgin in the thirteenth century. One of those was the special devotion to Mary held by Francis and the Franciscans. One of Franciscanism's distinguishing characteristics was its Christocentrism: Franciscans believed man's destiny was centered on and found its meaning in Jesus Christ. Because the Blessed Virgin had brought Christ into the world by God's will, the Franciscans held her, too, in great esteem.¹²⁴ St. Francis had desired that a Mass be said in the Virgin's honor every Saturday.¹²⁵ The Franciscan Order had approved the Feast of the Conception of Mary by the mid-1260s, and in 1269, the Franciscan General Chapter officially accepted the Feast of the Virgin of the Snow,¹²⁶ a feast associated specifically with the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. It seems quite likely that some of the Marian iconography in the apse mosaic emerged from the sermons of two Franciscans associated with Pope Nicholas, St. Bonaventura and

¹²³ Although he died in 1292, before the mosaic was completed by the Colonna family in about 1295. Gardner notes, though ("Pope Nicholas IV...", p. 5), that there is no reason to doubt that the main lines of the mosaic program were already established by the time of Nicholas's death and that the mosaic was faithfully completed by the Colonna.

¹²⁴ McDevitt, p. 38.

¹²⁵ Huber, p. 159.

¹²⁶ Gardner, "Patterns...", p. 452.

Matteo d'Acquasparta.

Bonaventura (who wrote the official *Vita* of St. Francis) was minister general of the Friars Minor immediately before Girolamo d'Ascoli. He was greatly devoted to the Virgin and preached a sermon¹²⁷ promoting the idea that Mary was assumed into heaven and crowned at a time when belief in the Assumption was not yet required by official Church doctrine.

Franciscan thought perpetuated this idea, and it was voiced again by Matteo d'Acquasparta, minister general of the Order from 1287 to 1289. Nicholas supported him as minister and later made him a cardinal,¹²⁸ and Matteo went on to have a strong influence on Franciscan spirituality. Dante, in his "Lament for the Decline of the Franciscan Order" in the *Paradiso*, mentioned him, and Ciardi, in his notes, points out that significant changes occurred under his rule.¹²⁹

Both Bonaventura and Matteo, along with other Franciscans (such as Fra Ubertino da Casale, also mentioned by Dante), promoted the belief in a direct progression of the Virgin from Dormition to Assumption to Coronation.¹³⁰ At Santa Maria Maggiore, the artist, the Franciscan Torriti, went so far as to place the Dormition scene centrally rather than in the

¹²⁷ See page 53.

¹²⁸ R. Ritzler, "I Cardinali e i Papi dei Frati Minori Conventuali," *Miscellanea Francescana*, Vol. 71 (1971), p. 16.

¹²⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. John Ciardi (London: New England Library Limited, 1970), p. 147, notes by Ciardi concerning Canticle XII, Verses 112 ff.

¹³⁰ Gardner, "Pope Nicholas IV...", p. 10.

chronological manner on the far right (as Cavallini did at Santa Maria in Trastevere) in order to represent a vertical progression of death, assumption (which is implied by the mosaic inscription which refers to "MARIA VIRGO ASSVMPTAE"¹³¹), and crowning. These three events were commemorated on successive feast days, namely August 15th, 16th, and 17th, by some communities,¹³² and by creating a linear visual succession of these events in his apse mosaic, Nicholas lent support to the Franciscan belief in the Assumption which glorified the Virgin, one of the most important saints of the Franciscans. As Gardner states, in the mosaic program, the Assumption of Mary "was unequivocally implied...Nicholas's role in giving visual currency to a doctrinal theme still in a delicate process of crystallization was of great importance."¹³³ Nicholas once more was displaying his total devotion to and emulation of his Order's founding saint.

¹³¹ Henkels, p. 141.

¹³² Frederick G. Holweck, "Assumption of the Virgin," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Gilmary Society, 1913), vol. 2, p. 6.

¹³³ Gardner, "Patterns...", p. 453.

Chapter Six: Ascoli Piceno and the Cope

Even when Nicholas was elevated to the demanding position of the papacy, he did not forget Ascoli Piceno, his place of birth. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was his genuine concern for the needs of his townspeople. In Ascoli, pursuit of his papal policies, artistic and otherwise, was intensified by hometown loyalty and surely by his own fond memories of home and his early days as a Franciscan.

Nicholas had watched the Franciscan Order grow in Ascoli Piceno almost from its inception. By the time he became pope, Ascoli had had a strong Franciscan presence for over seventy years. Nicholas, who probably had known personally some of St. Francis's first Ascoli recruits, genuinely cared about the spiritual welfare of the townsfolk who first introduced him to Franciscanism. As a citizen, a Franciscan, a one-time minister general of all Franciscans, and now as the first Franciscan pope, Nicholas took a very personal interest in Le Marche region, and in Ascoli Piceno in particular.

In a more pragmatic vein, it is worth noting that Ascoli Piceno's region, Le Marche, was not necessarily a stable ally of the papacy. Even his own Ascoli was capable of giving

Nicholas trouble.¹³⁴ Historically, many towns in Le Marche were known to be particularly independent and resentful of papal interference.¹³⁵ Problems persisted into midcentury and beyond before terms were reached with papal authorities.¹³⁶ Even then, papal relations were not always smooth.

Another impetus for targeting Le Marche for papal attention was the fact that St. Francis had been quite active in the region. In fact, Ascoli Piceno's citizens had had their own religious experience, administered directly by the Order's founder. In 1215, a young and fervent Francis came to Ascoli and inspired the inhabitants.¹³⁷ Thirty likeminded youths founded the first small Franciscan monasteries in the area.

Soon, these friars began to clamor for a home within the walls. They wanted a more practical location, one from which it would be easier to serve the people. They also wanted to build a better facility in a more strategic location.¹³⁸

Alexander IV (1254-1261) approved the move in 1257, but immediately there sprang up strong resentment and resistance

¹³⁴ Mann, p. 190.

¹³⁵ Waley, p. 87.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 155.

¹³⁷ Refer to p. 4.

¹³⁸ Elia Calilli Nardinocchi, "Insediamenti degli Ordini Mendicanti in Ascoli Piceno," *Picenum Seraphicum* (1979-80), p. 217.

from the secular clergy already living within Ascoli's walls. If the Franciscans moved into the urban area, they would doubtlessly become enmeshed in the religious and administrative patterns of the town. The powers and duties that had once belonged solely to Ascoli's secular priests would in part shift to the newcomers. Preeminence and prestige that were once theirs alone would be divided. There were also financial considerations: having another competitor for the townspeople's charities would lessen revenues.¹³⁹

The civil authorities joined the religious leaders in their opposition to the Franciscans' transfer into town. In fact, resistance was so severe that Pope Alexander IV came to the Franciscans' defense. In a letter dated December 13, 1257, he threatened to excommunicate certain Ascolani and to deprive the city of Church privileges if the Captain of the People, the Council of the Elders, or anyone else dared to impede the friars in their right to occupy their designated spot inside Ascoli Piceno's boundaries.¹⁴⁰

Tensions were still present when Nicholas (then Girolamo) was in his early 30s, in 1258, at which time the Franciscans were ready to begin building a new church. An obstinate local bishop refused to consecrate the first stone. Again Alexander IV was called on to defend the friars, which he did, blessing the stone himself and sending a more accommodating bishop to

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 219.

deliver it.¹⁴¹

Shifts in Le Marche's medieval religious structure were closely followed and often politically involved, sometimes causing religious centers to wax or wane in importance. For example, in the 1200s, Venice was replaced by Padua as a major Franciscan center, and Ascoli itself was rivaling Ancona in importance.¹⁴²

Nicholas, bearing the knowledge of the troubles the Franciscans had experienced in Ascoli Piceno, must have felt protective of the site at which he had experienced his first calling to the spiritual life. His loyalty to his hometown revealed itself in several different ways. First, Nicholas applied himself to the task of stabilizing Ascoli Piceno. The town's secular heads had used their positions of leadership to take an antagonistic stance towards the Church. They had even destroyed roads that led to monastic sites and forbidden the Ascolani to assist the religious orders in rebuilding.¹⁴³

Nicholas immediately took steps to restore proper respect for Church property and activities and to assert his own authority as the Church's head. Early in his pontificate, he became the rector of the city's *auctoritate apostolica*, a

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Luigi Pelligrini, *Insedimenti Francescani nell'Italia del Duecento* (Rome: Laurentianum, 1984), p. 160.

¹⁴³ Giuseppe Bartocci, "Il Monastero di Sant'Angelo e il Comune di Ascoli (1250-1300)," in *Le Marche nei Secoli XII e XIII*, Atti del VI Convegno del Centro di Studi Storici Maceratesi (Parma: Centro di Studi Storici Maceratesi, 1972), p. 75.

position which was later confirmed for life. He also ordered a provincial rector to go directly to Ascoli to investigate the situation and to demand that city officials appear before him to explain their behavior.¹⁴⁴ This rector remained in Ascoli more than one month trying to sort out the situation.¹⁴⁵

Nicholas issued several bulls forcing the Ascolani to face up to fines, debts, and penalties,¹⁴⁶ yet he wrote to the local rector to ask that the fines imposed be reduced.¹⁴⁷ He also gave the city papal privilege, exempting its citizens from the jurisdiction of the subprovincial courts of Le Marche.¹⁴⁸ This was an important indication of his desire to emphasize papal authority in an area dominated by questionable secular leaders.

Beyond these political "gifts," Nicholas demonstrated his loyalty with material blessings as well, making contributions of art to the city's churches.¹⁴⁹ The gifts included pieces of metalwork, ecclesiastical embroidery, and a panel painting

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Waley, p. 212.

¹⁴⁶ Langlois, ed., nos. 7087-8, 7093, 7336.

¹⁴⁷ Waley, p. 213.

¹⁴⁸ For Nicholas's dealings with Ascoli Piceno, see Langlois's *Les Registres*, nos. 830, 2413, 6961-5, 6982, 6995, 7006, 7025, 7030, 7036-7, 7082-3, 7098-7100, 7122, 7149, and 7236.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., nos. 7101 and 7122.

of the Madonna, though this last was destroyed by fire in 1853.¹⁵⁰

The ecclesiastical embroidery, however, survives (Figures 8a and 8b). Nicholas did not commission it or choose any of its iconography, but the piece was so well attuned to his own thinking and goals that he chose to present it as a gift to the cathedral of Ascoli. In a letter of July 28, 1288,¹⁵¹ he gave the cope to Ascoli, expressly forbidding its sale or removal from the cathedral, where it was his wish that it should remain forever.

The elaborately woven cope is one of the finest examples of *opera anglicanum* in existence today, perhaps the more famous for its bizarre and unresolved theft.¹⁵² The original intent of its iconography and the political and religious circumstances that surrounded its creation have been thoroughly examined by others.¹⁵³ What proves interesting

¹⁵⁰ Gardner, "Patterns....," p. 439.

¹⁵¹ May Morris, "Opus Anglicanum Part II: The Ascoli Cope," *Burlington Magazine*, 6 (1905), p. 440.

¹⁵² It disappeared from Ascoli's cathedral in 1902, only to resurface two years later at an English textiles exhibition. Investigation showed the owner to be American business magnate J.P. Morgan. An arrest, a cryptic note, and a suicide all ensued, but the proceedings became irrelevant when Morgan returned the cope to Italy in 1904. For the story as reported by the New York Times, see these articles, all from 1904: Aug. 21, p.1; Sept. 3, p. 7; Oct. 2, p. 4; Oct. 16, p. 12; and Nov. 19, p. 1.

¹⁵³ For example, see Susan Kyser's *Figuring Reconciliation: The Embroidered Cope at Ascoli Piceno, Pope Clement IV, and the English*, M.A. thesis, Syracuse University, 1989.

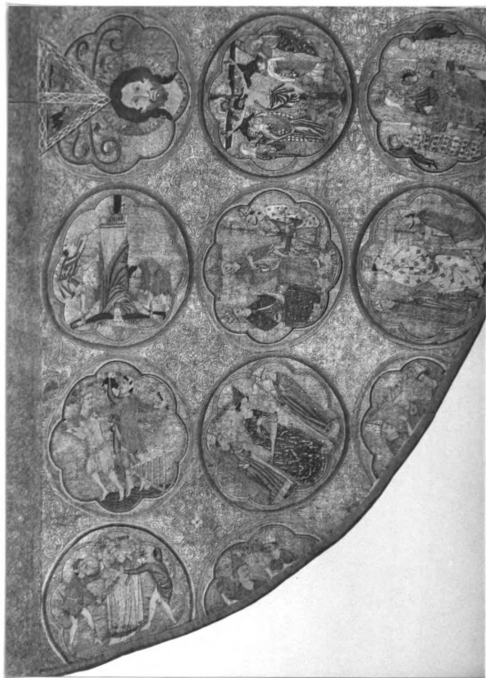


Figure 8a. The Ascoli Cope: left side



Figure 8b. The Ascoli Cope: right side

here is an examination of the cope's role in its new context, that of a finished object resting in the papal treasury and selected by Nicholas for presentation to the cathedral of his native town. Given his explicit instructions that it not be loaned or disposed of, one wonders what the cope meant to Nicholas, not its commissioner, but reigning pope in pursuit of a distinctly Franciscan policy. What did it represent to him, what message did he hope to promote, and how did it relate to Franciscanism?

As a piece chosen to play a part in Nicholas's policy to bolster the reputation of Rome as the central religious power, the cope is unequaled. The vestment propounds the authority of the Roman papacy in every aspect. Iconographically, the cope's nineteen tondi are divided into four series. The first is a central, vertical column of three tondi. The bottom tondo depicts a Madonna and Child; the central one, Christ crucified; and the topmost, Christ as Pantocrator (Figure 9). The column as a whole is the anchor that supports the pro-papacy message of the surrounding tondi. The meaning is clear (it also, it should be noted, perfectly corresponds with Franciscan beliefs): Mary's intervention brings the faithful to Jesus, who died for mankind's sins and rose again to stand in judgment of all, granting the faithful their salvation. God had chosen the popes to surround Him and continue His Church and to provide the channels necessary to obtain salvation.

The rest of the cope's tondi are organized in roughly



Figure 9. Ascoli Cope detail: Pantocrator

chronological order in three horizontal bands. The first band, that closest to the Christ Pantocrator, consists of six tondi containing early popes all associated with martyrial legends. They are Giovanni, Marcellus, Peter, Clement, Stephen, and Fabianus. Flanking the vertical column, they, like the crucified Christ at center, are all seen at the moment of their martyrdoms. Like Him, they have all been called to make the supreme sacrifice, to die for the sake of establishing Christ's Church on earth.

Peter's tondo is located next to that of the Pantocrator. Placing Peter at the right of the judging Christ recalls the biblical passage from Matthew 16:18-19: "I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of hell will not prevail against it. I give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven." Peter is seen as a continuation of God's will carried on through the person of the pope.

The Church's second pope takes the flanking position on Christ's other side, opposite Peter. Clement was in reality the forth pope, but common legend placed him second and held that Peter invested Clement with his papal powers with his dying breath, and "thus the right of succession [as head of the Church] of St. Peter and the popes of Rome came to be justified."¹⁵⁴ St. Jerome, Eusebius, and Origen all equated

¹⁵⁴ Rosalia Bonito Fanelli, ed., *Il Piviale Duecentesco di Ascoli Piceno*, (Ascoli Piceno: Cassa di Risparmio di Ascoli Piceno, 1990), p. 62.

this Clement with the one mentioned by St. Paul in Philippians 4:3, and it was Clement who wrote the "First Epistle of Clement," an important document that traced the popes back to Jesus and defended the idea that Christ inaugurated the office of the papacy.¹⁵⁵

All popes depicted in this band were known for their struggles to affirm the Roman Church. Pope Stephen helped to stabilize the early Roman papacy, defending the papal lineage based on the Gospel of Matthew. Fabianus (Figure 10) and Marcellus further organized the Church, inventing a system no longer modeled after Augustus's civic regional divisions, and therefore displaying the superiority of divine over civic law.

The second horizontal band holds six more popes, all doctors or confessors: Leo, Hillarius, Silvester, Gregorius, Lucius, and Anastasius. Whereas the first band shows popes laboring and dying to establish the Church, this band concentrates on displaying its administrative and judicial aspects.

Hillarius and Leo worked throughout their reigns to consolidate and bolster the papal office. Gregorius was the first to call the pope the "servant of the servants of God," which later became an official title of the office.¹⁵⁶ Anastasius, Lucius, and Leo were great combatants of heresy.

¹⁵⁵ For further information and sources for the lives of these saints, see Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater, eds., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 4 vols., (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1956).

¹⁵⁶ Joyce, p. 270; Fanelli, p. 76.



Figure 10. Ascoli Cope detail: Pope St. Fabianus

Pope St. Silvester, pictured at left center, was the pontiff during Constantine's reign, and thus at the time when Christianity first became the official religion of the State. According to legend, Constantine gave Silvester a document known as the Donation of Constantine, which conferred on the popes "primacy in ecclesiastical patriarchates and temporal dominion over Rome."¹⁵⁷ Constantine also offered him the imperial crown, but Silvester, to demonstrate the subordinate position of temporal power to papal authority (and surely it was well for Nicholas to remind the Ascolani of this idea), declined.¹⁵⁸

The third horizontal band contains only four popes; Clement, for whom the cope was probably commissioned, and three others, all from the thirteenth century: Alexander IV, Urban IV, and Innocent IV. Each one played an active part in proclaiming the authority of the Church. Alexander attempted to reassert papal power in Sicily; Innocent proclaimed the papal office supreme and beyond the jurisdiction of earthly rulers. Urban recovered control of many papal territories that had been lost.

The cope employs no subtlety in its exaltation of the role played by the popes as vicars of Christ; in fact, the garment's theme is entirely papal. Sixteen of its nineteen

¹⁵⁷ John N. Davidson Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 28 and see also L. Duchesne, ed., *Liber Pontificalis*, 2nd ed. (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 170-201 and Fanelli, p. 74.

¹⁵⁸ Fanelli, p. 73.

tondi represent popes, and all in a way that emphasizes their divinely approved status as leaders of the Church. The cope's iconography undertakes what amounts to a justification of the papal office, beginning with Peter and emphasizing the direct progression of spiritual authority from Jesus Christ, its source. It glorifies the Church in its moments of tribulation, demonstrating the wisdom and courage of the popes in the face of dissent and disaster, thereby emphasizing the primacy of Rome as head of the Church. These alone are reasons enough for its selection by Nicholas. Bestowing the cope upon Ascoli Piceno's cathedral served to focus importance on the role the native son had now obtained. Such exaltation of the papal office and of its divine initiation was well in line with Nicholas's propagandistic needs.

But there were Franciscan implications in the iconography, too. Nicholas, surely aware of them, intended that the cope bear a Franciscan message and emphasized his apparent intention by sending Lamberto di Ripatransone, a Franciscan, to deliver it.

Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto states that the cope had originally been destined for the church of St. John Lateran in Rome.¹⁵⁹ She bases her argument on the fact that it is likely that a cope covered with papal imagery was meant for a papal church, pointing out the similarity between the head of

¹⁵⁹ Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, "Il Piviale e Niccoló IV," in *Il Piviale Duecentesco di Ascoli Piceno*, ed., Rosalia Bonito Fanelli (Ascoli Piceno: Cassa di Risparmio di Ascoli Piceno, 1990), p. 23.

Christ in the church's apse mosaic and the same subject in the cope. They are indeed similar, and if her hypothesis is correct, it raises an important Franciscan connection: choosing a gift intended for the Lateran to give to Ascoli created a direct link among the popes' church, Nicholas, Ascoli Piceno, and the dream of Innocent III, in which Francis sustains the Church. Nicholas had specifically cited the dream in his inscription at St. John Lateran, and he always kept in mind the similarity of Francis's role as sustainer to the role of the pope.

An essential part of the papacy was to spread the word of God, often through missions. One of the central themes of Franciscanism was the concept of mission. Francis himself was the first Franciscan missionary. In 1212, he sailed from Ancona, a port very near Ascoli, for Syria to convert the infidel, though he only got as far as Dalmatia (a place, it will be remembered, where Nicholas once worked).

Francis believed in accepting and even embracing martyrdom if necessary, affirming that "you should not be afraid of...those who kill the body but cannot do more than this" (Matthew 10:28). The early Franciscan concept of mission embraced a "desire for martyrdom"¹⁶⁰ that led the Friars Minor to a compulsion for missionary activity in far away, even hostile, lands. Nicholas himself had often been

¹⁶⁰ Randolph E. Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), p. 41.

called on for missionary duties. He had been especially concerned with missions to Constantinople, where he had once succeeded in reuniting the Catholic Church--only to see it split again a short time later. But the quest to mend the rift was not one he had forgotten. As Gardner puts it, "Union was in his bones."¹⁶¹

In the Ascoli cope, that spirit is reflected by the high proportion of popes present who were themselves involved with Constantinople. Pope Giovanni, the first pontiff to travel to that Eastern land, was martyred there for his trouble. Urbanus was widely experienced as a papal legate before taking Peter's chair, as was Girolamo. He was pope when Constantinople fell to Paleologus (with whom Girolamo later dealt) in 1261. Urbanus, too, tried without success to restore Constantinople's Latin empire. Anastasius as well sought to unite East with West, Clement continued correspondence with Paleologus, and Hillarius protested against the condemnation of a Constantinian bishop.

Saints Fabianus and Silvester held a different significance for Nicholas. Fabianus was elected pope, despite the fact that he was a layman, when the cardinal electorate saw a dove alight above his head and interpreted it as a symbol from God revealing his special calling. Silvester (who, according to legend, converted Constantine to Christianity) was the pontiff conducting the dedicatory Mass

¹⁶¹ Gardner, *"Patterns..."*, p. 453.

at St. John Lateran at the moment the approving head of Christ miraculously appeared in the apse. Both these men relate to Nicholas's preoccupation with divine symbols of approval of both Rome and pope.

Gregorius was an important missionary, playing a major role in converting England to Christianity. But as Fanelli points out, "often one finds that the same name in the cope can be interpreted as a reference to various popes."¹⁶² Here the presence of a Gregorius brings to mind the Gregory who was much closer to Nicholas in time--Gregory IX (1227-1241). It was he who canonized Francis of Assisi and who, in 1228, laid the foundation stone for the basilica that would hold the new saint's body.

Alexander IV was directly connected to Ascoli Piceno. It was he who approved the transfer of the friars to within Ascoli's walls, blessing the first stone of their new church.¹⁶³ He had been a strong supporter of the Franciscans as cardinal-protector of the Order under Innocent IV. As pope, he not only favored the Franciscans at the University of Paris when secular clergy challenged their teachings,¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Fanelli, ed. p. 69. Translation: often one finds that the same name in the cope can be interpreted as a reference to various popes. (The translation is mine.)

¹⁶³ See page 73.

¹⁶⁴ Kelly, p. 194.

but he canonized St. Clare of Assisi, a contemporary and close friend of St. Francis and the third major saint of the Franciscan Order.

Chapter Seven: Assisi and the Chalice

In an examination of Nicholas's role as Franciscan and art patron, a discussion of Assisi cannot be omitted. As the home of the mother church of the Franciscan Order, the basilica of San Francesco, Assisi was of the utmost importance to the Franciscans. Yet the town had not immediately become renowned as the "sanctuary city of Umbria."¹⁶⁵ Widespread fame did not come until around midcentury. The basilica of San Francesco, built to house the saint's remains, was intended from its inception to be a major pilgrimage destination. A grandiose church--despite the wishes of Francis himself--would help secure Assisi's position as an important historical and religious center.

Construction of the church was begun in 1228, but the building process was sporadic and difficult. In the 1240s, Innocent IV (1243-1247) authorized the collection of charities for the building's completion. The dedication ceremony was held at last in 1253, though the structure still had not been finished. In 1266, another papal decree was issued, this time by Clement IV (1265-1268), to allow for the collection of

¹⁶⁵ Roberto Rusconi, "Dal Sepolcro di Francesco all'Indulgenza della Porziuncola," in *San Francesco d'Assisi: Storia e Arte*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milan: Electa, 1982), p. 159.

funds to complete and decorate the church.

Pope Nicholas III (1277-1280), a great friend to the Franciscans, had been very interested in seeing the Assisi church completed. But in 1279, Bonagrazia da Persiceto was elected minister general of the Franciscans. As Girolamo's successor, he was tremendously busy, attending to the many matters the overburdened Girolamo had not seen to. Bonagrazia was soon engaged in dealing with the conflicts within the Order and with curbing the bitter resentments that existed between Spirituals and Conventuals. Unifying the brethren into a single cohesive Order became his main goal,¹⁶⁶ and it would seem he had no time or inclination to push for progress on work at Assisi.

In the year following Bonagrazia's election came the death of Nicholas III, and his passing was no small loss to the Franciscans. As the Order's cardinal protector, he had been much involved with the friars and was an avid Franciscan supporter. The loss of the positive influence Nicholas III provided at the papal level was perhaps the main reason for the halt in work at Assisi.

The election of Raymond Geoffrey to the position of minister general of the Friars Minor in 1289 presented yet another difficulty: Geoffrey was a Spiritual, and, as such, was not supportive of lavish artistic endeavors like the one underway at Assisi.

¹⁶⁶ Huber, p. 169.

Perhaps it was for this reason that Nicholas IV opposed Geoffrey's election.¹⁶⁷ When he had been minister general, Girolamo had recognized the importance of relaxing the Order's stance on poverty in order to establish a more realistic policy that would allow for growth and order, not to mention an art that would make possible the propagation and perpetuation of the Order. Geoffrey, as a Spiritual, would try to lead the Order in precisely the direction that Girolamo would not have wanted. By 1288, the year in which Nicholas became pope, no papal funding for the basilica had been issued for twenty years.¹⁶⁸

The Assisians had good reason to take new hope upon Nicholas's succession to the papacy. They knew there were several reasons for their town to receive papal favor. Nicholas had spent some time in Assisi in his early years training for the Franciscan life. He was clearly devoted to the saint. He had surely seen work on the church in its early stages and doubtless took an interest in the memorial's construction and decor. The decoration of the upper church must have presented an irresistible opportunity for Nicholas. The content of the fresco cycles could influence thousands of pilgrims, cement Francis's reputation, and secure Assisi's position as an important pilgrimage center for centuries to come. Nicholas had taken new, thoughtful approaches to all

¹⁶⁷ Mann, p. 179.

¹⁶⁸ John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987), p. 191.

artistic material that dealt with his Order's founder. How could he not seek some control over what was to be a major representation and glorification of his saint at the Order's world headquarters?

But whether Nicholas was actually involved in the Assisi frescoes remains a disputed question. The literature on the basilica is enormous and sometimes contradictory. Many of the theories concerning the frescoes are based on stylistic analysis, since documentary evidence is lacking. Furthermore, "the battle over dating is no more than a prelude to the veritable war of attribution."¹⁶⁹ Until decisive new evidence is found, it seems the many theories will only be perpetually reincarnated. In hopes of avoiding a pointless bout on the same stalemated battlefield, only the elements most relevant to Nicholas's story will be examined here.

It is probable that the church's decorative program was executed, at least in part, during Nicholas's papal reign. According to Scarpellini, the date of the upper church's decorations is now fixed between 1290 and 1300.¹⁷⁰ Others give slightly different opinions. John White favors "a date in the 1290s."¹⁷¹ Miklos Boskovits feels that Pope Nicholas

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁷⁰ Scarpellini, p. 103.

¹⁷¹ White, p. 207.

may have been responsible for at least a part of the fresco program,¹⁷² and Luciano Bellosi places the date between 1290 and 1292, squarely within the reign of Nicholas IV.¹⁷³ The basilica of San Francesco was under papal jurisdiction,¹⁷⁴ and Nicholas was the first Franciscan pope. He took pains to favor his Order: he was committed to commissioning art that projected a calculated image of Francis. Nicholas was also committed to honoring him in some of the most important churches of Rome, such as St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore.

Bellosi points out that Jacopo Torriti's role as one of the artists working in the upper church may not have been coincidental.¹⁷⁵ Torriti, the preferred artist of Pope Nicholas IV, was the creator of all Nicholas's major mosaic programs. Perhaps his work at Assisi was again at the behest of his most important employer.

But Nicholas's generous disposition toward the Franciscans and the possibility of fresco dates that coincide with his reign do not prove his patronage of the upper church frescoes. These facts are merely circumstantial evidence.

¹⁷² Miklos Boskovits, "Celebrazione dell'VIII Centenario della Nascita di San Francesco: Studi Recenti sulla Basilica di Assisi," *Arte Cristiana*, vol. 7, no. 697 (1983), p. 207.

¹⁷³ Luciano Bellosi, "Decorazione della Basilica Superiore di Assisi e la Pittura Romana di Fine Duecento," in *Roma Anno 1300* (Rome: 1980), p. 127.

¹⁷⁴ Bellosi, *La Pecora...*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁵ Bellosi, "La Barba di San Francesco...", p. 32.

Some clues of a more concrete nature do exist. Nicholas is known to have granted a number of indulgences (or promises of remission of purgatorial punishment due for sins) to those who visited the Assisi church. The Pope also gave relics of the "true cross" to several Umbrian convents.¹⁷⁶

His financial support was also definite. Nicholas issued a bull dated 15 May, 1288, only three months, therefore, after his ascent to the pontificate. In it, Nicholas decreed that the charity monies collected at the Assisi basilica and at Assisi's Porziuncola should be used for the ornamentation of the Franciscan basilica. In his short reign, Nicholas issued eight bulls to promote work on the church of San Francesco.¹⁷⁷ This is more than any of the popes who preceded or followed him.¹⁷⁸

Nicholas also favored the basilica of San Francesco at Assisi with gifts of art. In fact, he made his first gifts to Assisi only two days after his election as pope, again demonstrating a strong inclination toward the Franciscans and giving early indication of the degree to which their Order would be favored by the Seat of Peter while he occupied it. The gifts were accoutrements for the Mass: chasubles, cippi,

¹⁷⁶ Dottoressa Daniela Ferriani and Giannino Gagliardi, personal interviews, July 29 and 30 respectively, 1992.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Oertel, *Early Italian Painting to 1400* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), p. 51.

¹⁷⁸ Bellosi, *La Pecora...*, p. 28.

candelabras, a pix.¹⁷⁹ Also included was a reliquary of Sant'Andrea. This piece was not commissioned by Nicholas, but was created before he became pope and for a different destination.¹⁸⁰ He now rerouted the work to the Franciscan church at Assisi. Three months later, with the bull of 13 May, 1288, he gave yet more gifts: silver vases, vestments of colored silk, and a sum of money "*come pegno del passato e del futuro affetto*."¹⁸¹ Among his gifts to Assisi was also a chalice by the Sienese metalsmith Guccio di Mannaia.

Nicholas's commitment to the basilica is thus well documented. It is tempting to believe he also had a hand in the fresco cycles, but whether this is so and to what degree he may have participated are questions that remain to be answered and are outside the scope of this paper. Let us examine an article that was definitely created for Nicholas, the chalice of the Sienese Guccio di Mannaia (Figure 11).

St. Francis "had a horror of numerous or exquisite utensils."¹⁸² This opinion did not make the task of adorning Franciscan churches an easy one for the friars, and the Order members grappled with their founder's severe attitude. It became necessary to issue decrees defining the number and type

¹⁷⁹ Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, "La Committenza...", p. 195.

¹⁸⁰ See page 22 for a brief discussion.

¹⁸¹ Bellosi, *La Pecora...*, pp. 28-29. Translation: as a testimonial to the past and to future effect. (The translation is mine.)

¹⁸² Karrer, p. 69.



Figure 11. Chalice of Nicholas IV

of ecclesiastical items to be permitted. The General Chapter held in 1260 took pains to lay down specific rules on this subject; for example, the number of chalices could not exceed one per altar plus one more for the convent. The Chapter even gave specifications for weight and mandated a technique of plain workmanship.¹⁸³

This conference was held during Nicholas's adulthood, so it is obvious that he knew of the constraints mandated by his Order. He chose to ignore such legislation in the interests of furthering his own intentions. In commissioning the chalice by Mannaia, Nicholas showed himself yet again to be squarely amongst the new, more liberal Franciscans. Nicholas consistently used the most precious and costly materials available in his artistic commissions: silverwork, mosaic tile, gold weavings. Francis would have opposed this chalice for that reason alone. It was sumptuous, made of priceless materials, exquisitely crafted (and signed) by Guccio. It was also the first example of translucent enamelware.

Nicholas's act of creating a fine cup, despite the Order's cautions against such luxuries, did not simply reflect a laxness overtaking the strict Franciscan spirit; rather, it represented a systematic effort on his part to loosen the bonds of Franciscan poverty. Only this would allow for the creation of a Franciscan iconography that would promote the spread and perpetuation of his Order and the beginning of an

¹⁸³ Hueck, p. 168.

artistic heritage that was Franciscan.

The chalice made a fine contribution toward a body of Franciscan work. It was a very visible showpiece, meant to be used on the high altar, just above Francis's mortal remains. It was as new in style as Francis was among the saints. Its cup is conical, rather than nearly hemispherical, as had been usual for thirteenth-century chalices, and the new smalting technique allowed for pictorial effects.¹⁸⁴

Nicholas and Guccio exploited this new enameling technique to the fullest. The lower portion of the chalice is based on an octagonal division. Eight tiny lobes holding angels support the base of the cup itself. Below them are eight small depictions of animals and evangelical symbols. A central ball-like shape separates the cup from the base. On it, a blessing Christ presides as risen head of the Church over Peter, His first-selected pope, and other apostles.

Such an iconographical program is fairly typical of medieval chalices.¹⁸⁵ It is in the smalts of the base that the unique approach of Nicholas is revealed. Here, the iconographical pattern becomes, in effect, a summation of his Franciscan beliefs and the great faith he had in the role they must play for the salvation of men and of the Church. Here, he beautifully integrated his Franciscan message into the Church's theme of universal salvation and power.

¹⁸⁴ Hueck, p. 170.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 171.



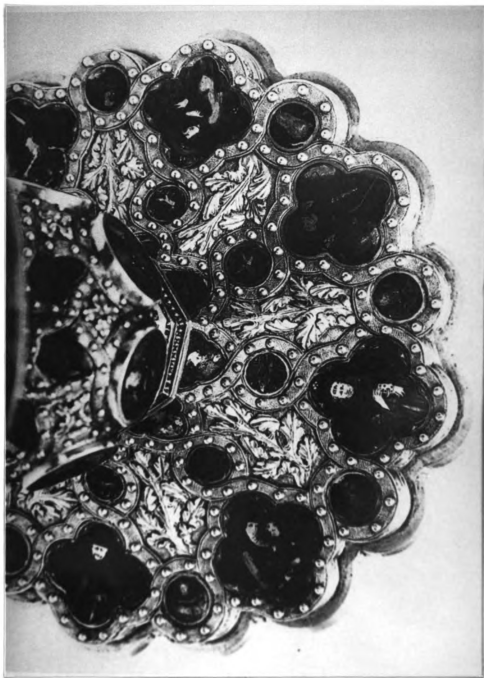


Figure 12. Chalice of Nicholas IV: detail of base

The base, too, contains eight smalts (Figure 12). A crucified Christ anchors the eight. He represents the sacrifice of the Mass and recalls the spilled blood that the chalice, in the form of transformed wine, was designed to hold. In His suffering, He is flanked by the Blessed Virgin and St. John.

Directly across the circular base from the Crucifixion scene is a representation of the Madonna and Child. The Virgin, in her role as the Lord's handmaiden, brought about the Incarnation that made possible Christ's sacrifice which bought the salvation of souls. This medallion, in its recollection of the Incarnation, emphasizes the central theme of the Mass.

Equidistant between the Madonna and Child and the Crucifixion medallions is the smalted image of St. Francis of Assisi. He is seen at the moment of his stigmatization, and, in his emotion, he turns toward the cross. Once again, the wounds of Christ recall the sacrifice of the Mass and the blood of Christ to be contained in the chalice. They also recall Francis's direct and close communication with Jesus, indeed, his status as an *alter Christus* figure. And his position halfway between the Madonna--a figure representative of the entire Church and a prime intercessor--and the crucified Christ gives him a most prominent place on the path to salvation. He is conceived of here as one of the Church's sustainers, even as he was described in the dream of Innocent III that Nicholas had so taken to heart.

On Francis's left is St. Anthony of Padua, the second saint of the Franciscan Order, who brought the Franciscan message to many and who instituted desert monasticism. Opposite St. Francis is the third Franciscan saint, St. Clare. She is seen holding a pix, which the people of Assisi knew to be a symbol of the saving power of the Eucharist because it referred to the story of the city's struggle against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. His armies were besieging Assisi, and defeat seemed imminent. Clare, who was ill, had herself carried to the city wall, armed only with a pix containing the Blessed Sacrament. Miraculously, the threatening brigades turned and fled.¹⁸⁶ It was not Clare who caused them to retreat. She was only one woman, and a sick one at that. The story illustrated the saving power of the Eucharist for those on the side of the just.

Next to Clare is Nicholas himself (Figure 13), the first Franciscan to be cast in Francis's own role: as pope, he was now the one charged with rebuilding God's Church. He is here depicted in garb that, in more ways than one, so well captures the man and his papacy. He wears the regal and elaborate papal crown and a rich papal cope, under which can be seen the Franciscan habit with its rope of knots, one of which, ironically, represents his sworn commitment to poverty.

¹⁸⁶ *Leggenda di Santa Chiara*, sect. 21: "I Prodiggi della sua Preghiera: e in Primo Luogo i Saraceni Miracolosamente Volti in Fuga," in *Biblioteca Francescana di Milano, Fonti Francescane*, 3rd ed., (Padova: Grafiche Messaggero di S. Antonio, 1977), p. 2413.



Figure 13. Chalice of Nicholas IV: detail of Nicholas IV

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Nicholas's enameled image on the Assisi chalice is intriguing. It simultaneously depicts him in the garb of both ragged Franciscan and regal pope. The juxtaposition is apt. In fact, in a sense, it forms a neat visual summary of his papal career.

He did indeed retain throughout his life the conviction in Franciscan beliefs that the simple brown robe in the smalt implies. And yet, he altered the Franciscan outlook as well, deliberately and systematically, to such a degree that a humble friar in a rich papal vestment no longer represented the impossible contradiction it was barely a generation earlier, in Francis's day.

Nicholas's ingenious and gradual modification of the strict Franciscan rule of poverty was central to his interest in promoting the Franciscan Order. What he had already begun as minister general when he helped Nicholas III write a bull on poverty, he furthered in the *Supra Montem* when he himself reached the papal throne. These bulls helped make the Order receptive to a softer stance on poverty. He backed up his written words with actions as well. He commissioned many works of art--generally in the most expensive materials available--that were, at one time, excessive by Franciscan

standards. By papal example, he showed the Franciscans and the world that it was possible to create Franciscan-oriented artworks that were both pious and elaborate, all in the name of God's greater glory.

Not only did he patronize expensive art on a major scale, but he was good at it. Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto put it well when she made this statement: "Nicholas IV showed himself to be a patron of very great sensibility and refinement. He demonstrated that he possessed a clear vision of art and culture on a European level. He also showed a profound knowledge of the historic role of the Franciscan Order and of his own person."¹⁸⁷

Yet, commentaries such as Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto's are something of a recent phenomenon. The assessment of Nicholas's effectiveness as pontiff has often been negative.¹⁸⁸

Nicholas's stature as pope has been greatly underrated, perhaps because a general tendency to focus on his political success has eliminated serious consideration of his spirituality. To concentrate on the former without consideration of the latter is to misunderstand Nicholas. He was, first and foremost, a spiritual leader.

As pope, Nicholas considered himself to be entrusted by God with a spiritual mission. He soon developed a papal

¹⁸⁷ Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, "La Committenza....," p. 199.

¹⁸⁸ See p. 11 for the opinions of Schiff, et. al.

policy that promoted spiritualism, emphasizing the union of the Eastern and Western Churches, conversion, missions, crusades, combat against heresy, and the promotion of peace. To achieve these greater spiritual goods, Nicholas understood that he had to use and to work within the earthly constraints of his position. Thus, he recognized there was also a need for a pragmatic side to his policy that included stabilization of the papal office and reinforcement of the Roman See as a central authority.

Nicholas had a profound belief in Franciscan theology, and the components of his spiritual policy were largely grounded in Francis's teachings. Franciscan beliefs were compatible with, indeed, an integral part of, his papal mission in its spiritual as well as its pragmatic manifestations.

Nicholas held dear the image conveyed in the dream of Innocent III of St. Francis as sustainer or savior of the Church. As far as Nicholas was concerned, the evidence could have come from no higher authority: God Himself had sent the dream to Innocent revealing the absolutely central role St. Francis was to play in sustaining the popes and the Church itself. In approving the Franciscan Order's Rule, Innocent III showed that he heeded the message of God's revelatory dream. Nicholas, a Franciscan himself, could do no less. It was essential to him that Francis and his Order play a key role in all aspects of his papal reign.

St. Francis had come to be seen almost as a second Christ

figure to Nicholas because of the saint's humanness, his accessible humility tempered with true vision and wisdom, his miraculous powers, his stigmatization, his profession of the Gospels, and his overwhelmingly potent spirituality. If any one saint could revitalize the weakened Roman Church, it was Francis. Nicholas, as leader of the Western Church, knew that he, too, was responsible for its revitalization, both spiritual and temporal. Given the pressures of the papal office and the depth of his devotion to his Order's founder, it is possible to understand why Nicholas began to draw parallels between himself and the saint, as evidenced in his portrait at Santa Maria Maggiore, in which Nicholas seems to bear the stigmata.

Nicholas's view of Francis as central to his papal goals also served him well in his pragmatic need to strengthen the Roman See. The Franciscans, beginning with Francis himself, had a strong history of support for and willing subordination to the reigning pontiff. With Nicholas's support, the papal-Franciscan relationship became a symbiotic one: his "approbation and encouragement of the Franciscan Order [was] as explicit as the role of the Order in supporting the papacy [was] implicit."¹⁸⁹

The use of the Franciscan Order and its theology in implementing both his practical and spiritual agendas was an obvious decision. For a man as deeply committed to

¹⁸⁹ Gardner, "Patterns....," p. 443.

Franciscanism as Nicholas was, he could hardly have done otherwise. Yet the Franciscanism of the Spirituals was ill-suited to Nicholas's needs because of its strict interpretation of the vow of poverty. Nicholas attained the papacy at a time that was difficult for the Order. The seeds of the conflict between Spirituals and Conventuals had begun to germinate and to create a rift among the brethren that caused great concern and genuine anguish for many members. Nicholas, too, struggled with the internal disruptions. He tried to negotiate with fairness to a middle position as minister general, but by the time he became pope, he found that, in order to spread the Franciscan message, he needed to align himself with the Conventuals. The Spiritual severity went too far in curtailing one of the best means available to him as pope of proclaiming the Franciscan message: artistic patronage.

In the passage quoted above from Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto, she has managed to capture no fewer than three important points about Nicholas in a single sentence: his refined patronage, his understanding of the role of the Franciscan Order, and his comprehension of his own role as pope. He was indeed an important patron of the arts, revitalizing the field of papal commissions that had begun to flag since Martin IV's time. He showed the refinement and sensibility of a man well traveled and well educated. Indeed, as legate he had worked in both the East and West and gave evidence of an understanding of the arts on a broad scale.

His profound awareness of the historical role of his Franciscan Order reveals itself in his choice of artistic commissions. They were invariably made with consideration for the Franciscan content as well as for their connections with papal political and spiritual needs. St. John Lateran, beyond being the church of the popes, was inextricably linked to the Franciscans by Innocent's dream. Santa Maria Maggiore was more than just an important Roman basilica; it also brought to mind the fervent Franciscan devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Franciscan hope to foster belief in her Assumption. Here, Nicholas showed his sensitivity to Franciscan beliefs by his willingness to promote the relatively new iconographical theme of the Coronation of the Virgin and to begin a new iconographical transformation of St. Francis from a short, scruffy wanderer toward a more heroic representation of all St. Francis stood for as at once the perfect contemplative and perfect activist. Nicholas, as Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto points out, also had an understanding of his own role as not only pope, but as the first Franciscan to hold that office. He understood that a generation had passed since Francis's day, and the Church needed a more modern interpretation of the Franciscan Rule. Yet he continued to draw direct parallels between himself and St. Francis, e.g., as at St. John Lateran where he looks very similar to Francis, or at Santa Maria Maggiore where he seems to bear the stigmata. This was no accident; equating himself with St. Francis, restorer of the Church, in a commutative sense also emphasized his own role as

an earthly Christ figure, head of the Church on earth, again reinforcing his papal position.

Nicholas sought a synthesis between Franciscanism and his papal activities, and indeed, the Franciscans by their nature made this an accessible goal because "The dialectic of their lives became just that: between the obedience to the ideal of Francesco and obedience to the Roman curia."¹⁹⁰ Nicholas, as both a Franciscan and a pope, represented the intersection of the two groups. His Franciscan devotion was so wed to his papal policies that a near osmosis was attained between the two. The age of Nicholas IV was a high point for the Franciscan Order. It is largely as a result of this man's strong conviction in St. Francis's validity as spiritual mentor and sustainer of the Church that, "In the Roman Church, between the epoch of Francesco and that of Nicholas IV, the Church experienced a focus on Franciscanism that was surely irrepeatabe."¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Leonardi, p. 225.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

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