

The Circle of Light: Salimbene and His Cronica  
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It is difficult for most modern people to understand the depth of the medieval man's commitment to his church and his God. The Holy Mother Church had vast political, military and moral power; it was the great leveller, the framework within which men were born, lived out their lives, and died. Over every man--king or peasant--the pope and his brethren in the clergy, by means of the sacrament and the confessional, exercised great influence in all aspects of medieval man's life. By the church one was christened, saved, and instructed as to obtaining salvation in the after-life.

Neither Salimbene de Adam nor his compatriots found it incongruous that the earthly representative of the Trinity (the pope) should be a king, a ruler of men, and a warrior. Some elements of christianity, those exemplified by Christ, were moving towards the gentler aspects of nature, but since the separation of the earthly mysteries and God had not yet been made, the christian God of the Middle Ages was still very much the fickle and revenging overlord of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

God was the prime motivating force of the medieval universe, and all aspects of existence, each event on the face of the earth, was a fabric in the great weave of Divine Will. Thus, the world of Salimbene and his mystic contemporaries was one of an omnipresent deity, and this deity ordered one's existence. Much as for the Greeks and the other ancient worshippers of the earth goddess, God the Son did walk among them. He was a living, breathing force in the lives of men. A man might converse with and even influence God, and thus Man's world. The eternal plan provided a balance-wheel, a purpose, an **answer**.

Thus, the medieval world view was very geometric, ordered, solid. To utilize a simple analogy, the Prime Motivator (God) is much like a pool player. He uses his cue to set the balls in motion. Now, these balls may strike one another, thus causing a collision and a reaction, but God is still the instigator. The universe was one of cause and effect,

<sup>1</sup> Men, after all, create God in their own image, and when they do so, God is given power over the greatest mysteries that Man can envision. In this way, God evolves as Man does, moving farther from the earthly mysteries as Man obtains answers and control over the same.

with nature and man inter-related in a causal but superficial sense. The flight of the pool ball is always caused by outside forces working upon it, and these outside forces always lead back to God.<sup>2</sup> With this analogy can also be seen one of the major dichotomies of the era: that of Augustinian pre-destination and free will. For Augustine, the prime-motivator always makes a called shot, leaving the ball no choice as to which pocket it falls in, salvation or damnation. The actions and decisions of daily life, then, are meaningless, as they can have no bearing on the future salvation or damnation. But, for those of a more optimistic theological bent, such as Joachim of Fiore, God makes his shot, and the ball has a choice as to whether to accept or deny God's course, and salvation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, also, one might avoid predestined damnation, and engage in a meaningful life. Action, change, and therefore history, were, at the most basic level, divinely motivated.

The medieval clerical chronicler simply did not see the intricately intertwined causal processes fundamental to modern experience.<sup>4</sup> He chose and organized his material in

<sup>2</sup> Brandt, 80.

<sup>3</sup> Joachim of Fiore was a medieval mystic born in 1145. It was his belief that the history of mankind was made up of three ages, these corresponding to the Holy Trinity, i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first, that of the Father, was the Age of Law, and its text was the Old Testament. The second, the Age of the Gospel, and, thus, the Son, was represented in the New Testament. Joachim's Order of the Floris was approved by Innocent III, and held that the world was at the initiatory phase of the third Age of the Spirit, which would bring about the purification of the Church, the triumph of monasticism, and the epoch of humanity. Joachim, who died in 1202, wrote of many signs and signals of this coming age, and among them were the appearance of the anti-Christ as well as the rise of a monastic group destined to lead the world through the transition and assist in the building of the new church. Although Joachim never named these, nor set a date for the coming of the Third Age, his followers and many others, including Salimbene (at least initially) interpreted Frederick II to be the anti-Christ, the Franciscan Order as the shepherds of the Holy Spirit, and the year 1250 as the date of the beginning of the Third Age, which would have its own testament to be added to the bible. Joachim was one of the first theologians to come out from under the yoke of Augustinian pre-destination and project a positive future for Mankind. In 1260 the writings and followers of Joachimism were condemned by the Catholic Church. Joachim's principle writings include the Concord of the New and the Old; Discourse on the Apocalypse; and The Book of Figures.

<sup>4</sup> The total of my discussion of the structural nature of medieval chronicles, and any generalizations made about them or their authors, derives its basic information from Brandt's .....

much the same way that the cue ball interacts with the other balls. The writer and his experience are the cue ball, and whatever bounces off becomes part of the fabric of the chronicle. William J. Brandt sees the medieval chronicler as a "circle of light," and that which falls within this illumination becomes relevant.

We can best understand the choice (of topic and event) by regarding Matthew as the center of a circle of light which shades off into the darkness. Minor incidents close to Matthew, in the abbey for instance, are worth reporting by mere proximity; incidents across the Channel must be in some way correspondingly more spectacular to attract his attention. . .<sup>5</sup>

The "principle of interest"<sup>6</sup> (that which was relevant and of interest to the writer) ruled.

"The most characteristic product, although not the only one, of the medieval clerical chroniclers art is perhaps best described as the "universalizing chronicle". . . simply one which did not self-consciously pursue a single line of action, but moved about freely among a variety of interests."<sup>7</sup>

The overall structure of most chronicles was very general, with the organizing principle being chronology, as the chronicle structure was largely and directly derived from the "one-line annual entries of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle." Although it would be incorrect to state that the medieval chronicler did not have a principle topic of relevance, or a narrative sequence in operation, these operated only in a general sense.

Brandt says that medieval chronicles "constitute a substantial body of materials written by men who fall considerably short of genius."<sup>8</sup> By this, I believe he meant that most of these writers were ordinary monks and clerics, who lived out their lives within

<sup>5</sup> Brandt, p. 48. Brandt is using the English chronicler Matthew Paris as representative of the medieval "universal" chronicler. Thus, what he says about Matthew can be applied as a generalization about writers in the genre as a whole. It is interesting to note that Salimbene does not fall into this category, as will be discussed later.

<sup>6</sup> Brandt, 47.

<sup>7</sup> Brandt, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Brandt, xv.

their Orders, and were not lauded for their efforts.<sup>9</sup> In fact, their literary efforts, often the product of a lifetime, were not even read by their contemporaries, but were most probably shelved in a monastic library somewhere. The topics of these chronicles were most generally either geographic (a history of England, the coming of the Franciscans to England, a history of the bishopric of Tours), topical (a history of the Third Crusade) or more broadly historical in nature. The "universal" histories, such as Matthew Paris' Chronica Majora and Flores Historiarum were typical of the clerical attempt to elucidate the reader concerning salvation history.

For many Christians of the thirteenth century, history was rather like a map of the Divine Will. By studying the history of mankind, in conjunction with the Scripture, one was able to see the hand of the Creator and his judgement. The primary mission of the Catholic Church was to bring the Word and the Will to the children of God, and the writing of interpretative histories was one method of doing so. Salimbene, in writing his chronicle, was attempting to illustrate the divine will, in addition to educate and morally instruct his readers. He also had much more specific goals for his chronicle: to defend, exemplify, and spread the Franciscan gospel, to outline the qualities of the ideal Prelate and church, and most importantly, to reveal the signs and portents of the coming of the Joachite Third Age. "Salimbene sought to find solutions and interpretations of present evils and events in a theory of gradual decay and renewal."<sup>10</sup> The ultimate revelation of the Joachite scheme was to grow out of the two previous ages (the Joachites believed themselves to be living in a time of transition between the Second and Third Ages), and that the revelations of the future are seen in the Old and New Testaments.

"Thus, by shifting the accent of God's revelation to history, Joachim raised history to a place of supreme importance. Salimbene understood this and attempted to make a practical application of Joachim's thought on his own times."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, obvious exceptions, most notably the venerable Bede. But, Brandt is speaking of the typical example of the genre.

<sup>10</sup> Delno West, "The Education of Fra Salimbene: The Joachite Influence," 206.

<sup>11</sup> West, *ibid*, 208.

"Content and style were interwoven in the Cronica in the realization of a theological program embodying fundamental tenets of Joachite and Franciscan thought. . . Salimbene combines in a unique sense the attitudes of a keen student of prophecies and an astute observer of society. Thus the logical application of Joachite principles lead to the creation of an unusual chronicle-one with a Joachite interpretation of events and society, inspired by a rudimentary social and moral conscience."<sup>12</sup>

Born 9 October 1221, on the feast day of Saint Dionysus, Salimbene de Adam was christened Balien, son of Guido de Adam of Parma, and the second son of a fairly wealthy and influential bourgeois Italian family. Probably inspired by the Alleluia Movement of the early 1230's, Brother Salimbene was received into the Order of the Friars Minor on 4 February 1238, thereby "destroying" his house, "in both the male and female line," as his older brother, Guido, had also entered the Order.<sup>13</sup> Salimbene, whose name within the Order means "leaping into good," and who would have preferred to be called "Dionysus," was to remain with the Grey Friars until his death, usually cited in early 1289. He travelled extensively within the Order, seeing much of France and Italy. Although chosen to attend the University of Paris, Salimbene passed up this honour, and went instead to Hyeres to join Hugh of Digne, a noted Joachite. Very little other than some of the more specific places and dates of his travels is known of Salimbene.

Campbell, in the "Salimbene" entry of the New Catholic Encyclopedia, calls him a "pious friar of honest character, curious and loquacious, but somewhat of a braggart and at times a scandal-monger. . . he loved his order and defended it against calumny."<sup>14</sup> What was Salimbene like? The best answer to this question is his Cronica, and using it as a guide, it tells us much about the man. He was pragmatic, most always taking care to assay both sides of a situation or a man's character, inquisitive, intellectual, and elitist.

<sup>12</sup> West, *ibid*, 209.

<sup>13</sup> The "Alleluia Movement," in northern Italy of the 1230's, was a period of time when a sudden upsurge of christian thought and feeling led to widespread preaching and sermonizing. Involving all levels of society, the energy was such that extemporaneous speaking in the streets was common, as well as mass worship, and processions of people travelling the streets from one church to another, seeking to spread and discuss the word of God

<sup>14</sup> J. Campbell, "Salimbene" in the New Catholic Encyclopedia, volume 20, p. 984.

And although he rarely spoke of his personal religious experiences, he was a Joachite and a Franciscan. Witty, sensual, and self-important, he was also an educator and an historian.

Salimbene spoke often of wine, food, physical character, music, and poetry. Musical or poetical talent he considered to be a great point in anyone's favour. And he loved a funny story.

Sometimes his use of humour tended to overshadow the moral point, that usually being the slant of the story. For instance, Salimbene told the story of a woman who, propositioned and nearly raped by her confessor, managed to fend him off with a promise of a future liaison. Having gone home, she promptly bakes him a pie filled with her own excrement. She sent a bottle of white wine and the pie, beautifully baked, to the priest, who, in turn, passed it on as a gift to his Bishop. The priest, not having cut the pie, is surprised to find his proverbial rear end in a sling.<sup>15</sup> Salimbene, intending this story to point out the evils of a corrupt clergy, concludes with: "And this was the woman's only fault: she should have sent her own urine to the priest in the vase, just as she sent her own excrement in the pie."<sup>16</sup>

Another equally amusing account comes much later, when Salimbene is decrying false saints and relics. This tale involved a false saint whose relics consisted entirely of his little toe, which was brought with great pomp and circumstance to the cathedral of Parma, where it was discovered to be a clove of garlic.<sup>17</sup> While earthy humour is an effective method of communicating with a common audience, in these particular cases, an audience would most probably remember the humour and forget the lesson.

It is interesting to note that early in the chronicle, Salimbene has a lengthy discussion of the uses and abuses of humour. His conclusion is that although scripture commends silence and prohibits garrulity, humour dispels sadness, and indeed "some men display levity of this kind by divine permission."<sup>18</sup> Also, Brother Salimbene, who hated

<sup>15</sup> Baird, 412.

<sup>16</sup> Baird, 412.

<sup>17</sup> Baird, 513.

<sup>18</sup> Baird, 135.



cabbage, often measured personages of note by their willingness to share the finer wines and foodstuffs with their subordinates, and never passed up an opportunity to list a dinner menu.

Delno West, questions Salimbene's grasp of Franciscan teachings, but says that he has a genuine desire to serve, suggesting that the Cronica is part and parcel of a Franciscan duty to spread the gospel. Understanding this apparent dichotomy is central to an understanding of Salimbene. Above all, Salimbene was an intellectual, and thereby an elitist. Joachim of Fiore's followers had seized upon the new Mendicant Orders as the clerical groups destined to lead the world into the Third Age of the Holy Spirit--this made the Franciscans special, and gave them a unique function, at least from the point of view of Salimbene. By joining the Franciscans, Salimbene not only was given an outlet for his intellectual and oratory inclinations, but also was provided with a purpose, a channel for his religious energies.

"Fra Salimbene always considered himself a priest and a friar first, and, as such, he held definite ideas about the Order to which he had dedicated his life. The primary motive Salimbene established for joining the Order of Friars Minor in the thirteenth century was a desire to partake in the restoration of the Church."<sup>19</sup>

Education was the core for Salimbene; ignorance and incompetence are frequent targets in his chronicle. Delno West asserts that to "leading friars of the second generation (of Franciscans), and to Salimbene, education was the handmaiden of preaching;"<sup>20</sup> preaching was the heart of Salimbene's Franciscanism. "Simply put, the purpose, motivation, and mission of the Friar's Minor, according to St. Francis, were to live an intense Christian life patterned after the gospel, and to reveal God by one's teaching and example."<sup>21</sup> For Salimbene, although he recognized that knowledge alone was worthless, it was the basis for preaching the gospel. Salimbene roundly criticizes the "Apostles,"(an

<sup>19</sup> Delno West, "The Reformed Church and the Friars Minor: The Moderate Joachite Position of Fra Salimbene," 273.

<sup>20</sup> West, "The Education of Fra Salimbene: The Joachite Influence," 195.

<sup>21</sup> West, "The Education of Fra Salimbene: The Joachite Influence," 195.

unauthorized mendicant order led by Gerard Segarello), whom Salimbene calls "those rascals who 'say they are' Apostles 'and are not'[Apocalypse 2.9],"<sup>22</sup> and finally writes:

"Their seventh foolishness is that they lay aside those occupations most fitting for them, that is to say, herding cows, keeping pigs, and farming. They ought, certainly, to take up the hoe and dig the earth. . ."

"Their eighth foolishness is that they meddle in business which is not their own, for which they are completely unfit: they want to teach and preach. For that office requires two things: knowledge and ordination by the properly constituted authority. . . . Here it is shown that those who want to teach others must have knowledge, either infused by God or acquired; if both, so much the better."<sup>23</sup>

This example demonstrates both Salimbene's superior attitude towards physical labour and his opinion that only educated clergymen should be engaged in the mission of preaching. His aristocratic snobbery is showing, especially as Francis himself commands physical labour and humility of his followers.<sup>24</sup>

Brother Salimbene had great difficulty with both the "Apostles" and another semi-heretical group called the Order of the Sack, primarily because they took alms, confessants, and audiences away from the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the orders who "taught mendicancy to all men." And, further, he says, "whoever wishes to start some new order always takes something from the Order of St. Francis--either the sandals, or the cord, or the robe."<sup>25</sup> Salimbene had quite a propriety attitude about his order, and seriously believed it to be specially chosen by God. "Specifically, Salimbene believed that St. Francis (and thus his followers) was chosen to illuminate and re-form the Church by his teaching and example."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Baird, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Baird, p. 269.

<sup>24</sup> Francis, "Testamenta," 118.

<sup>25</sup> Baird, 248.

<sup>26</sup> Delno West, "The Reformed Church and the Friars Minor: The Moderate Joachite Position of Fra Salimbene," 277.

The fact of mendicancy seems to sit uncomfortably with Salimbene, if only because he spends such a lengthy amount of time justifying it. Granted, the Mendicant Orders were being attacked on this front, but Salimbene takes great care to differentiate between those who have to beg, and voluntary poverty "which is for those who would be perfect."<sup>27</sup>

Salimbene is very much a man of his times, giving little thought to a Pope excommunicating an entire country because the King angers him, thousands dying under the swords of the Crusaders, clergymen who carry the banner for an invading army, Inquisitors torturing men in the name of Christ, and Church allies whose name become renowned for "performing many deeds worthy of record necessitated by the viciousness of the war at that time--burning, capturing, destroying, and killing."<sup>28</sup> Salimbene does not encourage violence, but bloody violence is a fact of his world. He speaks of a group of children dragging the corpse of man (condemned of storing food stuffs for the winter) through the streets of Brescia. A farmer tried to prevent them from tying the body to a wagon, because they were tired of the labour, and they beat him off. Salimbene's only comment is to warn against avarice, which is especially apparent in the old, "the young are generous."<sup>29</sup> The Church of Salimbene's time was neither pacifistic nor neutral, and death by plague and the sword was a common occurrence.

What is the Cronica of Salimbene? Because of its quixotic nature, it is not possible for me to categorize, and although I do not suggest that my analysis is anything other than general and superficial, it is my intention to prove that, a serious and multi-faceted work, Salimbene had definite, specific purposes and readers in mind when he wrote his chronicle.

Although in form and structure, Salimbene's chronicle is representative of the genre, the subject matter is somewhat unusual, primarily because he has a number of specific goals which the chronicle is used to satisfy--it is not simply an account of his times, or intended for shelving. These goals will be discussed at a later point. For now, let us turn to the physicality of the work.

<sup>27</sup> Baird, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Baird, 332.

<sup>29</sup> Baird, 628.

It is some 951 manuscript pages in length, and unlike most medieval literary works, only a single extant version of this manuscript (most likely the original, written and illuminated by the author himself) has surfaced. The overall structure is chronological, organized annually, with the portion of the chronicle wholly written by Salimbene beginning with the year 1212<sup>30</sup> and continuing through 1288, where the manuscript ends in mid-sentence, missing the final portions. Individual topics are introduced with a heading, and a brief explanation of the text to follow: "God wishes his friends to beg for two reasons: that those who give may be rewarded and that those who receive may repay with prayers."<sup>31</sup> A numerical division of topics is typical of Salimbene's style, and an ordered, medieval approach to any issue.

Although Salimbene's vocabulary is by no means simplistic, it is earthy. His sentence structure, at least in translation and minus the scriptural clauses, is clear and easily followed. An entry will frequently begin in a formal, third-person tone, but as he gets going, Salimbene drops this, and lapses into the first-person. He is very direct in speech, and Salimbene often addresses his reader, apologizing for digressions, explaining references, and interjecting personal opinions. Two of the most frequently utilized narrative methods are the humorous story and the example. As for his funny stories, these demonstrate morality, good behaviour or the like. And, he likes to employ the bad example to highlight the good. Brother Elias, the Apostles, and corrupt clergy all receive a lot of attention, and are used to demonstrate the value of their opposites: John of Parma, the Mendicants, and virtuous clergy (mostly Franciscans, if you believe Salimbene). And always, scripture is the ultimate authority.

Unfortunately, Salimbene, in his zeal to justify either one or both sides of a situation, often quotes scriptural passages of diametrically opposed positions, and within the same line of argument. A typical example of this comes when Salimbene is talking about Brother Detasalve, who made a wisecrack to a group of Florentines. Salimbene writes that

<sup>30</sup> As Baird notes in his introduction to the text, "this is the beginning proper of Salimbene's own chronicle." The previous sections, with some minor corrections and deletions, are largely the work of Sicardo of Cremona, and are not dealt with in this paper.

<sup>31</sup> Baird, p. 21.

"we would have to conclude, for a number of reasons, that (Detasalve) spoke dishonorably. . . .Proverbs 26.4: 'Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be made like him.'"<sup>32</sup> Two pages later, the author says Detasalve can be excused, nevertheless, for more than one reason, although his words should not be taken as a model, ". . . because he answered 'a fool according to his folly, lest he imagine himself to be wise,' as Proverbs 26.5 says."<sup>33</sup>

Overall, the Cronica would appear to be composed of three sections, the first of which Salimbene himself calls the "Book of the Prelate," which extends to the year 1238. It contains "many useful things about good and evil prelates"<sup>34</sup> and is primarily concerned with showing, by the bad example of Brother Elias, the proper qualities of men of the church. This is the driest and most obviously slanted portion of the chronicle.

The second section could be named the "Book of the Dragon" because here Salimbene devotes much time to Frederick II, the prophesied "dragon" or "anti-christ" of the Joachites. However, this second is much wider in focus than the first "book." Interspersed with the deeds of Frederick II are tales of the Italian city-state wars, Salimbene's travels, and the lives of different Franciscans (most notably, John of Parma). Also, he writes of Joachism, wine, corrupt clergy, and the Apostles (an unauthorized mendicant order). These last two are lengthily treated, primarily because Salimbene again uses an example of the bad to highlight the good, which in this case is the nature and rights of the Franciscan Order. Of course, scattered amongst these are teaching tales (those with a moral for the reader), and just general, chatty accounts of local happenings.

With the year 1250, and the untimely death of Frederick II,<sup>35</sup> Salimbene moves on into the "Book of Consequences", to speak of the fruits of evil. Joachite thought of the thirteenth century postulated that Men were living in an era between the Age of the New

<sup>32</sup> Baird, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Baird, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Baird, 156,

<sup>35</sup> At least from the Joachite point of view, and certainly from Frederick's.

Testament and the Age of the Holy Spirit, and the new era would be ushered in by the **novus ordo**, a monastic group which would lay the foundation for the new church. Part of their function was to show the imminence of the coming age, and the need for spiritual preparation. The "Book of the Consequences" does this, outlining the fall and punishment of evil ones, and the road to salvation.

Much of this last is taken up with bloody accounts of revenge and death, unnatural portents, tales of the traps set by the Devil, and the necessary qualities for salvation. Also, Salimbene includes a lengthy section on the battle between the Church and defunct Imperial Parties of Parma and Modena, and the consequences of their stubbornness. The "Book of Consequences" is unfinished, as the manuscript is defective, but even so it is the most Joachite in nature.

As for Salimbene's choice of topics, and sequence of events, these are a great deal more chaotic than his structure. A typical sequence of narrative events runs like this (and it took me the better part of a half an hour to determine his logic). In narrating the deeds of Frederick II after being put to flight,<sup>36</sup> Salimbene happens to note that on the same day of Frederick's flight, he had come to the convent near Lyons, where Brother John of Piano Carpine was still under siege by Frederick. Brother John gave many gifts to the Pope, which must then be listed and described, and one of these gifts, a purple garment, puts Salimbene in mind of the Tartars, because John said he could only enter the presence of the Khan when wearing purple. Now, Brother John wrote a book about the Tartars, and in it was a letter Genghis Khan had written to the Pope, and so Salimbene includes the text of that letter.

Next, spurred on by the thought of Tartar invasion, Salimbene outlines "the peoples who have wreaked havoc on Italy in various times."<sup>37</sup> This in turn leads to a discussion of Brother John being sent, by Gregory IX, to the Tartars. John passed through France, which Salimbene did, necessitating, of course, a full account of the Black Friars at Cluny, William of Auxerre, the gift of faith, spirits, a poem about wine, the scriptural support and

<sup>36</sup> This sequence begins on page 197 of Baird. I am not individually footnoting each topic, as I am outlining the sequential progression of topics.

<sup>37</sup> Baird, p. 199.

condemnation of wine (as Auxerre county produces several fine ones), and the drinking habits of the French and English. Here he pauses for a breath, and fifteen pages from the beginning of this incredible train of thought, Salimbene says, "Enough has been said of these matters."<sup>38</sup> However, unable to resist, he interjects one last digression on the length of spring days in Italy and France. "Let us now return to the course of our history. . ."<sup>39</sup> As dizzying as Salimbene's logic can be, it is highly amusing, and refreshing, since many of his more incredible non sequiturs are ensconced between lengthy, rather dry sections of the text, such as this one, blithely inserted betwixt the difficulties of the papal court at Tivoli, and the Church party: "Take note that in modern times all of the kings of France have been called either Louis or Philip."<sup>40</sup>

Salimbene himself is very aware of his tendency to wander off the point, and in fact both apologizes and defends himself several times.

The various digressions that we have indulged in throughout this chronicle may be excused for three reasons. First of all, such things come to mind despite ourselves and at times when, in good conscience, we could not avoid them, because 'the Spirit breatheth where he will' . . . Second, such digressions have enabled us to say many good and useful things which can be best reported in such a history. Third, we always return to the original subject and never leave out any of the facts of the history on account of the digressions."<sup>41</sup>

Late in the chronicle, while discussing the Tartars, Salimbene becomes a bit testier in defending his wandering style, finally falling back upon the ultimate defense, the Bible: "If anyone asks why I did not put all the materials on the Tartars together, I answer that the events took place at different times and therefore I wrote about them at different times, and I was forced to write about them now under this year, now under that. . . And this is

<sup>38</sup> Baird, p. 212.

<sup>39</sup> Baird, p. 212.

<sup>40</sup> Baird, 599.

<sup>41</sup> Baird, 176.

what Moses did in his books."<sup>42</sup> By this point, I had developed quite an affection for the Grey Friar, and I could just imagine him sitting on his stool, muttering about the editorial comments of his compatriots.

But, it is easy to see Brandt's circle of light at work. On several occasions, seemingly over-ridingly important events, such as the canonization of Saint Francis, or the death of royalty, or even a major meeting of the General Chapter of his Order, are passed over for what seem to the modern reader to be trivial occurrences, such as a swarm of butterflies, or local events. Salimbene spends an entire page outlining the nine reasons that Parma fell to Imperial exiles,<sup>43</sup> and the cunning and contractual trickery of the Venetians.<sup>44</sup> Yet, only three lines are given to the creation of an Apostate Greek Pope.<sup>45</sup> For Salimbene, it is equally as important to record the doings of the Franciscan Brother John of Piano Carpine, and the prevalence of either wine or beer in French monasteries, as it is to discuss the doings of king and popes. The lack of any causal relationship between these topics, which are admittedly not necessarily related in any way other than Salimbene's circuitous train of thought, points to Salimbene's inability to perceive the causal relationships of broader event sequences. Although, Salimbene often mentions drought, and the resulting food shortage and inflation, or the death of a nobleman causing dissension on a much larger scale, but this seems to be about as far as he is able to take this type of an analysis.

Salimbene sees the connection between these events, but he does not have a sense of the relationship between economy, politics, and religion, or if he does, it is not mentioned. In other words, nowhere in the Cronica will you find a discussion of, for example, a crusade being launched so that the Pope might collect "taxes," the ensuing depression in rural areas, and the attendant development of heresy by a starving populace. The connection between "taxes" and heresy is intricate, and involves the realization of

<sup>42</sup> Baird, 626.

<sup>43</sup> Baird, 179.

<sup>44</sup> Baird, 490.

<sup>45</sup> Baird, 520.



inter-causal relations, which as we have seen, the typical, departmentalized, medieval mind would be unlikely to discern. The causal relationships of Salimbene are of a much more immediate nature, the primary one being man and the divine.

For Salimbene, scripture is the ultimate measuring stick--the common denominator of all events--and he relates the scripture to every aspect of life. The Bible is used for proof of everything from the fruits of evil and the Franciscan right to preach, to the proper use of humour and the treatment of menials. Unfortunately, Salimbene is rather proud of scriptural knowledge, and tends to bury the reader in totally unnecessary, mundane, and only loosely applicable scriptural quotations, sometimes lasting for several pages worth. Baird calls this "inveterate habit of quoting scripture at every possible opportunity" the "most disruptive, downright annoying, element in the chronicle"<sup>46</sup>, and it is certainly quite distracting to a modern reader, especially as most of these quotations contribute nothing to the narrative, ex. "Then he went to the curia where he practiced law and became wealthy and 'rich, and very glorious'".<sup>47</sup> This former is an example of the mundane category.

I agree with Baird in that Salimbene's fulsome use of scripture shows the "full living quality that the Bible had for Salimbene."<sup>48</sup> Although there is nothing spectacular or unusual about his scriptural usage, these quotations are part of Salimbene's writing style, just as the Bible was a revered, loved, and everyday part of his life.

Richard Brentano, in his review of the Baird translation of the Cronica, says that Salimbene is "a friar interested in autobiography, biography, learning, lore, government, class, scripture, religion, food, wine, place, language, the sound and spelling of words, in everything he could think of, and a friar who travelled, talked, listened, wrote, described."<sup>49</sup> The wide range of material presented in the chronicle certainly shows this. Among the topics dear to Salimbene's heart, and deserving of more than one mention in his chronicle are wine, food, music, poetry, religion, theology, funny stories, relics, farming, the customs

<sup>46</sup> Baird, xvii.

<sup>47</sup> Baird, 600.

<sup>48</sup> Baird, xvii.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Brentano, p. 466.

of foreign cultures, fashion, to name but a few. The broader goals of the chronicle would appear to be these: Joachite history and prophecy, Franciscan ideals, salvation, morality and Christian behaviour, the qualities of the ideal Prelate and Church, and preserving the fabric of his time for posterity. His primary motivation, then, is education--the dissemination of knowledge, and history is his method.

Perhaps the most important topic to be addressed in any discussion of the Cronica is the motivation of the author. Why did Salimbene write this lengthy account, and for whom?

Salimbene himself cites many different reasons for writing his Cronica, and there is at least one unstated reason as well. The most common misconception is that Salimbene wrote the chronicle for his niece, Sister Agnes, a member of the Order of St. Clare. "I myself in writing various chronicles have always used a simple, clear style, so that my niece, for whom I wrote, would be able to understand it."<sup>50</sup> And, certainly, Salimbene points out specific portions of the chronicle which were included at her request: "And so I have given an account of the genealogy of my family as I set out to do, . . . First of all I did so at the request of Sister Agnes, my niece, a member of the Order of St. Clare in the convent at Parma. . ."<sup>51</sup> Given the wide-ranging nature of the chronicle it is unlikely that Salimbene penned this entire work for his secluded niece. Also, Salimbene several times makes reference to members of his readership:

"And so because they are worthy of record and because many people have inquired of me about them, it was incumbent upon me to write of such events and not keep silent. . ."<sup>52</sup>

". . .and those who have to preach, without warning, on this subject may have material prepared on this subject and thereby avoid confusion."<sup>53</sup>

Salimbene many times makes reference to including topics because people asked it of him,

<sup>50</sup> Baird, 177.

<sup>51</sup> Baird, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Baird, 196.

<sup>53</sup> Baird, 557.

or frequently questioned him on a particular event. Also, many of his entries about Franciscans and the priesthood are clearly answers to challenges: "The satisfactory answer I made to three archpriests, my friends, concerning the accusations against the Friars Minor and Preachers at the Ravenna council."<sup>54</sup> So, Salimbene imagined his readership to include theologians, priests, preachers, and interested parties in general.

Frequently throughout his narrative, Salimbene speaks of his lack of time, and need for haste, writing that he would like to further discuss a topic, but must move on. "But I will not write of these things for the sake of brevity, and because there are many other things that need to be recorded."<sup>55</sup> Salimbene feels the weight of time, and more importantly that there are events and ideas that he needs to relate.

". . . a historian should be a fair man and not give just the bad qualities of a person and keep silent about the good."<sup>56</sup> By his own words, Salimbene considers himself to be an historian, as well as a defender of the Franciscan faith, an educator, a story-teller, an assistant in the building of the "new" church, and an usher of the Third Age of Joachim. This last is most vividly seen in his second and third "books:" those concerning Frederick--the Joachite anti-christ--and the fruits of evil.

For the Joachite believer, and Salimbene, history was a living, breathing entity, and understanding it was a vital aspect of both living in the present, and preparing for the future. History was a map which showed the progress of the Universal plan, and the will of God, pointing out the signs of salvation and despair, ushering men into the Third Age of the Holy Spirit. Salimbene never quite stated that he was a Joachite, but he does not deny it either. In fact, he often mentioned the value of flexibility, and justified amending one's beliefs. This would seem to indicate, as Salimbene had a noted tendency to justify his own beliefs by discussing the beliefs of others, that Salimbene had amended his own Joachite beliefs, without wholly exorcising them.

All of these roles, and many more, can be seen in his Cronica, and so, perhaps,

<sup>54</sup> Baird, 405.

<sup>55</sup> Baird, 170.

<sup>56</sup> Baird, p. 481.

there is no single or simplistic motivation behind Salimbene's taking up his pen. Yet, his chronicle was not a random recitation of events, or even a cataloguing of the history of a certain nation, such as Matthew Paris's Chronica Majora.<sup>57</sup> It is a work with purpose and direction. "Chronicle writing for Salimbene was part of his mission; it was intended to edify and instruct."<sup>58</sup>

Whatever else the Cronica may be, it is a beam of brilliant light that lances through the shadows of history, and illuminates one brief moment in history. Salimbene de Adam stands at the center of that light, and at the center of his chronicle. On the one hand we have a man who places high value on the intellectual pursuits: music, poetry, education, philosophy, history, and the like. Yet, for all his elitism, and fussing about the superiority of the Franciscan Order, Salimbene lists courtesy, a holy life, good morals, the wisdom of a loving and understanding heart, acceptance, humility, and the ability to stand up for one's beliefs among the qualities most needed in a prelate, the representation of the best of the Order.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most splendid and worthwhile aspect of the Cronica, is the fact that Salimbene makes the past live and breathe. After reading his chronicle, I almost feel as if I have met many of the people who walk its pages. Salimbene, who died in 1289, seven hundred years ago, speaks to the present, and allows us to see as he did, "Ut vidi oculis meis."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> I concede, however, that the two works share the same outward chaos of form and content.

<sup>58</sup> Delno West, Reformed church, 283.

<sup>59</sup> Baird, 104-106.

<sup>60</sup> "And I saw it with my own eyes."

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