THE MESSAGE ON THE WALLS: 
DISCOVERING THE VISUAL SERMON OF THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Nearly 600 years ago, two men painted in what would become one of the most artistically influential spaces in Florence. While other hands would alter the face of the Brancacci Chapel over the following years, the frescoes by Masaccio and Masolino da Panicale remain the most powerful and remembered decorations in the chapel (Figure 1). Masaccio exerted such an impact on the future of painting that, according to Giorgio Vasari, a biographer of Renaissance artists, modern art is indebted to Masaccio for learning to draw from nature, and to use linear perspective.\(^1\) The restoration of the Brancacci Chapel in the 1980s revealed a great deal of new information about the frescoes and the painters involved. Besides the discovery of the true colors found on the altar wall protected by the altarpiece, the way in which Masaccio used these colors proved revolutionary. Prior to the Brancacci Chapel restoration, it was thought that the first artists to revolutionize the use of color dated back to Beato Angelico and Domenico Veneziano, both working a bit later than Masaccio.\(^2\) The discovery of Masaccio’s colors, however, reveals that he thought about colors and how colors relate to one another. For centuries, art historians promoted Masaccio as the father of linear perspective in painting; now, he has new accolades for his brilliance in color choice.

The influence of the Brancacci Chapel on the art world continues; however, the chapel embodies more than a revolution in art theory and practice. For decades, scholars have studied the stylistic choices and possible interpretations of the Brancacci Chapel from the 1420s, but not


until the 1970s did scholars begin to examine the possible theological interpretations of the fresco cycle. This cycle depicts stories from the life of Saint Peter, with two additional scenes of Adam and Eve on the entrance pilasters (Figures 2, 3, and 4). Commissioned by members of the Brancacci family in Florence, the chapel forms the right transept of the Oltrarno Florentine Carmelite church, Santa Maria del Carmine (Figure 5). While the order commissioned the church in 1268, the family chapel was not added until 1386, and it sat undecorated until 1423. Due to social and political disorder in Florence, along with the departure of Masaccio and Masolino for Rome, the chapel was left unfinished by 1427. Nearly sixty years later, another artist, Filippino Lippi, completed the fresco cycle.

At the time of the original commission, Florence and the Western Catholic Church had just emerged from a great deal of turmoil and discord. Having survived threats from foreign invaders, encroachment on trade routes, and the Western Schism, both Florentines and Christians in general had renewed energy and interest in promoting themselves and the Church. To do so, local wealthy family members commissioned church and family art to show gratitude to God while engaging in self-propaganda. The Brancacci Chapel fits within this framework by advertising the successes of the family, Florence, and the papacy.

To date, the majority of scholarship has focused on the Brancacci family, the debate over which artists worked together and when, and how one might interpret each individual scene within the context of contemporary Florentine society. This thesis adds to this body of research by considering the chapel fresco cycle in its entirety, offering visitors a single, unified

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theological message; it proposes an innovative approach to interpreting the fresco cycle as an active, didactic tool for resident clergy, parishoners, and visitors to the church.

During the fourteenth century, the Carmelite brotherhood made the transition to becoming a preaching order, and as such, began developing sermons, which incorporated a fourfold method of interpreting scripture. This involved telling the literal and moral aspects of Bible verses and concluding with general themes related to allegorical and anagogic interpretations that affect one’s chance at attaining salvation. In doing so, the order borrowed directly from their Franciscan brethren, both in sermon design and utility of church art. By examining the content and arrangement of the scenes, I have found the Brancacci Chapel fresco cycle represents a visual Carmelite sermon, based on Franciscan precedent, by portraying the life of St. Peter, while simultaneously providing support for the papacy, the church, and education for proper Christian living. Furthermore, this visual sermon, or muta predicatio, has the ability to transport visitors to a divine realm of meditation and a direct connection with God.
CHAPTER II
QUATTROCENTO FLORENCE

The Western Schism

In 1378, the Catholic Church faced an unusual dilemma: two pontiffs existed, both asserting their authority as the true papal leader of the church. One, residing in Avignon, France, garnered the support of the French King and his court, while the papacy in Rome kept Italian loyalties. For nearly forty years, this schism between the western church leaders grew, and contemporary theologians, such as Henry of Langenstein and Conrad of Gelnhausen, urged the formation of a council to settle the dispute.\(^4\) Debates raged and threats were levied between Avignon and Rome, with no end in sight. During the course of several popes at each location, neither side would relinquish control to his opponent. This division proved detrimental to the church, her authority, and her finances, as doubt grew in the hearts of Christians all over Europe.

While all of Christian Europe felt the impact of the Western Schism, Florence felt particularly threatened by the weakened papal authority in Rome. From 1375-1378, the Florentine Republic actually desired a weaker papacy, created secular laws against the church, and fought the current Avignon pope, Gregory XI, from expanding the Papal States in central Italy upon his return to Rome and from becoming an emperor.\(^5\) The Republic feared that an expansion of the pope’s authority and territory in Italy would threaten Florentine trade interests and their wool and silk exports. Ultimately, Florence fought in the War of the Eight Saints to maintain freedom of trade, a move which induced the appointment of both a pope in Avignon and another in Rome, initiating the Western Schism.

\(^4\) Alison Williams Lewin, “‘Cum Status Ecclesie Noster Sit’: Florence and the Council of Pisa (1409),” \textit{Church History} 62, no. 2 (June 1993): 178.

Despite the now weakened papacy, Florence found herself in a worse situation during the Western Schism than before the papal divide. The partitioned popes, cardinals, and their supporters left central Italy unprotected by a strong pope, and as such, a target for foreign adversaries.\(^6\) Pressure from both Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan and Ladislao of Naples placed the trading territories of Florence under even greater threat than the expansion of the Papal States.\(^7\) In 1400 and 1402, Visconti began strategic invasions into Perugia and Bologna, respectively, both of which Florence tried to help defend, since these cities served Florence as major trade routes to the east and south. At the same time, Ladislao strove to conquer Italy from the south, and he bullied the Roman pope into promising him kingship of Naples and Sicily upon resolution of the divide.\(^8\) Meanwhile, internal strife and civil conflicts arose as each pontiff’s camp attempted to lay claims to the various regions throughout Europe and strengthen his influence.\(^9\) Rather than celebrating the troubled papacy, Florence now had reason to aid the church in finding a resolution to the divide.

Early in the split, Florence joined the previously mentioned call for a council to resolve the schism. Regardless of the Republic’s earlier opinion on papal rule, Florence now saw a strong papacy, be it in Avignon or Rome, as the only way to protect her city and trade routes. By 1400, Florence began making a push to convince both pontiffs to meet in Tuscany and reach a resolution. This potential for a resolution, however, threatened Ladislao and his plans of kingship; he already had a promise from Gregory XII, the current Roman pope, that no

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\(^6\) Despite the past seven popes residing in Avignon, Central Italy and the Papal States maintained assumed protection from the papacy. Once the divide occurred, however, the responsibility of Italy fell to the easily swayed Roman pope.

\(^7\) Lewin, “Cum Status Ecclesie,” 180.

\(^8\) Ibid., 185.

\(^9\) Ibid., 180.
resolution would occur before Ladislao had been declared King of Southern Italy. In 1407, he and his troops from Naples marched on Rome, demanded that all Florentines be evicted from Rome, and sent Gregory XII into hiding.\textsuperscript{10} Out of fear of Ladislao, Gregory XII actively avoided meeting with Benedict XIII, the current pope presiding in Avignon, though both expressed an interest in doing so.

Florence continued to placate both sides while attempting to arrange a union, but in 1407, the stagnant situation motivated the University of Bologna to declare both pontiffs and their cardinals as heretics and that Christians should ignore them both entirely.\textsuperscript{11} This triggered a new series of attempts to meet between both the pontiffs and their now-rebelling cardinals. In 1408, several cardinals from each side declared their intent to meet, with or without the pontiffs, and in 1409, Florence successfully hosted a council of these cardinals in the city’s recently acquired territory of Pisa. In addition to Florence’s support for the cardinals, Siena and Bologna both allied with Florence to ensure the council’s safety from any threatening forces.\textsuperscript{12} While a resolution was not reached, a third pontiff, Alexander V, was elected, and the union to protect the council extended to Louis II of Anjou, who had his own agenda of conquering Naples.

Florence, along with Siena and Bologna, had successfully laid the groundwork necessary to end the schism and re-strengthen the papacy, and thus Florence’s safety and livelihood. Later councils, held in both Pisa and the German lake town of Constance, resulted in the election of Martin V, the abdication of the Pisan and Roman pontiffs, and the excommunication of Benedict XIII, the Avignonese pope. Though the papacy and his court would not return to Rome until 1420, Martin V left Constance in 1418 and made lengthy stops in several cities along his

\textsuperscript{10} Lewin, “Cum Status Ecclesie,” 181-182.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 185, 187-188.
journey, including Florence. Florence immediately felt relief from decades of uncertainty and foreign threats, and now the Republic’s neighborhoods could focus inward, while maintaining a new fervor for supporting the pope.

The Carmelite Neighborhood

Four quarters divide the city of Florence with a large church dominating each, and in these districts, citizens valued the feeling of community membership. Within these four quarters, a total of sixteen political districts existed. The Oltrarno neighborhood surrounding S. Maria del Carmine stood within the gonfalone of Drago Verde and consisted primarily of working-class people, with a high rate of poverty, though a handful of elite families also called the Carmine home. Within this community, a strong devotion towards caring for the poor and infirm existed and was expressed through two major confraternities.

The first and oldest confraternity, the Company of Saint Mary and Saint Agnes, typically referred to as Sant’Agnese, held their meetings in the Carmine and maintained a mission of charity and care for the local poor in allegiance with the charge of the Florentine Carmelites. The second confraternity, the confraternity of San Frediano, met in the nearby neighborhood church with which it shares its name. Both confraternities placed the majority of their efforts into caring for the poverty-stricken neighborhood around the Carmine and San Frediano, including neighborhood-wide delivery of bread to those in need around New Year’s Day and

Easter. As lay fraternities, both Sant’Agnese and San Frediano were operated by local citizens and contained members of the neighborhood elite, including the Brancacci family.

The Brancacci Family

The Brancacci family has a long history in Florence, and many family members were actively involved with the Carmelite brotherhood when the monks first established themselves, including when in 1268, a group of Carmelite monks founded Santa Maria del Carmine as the first Florentine church of the Carmelite Order. Records indicate that these early family members played a direct role in helping the Carmelites design their church, as well as the piazza. The first mention of the Brancacci Chapel appears in 1386, when a Carmelite ledger describes Pietro di Piuvichese Brancacci, a wealthy silk merchant of the Oltrarno zone of Florence, bequeathing funds for construction of three walls and a vault to become the right transept of the church and the family’s private chapel. After construction, however, the chapel sat undecorated for approximately forty years even though Pietro, his son, Antonio, and other family members bequeathed money for its decoration.

Three lines of the Brancacci family resided in Florence at the time of Pietro’s death in 1367, but only two laid claim to chapel ownership. By 1374, those within the original Piuvichese line filed for separation from the other chapel-affiliated line due to a family member

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15 Ibid., 18.
16 Shulman, Restoration, 6.
being convicted for homicide. Following this discord, Pietro’s cousin from the estranged line, Serotino, bequeathed fifty florins to the Brancacci Chapel to no avail.\textsuperscript{19} Pietro’s line felt that Serotino’s remained disgraced and the two lines stayed divorced.

As such, five male heirs of the Piuvichese line could claim ownership to the chapel: Pietro’s two living sons, Antonio and Nofri, Pietro’s brother, Michele, and Pietro’s two nephews, Lodovico and Iacopo, from his deceased brother, Giovanni.\textsuperscript{20} By 1390, both of Pietro’s sons were deceased. Giovanni’s son, Lodovico, joined a brotherhood, and his other son, Iacopo, died in 1394, leaving behind no male heirs. Therefore, the chapel ownership fell to Ludovico, who died in 1420. Despite this lengthy shuffling of chapel ownership, further problems existed that prevented the Brancacci Chapel from receiving funds for decoration. While Pietro’s will stipulated funds for building the chapel, as well as requests that his heirs continue to contribute funds to the chapel, none of his children ever paid the taxes on the registration of his will. In 1390, after the death of Pietro’s last son, Pietro’s brother, Michele, assumed control of the family and finally made payments on the taxes and penalties regarding Pietro’s will.\textsuperscript{21} With Michele’s death in 1394, chapel ownership fell to the monk, Lodovico, who did not concern himself with the material necessities of the family chapel. At his death in 1420, Michele’s son, Felice, remained the oldest living heir of the Piuvichese Brancacci family line and assumed ownership of the chapel, and subsequently, the responsibility to decorate fell to him. Felice’s will indicated


\textsuperscript{21} Molho, “Iconography and History,” 73.
he did not feel he stood as the sole proprietor of the chapel, however, as in 1430 he wrote that the Brancacci Chapel belonged to the whole family.\textsuperscript{22}

Felice Brancacci, like his ancestors before him, was a part of the “ruling elite” in Florence who ran the city financially, politically, served as representatives on international affairs, and made monumental art commissions glorifying themselves, Florence, and the Church.\textsuperscript{23} In particular, the Brancacci family made their wealth as silk merchants and traders. In the fourteenth century, a decline in wool sales and a successive rise in silk trade led to Brancacci family success.\textsuperscript{24} Felice found accomplishment in more than the family business, however; he served three terms as Prior of Florence, as the Captain of the Guelf Party of Florence, as the Podestà of Carmignano, and in 1434, he led a group of allies to offer protection to Pope Eugenius IV when the Papal States were threatened.\textsuperscript{25} After Florence conquered Pisa in 1406, Felice also spent a great deal of time there, serving twice as one of the Dieci di libertà e pace, as Podestà, and passing through on trade business.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1422, Felice and Carlo di Francesco Federighi sailed from Pisa as Florentine Ambassadors to the Sultan of Cairo. Their goal on this arduous venture was to acquire access to trade routes and establish a relationship between Florence and Cairo. After successfully securing what they desired, the travelers returned home, nearly dying in a storm at sea along the way. To recover, Felice and his comrades stopped in Pisa where they gave thanks to God, possibly in San

\textsuperscript{22} Stehlke, “Brancacci Style,” 90.
\textsuperscript{24} Shulman, \textit{Restoration}, 6.
\textsuperscript{25} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 56; Molho, “Iconography and History,” 78.
\textsuperscript{26} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 57.
Pietro a Grado, where a fresco cycle of St. Peter exists (Figures 6 and 7).\textsuperscript{27} This cycle depicts the story of the life of St. Peter across several panels and recalls the design of that which originally covered the walls of Old St. Peter’s basilica in Rome. If Felice and his party did, in fact, visit this church, then the fresco cycle of St. Peter may have inspired Felice to choose this subject for his family chapel, honoring both his ancestor and his gratitude to God for completing a tumultuous journey.

Felice believed he had a civic and religious duty to serve those that lived less fortunately than he.\textsuperscript{28} As a wealthy silk merchant involved in the local confraternities, it is no surprise then that Felice Brancacci’s will included large sums of money as donations to help the impoverished.\textsuperscript{29} He also urged church members and his family to care for the poor, widows, and children, and he personally bequeathed funds to provide young neighborhood girls with dowries for marriage and money to feed prisoners held in Pisa.\textsuperscript{30} As loyal Florentine citizens, he and his family not only cared for Florence, but they also remained steadfast supporters of the papacy and Pope Martin V following the Western Schism.

By the fifteenth century, increased security from foreign threats and enhanced trade routes allowed art patronage in Florence to flourish, but in neighborhoods like the one surrounding the Carmine, the focus remained on civic and religious duty, even in art. Much of the art commissioned during this time included references to the pro-papal stance of Florence, as well as the city’s primary trades in wool and silk, all couched in a need to help the less fortunate.\textsuperscript{31} Around 1423, the Brancacci Chapel finally received attention when Felice returned

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27]\textsuperscript{27} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 58-59.
\item[28]\textsuperscript{28} Eckstein, “Mythic History,” 18.
\item[29]\textsuperscript{29} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 62-63.
\item[30]\textsuperscript{30} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 63.
\item[31]\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 54-56.
\end{footnotes}
from Cairo and hired artists to paint a fresco cycle on the life of St. Peter. Felice also requested in his will of 1432 that his family, upon his death, see to the completion of the frescoes.\textsuperscript{32} Felice would never personally see the frescoes finished, however.

In 1433, Felice married his second wife, the daughter of his friend, Palla di Nofri Strozzi. Likewise, Palla married the daughter of Felice.\textsuperscript{33} The transition from friendship to family proved to be life-altering for Felice. In 1433, several major families in Florence, including the Uzzano, Strozzi, and Albizzi, aimed to wrestle political control away from another powerhouse family, the Medici. After a successfully staged coup d’etat, the Medici went into exile to Venice, only to return in 1434 with a stronger coup d’etat of their own led by Cosimo de Medici. After the Medici resumed control of Florence, they subsequently exiled seventy families whom they now perceived as enemies.\textsuperscript{34} Despite Felice’s previous friendship with Cosimo, as well as his desperate attempt at remaining neutral between these battles, Cosimo named the Brancacci as one of the families banished from their Florentine home. Letters that Felice wrote to Cosimo express his interest in repairing their broken friendship, as well as acknowledging a financial debt Felice owed Cosimo; Cosimo, however, never reciprocated Felice’s efforts to amend.\textsuperscript{35} In the 1480s, the Medici lifted the exile on the Brancacci family and many returned to Florence. Felice, though, did not survive the exile and passed away in his new home in Padua in 1449, never to see his family chapel again.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32] Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 64.
\item[33] Brockhaus, “Die Brancacci-Kapelle,” 169.
\item[34] Shulman, Restoration, 9.
\end{footnotes}
CHAPTER III

THE PREACHING CARMELITES

The History of the Medieval Sermon

The art of preaching predates the formation of the Mendicant Orders, so the Franciscans and Dominicans had earlier references from which they could gather their own materials. Typically a Medieval preacher sought to use Biblical scripture to relay a moral lesson to audience members. As such, early medieval sermons evolved from instructional methods to educate young clergy members on the meaning of Biblical scripture into verbal adaptations to teach the laity the same theology. Until the 990s, however, the use of senses, a term used to refer to methods of interpreting scripture, remained reserved for clergy education and scholastic teaching. These senses, described below, allowed for a deeper understanding than literal interpretation alone, and for centuries, clergy believed these approaches too complex for their church members to comprehend.

The suggestion that scripture could be understood on more than one level dates to long before the medieval era. In Galatians 4:24-31, Paul implies that multiple interpretations of scripture exist. The use of allegory in hermeneutics traces back to a linking of Jewish Talmud principles and the ideas of Greek philosophers. Christians took the same approach by using allegory to unite New Testament scriptures with early Platonism – a comparison that would continue into the Renaissance. I found that Saint Augustine elaborates on the use of deeper

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38 Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 244.
interpretations of scripture in his four-book work, *De Doctrina Christiana*, published at the end of the fourth century, with the fourth book added in the first quarter of the fifth century. In Book II, Chapter X, Augustine explains that scriptures often appear ambiguous through having two meanings: literal and figurative, indicating that a scripture can mean both what it signifies directly, as well as something else. Later, in Book III, the writer expands on this idea by advising those attempting to read into scripture to consider the passages before and after, to have a thorough understanding of the context. Likewise, some scriptures may remain so vague that interpretation is ultimately up to the reader. Augustine cautions his readers to recognize that the two means of interpretation exist, but an understanding of all the figurative translations may not be readily available to all. Concluding with Book IV, he instructs preachers to use these methods to explain the scriptures to the laity, but to do so in a way that inspires, promotes wisdom, and honors God.

Biblical scholars continued to expound on Augustine’s ideas, adding senses and elaborating on how they should be used. By the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, preachers recognized allegory as a noteworthy way to relate scriptures that were now hundreds of years old to their church members. In doing so, the word of God became something to which the everyday person could relate.40 From allegory, most of these Early Christian senses made their way into sermons to the laity.41

In the second half of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas addressed this same topic in his *Summa Theologica*. In reading his text, I found in Part 1, Question 1, Article 10, Aquinas reaffirms Augustine’s thoughts and speaks on how a man can interpret scripture on multiple

40 Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 244-245.
41 Ibid., 244.
levels to ascertain God’s message. He argues that since man is capable of creating written works that have multiple meanings, then so, too, should God be able to put other interpretations embedded within his message to mankind. Citing scripture and the actions of Christ, Aquinas defines four senses: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic. To combat doubters, he concludes that the literal sense comes from the words written by the human authors of the Bible; the other three senses derive from God’s own intentions. Perhaps most importantly, Aquinas explains that even though all four senses exist throughout scripture, only the literal is required to find each of the other three – no particular sequence is necessary to find a deeper level of understanding, and the literal sense, alone, provides enough for faith.

Despite the sufficiency of the literal sense, some medieval writers, such as Guibert de Nogent, a twelfth-century theologian, advised preachers to use the four senses in the development of their messages. Nogent explains in his *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* that even Jerusalem can be interpreted on multiple levels as a city, the faithful soul, the Holy Church, and the afterlife in Heaven. Unfortunately, many parish preachers found themselves unprepared to translate deeper levels of interpretation to their parishioners, and the church feared errors appearing in their sermons. To remedy this concern, theological scholars and preachers in the thirteenth century began composing manuals, or *ars praedicandi*, on how to effectively develop sermons using the senses. By the fourteenth century, manuals and example sermons that drew from Jewish and classical sources became common reference tools for Christian preachers.

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In his tract on the *Art of Preaching*, Henry of Langenstein, a fourteenth-century German scholar and theologian, wrote about the fourfold method as suitable for outlining every sermon, and his work, among many others by his contemporaries, subsequently influenced both Franciscan and Dominican messages. Henry describes each of the four methods, or senses, which include the literal or historical, moral, allegorical, and anagogic, the latter two being the more cosmic of interpretations, relating to salvation and the afterlife. He lists them according to the scholar who heavily focused on that particular sense, and each step in the interpretation becomes progressively more complex and provides a deeper understanding of the embedded meanings. Henry describes the fourfold method as follows:

1. **Primary basis:** The glorious Jerome translated the Bible from Greek into Latin. The general figures are four – they are called “general” because they are suited to every part of the sermon: The first is called *historia*, and is the simple interpretation of the literal sense, as when the Gospel is rendered in the vernacular.
2. **Gregory** [interpreted scripture] from the moral point of view. The second figure is called *tropologia*, and is the exposition of the historical sense with reference to: [a] the realm of spiritual men; [b] man, the only noble creature; [c] the general body of mankind; [d] the soul of man; [e] the virtues; [f] morals, and the vices. General rule: Everything that regards man according to substance or attribute by a mystical, spiritual, exposition is comprehended under tropology.
3. **The object of Ambrose’s care was the church.** The third figure is called “allegory” and is the exposition of the historical sense applied to: [a] Christ; [b] The Blessed Virgin; [c] The Church Militant. General rule: Everything that regards faith in some way through a mystical interpretation is comprehended under allegoria.
4. **[The exemplar is] Augustine,** because he wrote with greater profundity than did the other three doctors [above-mentioned]. The fourth figure is called *anagoria*, and is the mystic exposition of the historical sense applied to: [a] God; [b] the Church Triumphant; [c] the devil; [d] hell. The parts of the discourse are twofold: essential and accessory. General rule: Everything that regards the Future Fatherland through a mystic interpretation is comprehended under anagogy.  

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45 Harry Caplan, "‘Henry of Hesse’ on the Art of Preaching,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 48, no. 2 (June 1933): 345. In some sources, Henry of Langenstein is referred to as Henry of Hesse, but both titles refer to the same theologian and scholar. As another Henry of Hesse exists, albeit from the thirteenth century, the title of Langenstein better differentiates to which Henry a writer refers.

Even those not writing preaching manuals shared their ideas regarding the four senses with readers. In Dante’s work, the *Convivio*, which follows the *Vita Nuova* but precedes the *Divine Comedy*, the author addresses a variety of contemporary topics such as philosophy, politics, sciences, and theology, and how these relate to daily life. In doing so, Dante also discusses the fourfold method of interpreting all writings, indicating that this manner of understanding the written word had become prolific in Medieval Italian thought. He begins the second tractate by explaining the four methods as follows:

The first is called literal, and this is that sense which does not go beyond the strict limits of the letter; the second is called allegorical, and this is disguised under the cloak of such stories, and is a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction. […] The third sense is called moral; and this sense is that for which teachers ought as they go through writings intently to watch for their own profit and that of their hearers; […] The fourth sense is called anagogic, that is, above the senses; and this occurs when a writing is spiritually expounded, which even in the literal sense by the things signified likewise gives intimation of higher matters belonging to the eternal glory.  

He goes on to confirm Aquinas’ assertion that only through first understanding the literal can any of the other senses then be applied. This affirmation also highlights an awareness of the increasing complexity of using each of the four senses.  

Throughout the remainder of the second tractate, Dante elaborates on these senses, providing numerous examples of how they can be applied to both works from antiquity and scripture. Therefore, by the formation of the Mendicant Orders, both theologians who sought to enhance their sermons and, to some extent, laypeople, such as Dante, were familiar with the use of the fourfold method of interpretation.

Both Franciscan and Dominican preachers used the four senses in a variety of ways, and each of their sermons involved two different approaches, largely in part to their different

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48 Ibid., 74.
audience members. Dominican churches adapted their messages to allow for aristocracy and persecution of heretics in order to reach the international merchant capitalists and bankers.\textsuperscript{49} The Dominicans tended to emphasize a didactic approach when preaching, uniting Christian thought with classical ideology and mythology, and structured their sermons in a way that followed the four senses in order of increasing complexity to reveal the path to salvation to their laity. The Franciscans, in contrast, reached out to the working class with messages of active engagement and charity towards the less fortunate.\textsuperscript{50} The Franciscan preachers focused on presenting a vivid portrayal of history and characters to which listeners could relate and emotionally sympathize.\textsuperscript{51} In doing so, the audience felt as if they participated along with those in Bible stories to receive God’s grace. To achieve this, Franciscan sermons typically began with the literal and moral interpretations of Bible stories, and then concluded with general themes of the path to salvation.

\textbf{From Auditory to Visual}

Early in their history, Franciscans believed in the power of art upon an individual. One thirteenth-century theologian and philosopher, in particular, addressed the appropriateness of using Christ’s image in art. Giovanni di Fidanza, better known as Bonaventura, wrote in his \textit{Super Sententiis III}, Distinction 9, Article 1, Question 2 his opinion on whether the human image of Christ should be adored in the form of church art. In his response, he states three arguments for why Christian art should exist: images aid in memory retention, images help those who cannot read understand scripture and sermons, and images spark more intense feelings than

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 174, 176.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 178.
speech alone. Bonaventura continues his argument for images enhancing memory, as he states, “Because of the frailty of memory, those things which are only heard, are more easily forgotten, than what we see. This is frequently seen to be true, that which is commonly said in many cases: the word enters in by one ear and goes out of the other.”

The potential transformative properties of art extend beyond influencing the memory. In the twelfth century, Abbot Suger, a French abbot and art patron, wrote about the anagogic power of art to transport a person from the material to the spiritual realm. Despite being rooted in earthly, tangible items, dwelling on beautiful, manmade creations would allow the mind to meditate beyond the physical world and attain a better connection with God. This philosophy has roots in Platonic thought, where harmony and beauty convey man to the divine. The use of beauty to understand God would continue to envelope minds into the Renaissance, with the emergence of Neo-Platonic thought to ostensibly unite Platonic and Christian ideologies, and perfect human proportions with the divine.

This belief in the power of images, combined with real world examples, inspired Franciscans to unite sermons and art. For example, in 1291, as the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi remained under construction, Angela of Foligno entered the nave and immediately converted after viewing the stained glass window of *St. Francis being Held by Christ* and having

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52 Bonaventura, *Opera Omnia*, ed. the Studio et Cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (Quaracchi, Italy: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventura, 1889), 202-204.
53 Ibid., 203. “Propter memoriae labilitatem, quia ea quae audiuntur solum, facilias traduntur oblivioni, quam ea quae videntur. Frequenter enim verificatur in multis illud quod conseuít dici: verbum intrat per unam aurem et exit per aliam.”
a vision that Christ was, instead, holding her. Franciscan clergy, in particular, remained so concerned with creating an engaging, active environment for their laity that they began to blend their sermons with the art that adorned their new church walls. Just a decade after Angela’s experience, the wraparound cycle of the life of St. Francis in the upper church at Assisi was conceived to invite church visitors to participate and actively transform by viewing the artworks (Figure 8).

The art in Assisi marks the beginning of a trend in church art termed by others as the *muta predicatio*, or silent preaching. In these silent sermons, the patron intended the art to both educate viewers and invite them into the stories; by imagining one’s self as part of the story taking place, one can then be transformed by the iconography. These powerful art cycles could reach all types of church visitors, ranging from the wealthy elite to the destitute and illiterate, and according to Bonaventura, would do so with a lasting impact that spoken sermons would struggle to achieve. These art cycles did more than just tell Bible stories, however, which becomes evident when looking at the Assisi example.

If the Assisi patrons simply wanted to paint their walls with Bible stories, then they likely would have arranged the scenes of St. Francis in chronological order; however, they did not. Instead, by placing the scenes in other arrangements, the frescoes evolve from picture stories to images with deeper meaning. As Marilyn Lavin explains, when audience members recognize that the scenes before them are out of chronological order, the mind consequently begins to look

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56 Ibid., 414.
for other meanings. So, if one assumes visitors would understand the subjects of the stories and recognize they did not appear in order, then these fresco cycles intentionally elicit deeper levels of understanding from viewers and may result in a variety of experiences based on the individual viewing the work.

Given the wide range of minds entering the church, some would likely interpret the scenes on deeper levels than others; not everyone would ascertain each possible message. This process of exploring, analyzing, and discovering different meanings of visual images all occur in the same manner as a preacher presenting multiple senses of interpreting scripture in a sermon – each interpretation becoming a bit more complex, with all audience members able to gain some sense of transformation, regardless of their ability to fully understand every detail. It is this union of verbal and visual sermons that would inspire another Mendicant Order, the Carmelites.

History of the Carmelite Order

In the early thirteenth century, the hermits living on Mount Carmel received their Rule and papal approval as a new monastic order and became the Order of the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel, or Carmelites. Rooted in a life of contemplation, reading, and prayer, these monks live a primarily eremitical life, just as their hermit ancestors did. Even today, Carmelites emphasize contemplation through individual prayer in their community. Their convents are fewer than those of other Mendicant Orders, and they depend on donations from laity more than the other

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60 Hammond, “Preaching by Image,” 448.
brotherhoods. The Carmelites emphasize private devotion over preaching or public ministry, and meditate daily on the Lectio Divina, or divine reading, which involves a four-part process of contemplating scripture. These steps include reading, reflecting, response, and rest. Using prayer and contemplation, they strive for a closer relationship to God and transformation in their lives.

Unlike the more familiar Franciscans and Dominicans, who came into being in the thirteenth century, the Carmelites trace their origins back to Elijah and Old Testament times when, after Elijah defeated the prophets of Ba’al and brought forth rain following a drought on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), hermits gathered to live near the fountain of Elijah on the Mount and worship the Lord in solitude. Subsequently, as Elijah later ascended into Heaven aboard his fiery chariot, he handed down a white garment to Elisha that allegedly had gray stripes scorched into it from the flames of the chariot (Figure 9). While this would become the first habit of the Carmelites, the order would later revert to a simple white habit.

Despite their professedly ancient origins, the first recorded history of the Carmelites dates to 1281, when a general concern arose that the current order members no longer remembered the firsthand knowledge of their ancient history passed down orally for generations. In an effort to preserve their past, Carmelites created a constitution claiming the hermits on Mount Carmel as

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64 Mount Carmel, located in present day Palestine
65 While this striped garment is considered the first habit of the Carmelites, their move into Western Europe resulted in changing to a solid white habit to avoid embarrassment over the unique look of stripes. See Holmes, “Currency of Miracles,” 163.
their fraternal ancestors. In 1320, a revision to the Constitution appeared that described the hermits as creating a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary beside the fountain of Elijah on Mount Carmel, following the incarnation of Christ. 67 This church arose in response to Mary herself frequently visiting the hermits on Mount Carmel and caring for them as her friends. 68 This act indicated a special relationship between the order and Mary, as well as Elijah, and makes the Carmelites the first group in history to devote themselves to the Virgin.

Just a few years later, other writings emerged noting that a cult of the Virgin existed among the hermits, and that the Carmelites directly descended from those men. The story became even more embellished when John of Cheminot, a fourteenth-century Carmelite writer, penned the Speculum fratrum ordinis beatae Mariae de monte Carmeli or Mirror of Brethren of the Order of our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1350, which united various stories of Carmelite history and revealed that Elijah’s father, Shobach, had dreams that told him his son would have a cult of followers. 69 The story of Elijah’s father is rare and found in a first century Greek text of the Lives of the Prophets. 70 Originally, the text included only the tale of Elijah’s future power as a prophet. 71 Cheminot’s version changes the scenes of the known story to include the prediction of Elijah’s power as well as foretell the formation of his followers, the Carmelites. 72

Cheminot was not the only writer to adjust previously recorded history to strengthen Carmelite origins. Other texts emerged that rewrote the life of Elijah by inserting new details

69 In some sources, his name is spelled Sobac.
71 Ackerman, “Stories of Elijah,” 137.
into existing stories that reinforced the Carmelite link to the prophet.\textsuperscript{73} These new accounts provided guidance for contemporary Carmelites, taught newcomers the history of the order, and reveals that they had no reluctance to alter pre-established history and revise their own past.

Laymen and the other monastic orders doubted the Carmelites’ story that traced their origins to the time of Elijah. Having no written history until the thirteenth century meant that no proof of such ancient origins existed, and personally knowing and being the first to honor Mary was quite a claim. To defend their declarations, the Carmelites commissioned art that connected the order to their antique and eastern beginnings. Nearly every Carmelite commissioned piece of art recorded during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries involved a Byzantine style panel of the Virgin and Child. Some Florentine commissioned works, such as the façade of S. Maria del Carmine in 1280, also included painted images of St. Agnese and St. John the Baptist – St. Agnese for her affiliation with the local confraternity, and St. John the Baptist as a patron saint of Florence.\textsuperscript{74} Other common additions included scenes of Carmelites interacting with Elijah and Elisha on Mount Carmel, providing validity for the ancient history of the order. Pietro Lorenzetti’s fourteenth-century polyptych altarpiece for the Carmelite church in Siena was one of the first works of art to expound on the Carmelite origin story and contained precisely these details, such as scenes with both Elijah and Elisha dressed in white Carmelite habits, which encouraged the hermits to wear garments like theirs (Figure 10). One of the predella panels shows \textit{The Approval of the New Carmelite Habit by Pope Honorius IV}, which reverts the Carmelites to the solid white habit before the scorch marks from Elijah’s chariot (Figure 11). This is the habit in which Elijah and Elisha are depicted. In commissioning this altarpiece, the

\textsuperscript{73} Ackerman, “Stories of Elijah,” 127-128.
\textsuperscript{74} Cannon, “Pietro Lorenzetti,” 19. Due to the placement of ashlar covering on the façade around 1400, we no longer have evidence of the appearance of this commission.
order announced their ancestry as dating earlier than that of the other monastic orders and even Christianity.75

The only records regarding Carmelite commissions of art for S. Maria del Carmine relate to the already mentioned façade, a second request for the completion of the Virgin for the façade, a fresco to commemorate the church consecration, and their high altarpiece, a *Madonna del Popolo*, which was delivered to the church by 1299 (Figure 12). Much of the other Carmelite art around Italy during this time consisted of half-length images of the Virgin and Child, and none of the recorded Carmelite commissions for art during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries included stories of St. Peter.76 This did not mean, however, that St. Peter was unimportant to the order.

By the fifteenth century, the Carmelites found themselves indebted to Felice Brancacci for paying for their meals on feast days and for promising ten years of bequests to the order if he could be buried in S. Maria del Carmine.77 This debt makes it easy to assume that the Carmelites simply allowed the Brancacci family to choose the overall subject matter for the chapel frescoes; however, the Carmelites did have an interest in St. Peter, which is evident in one particular *Lectio Divina*, titled *Lectionarium antiquum Ordinis Carmelitarum*. This reading places a focus on the feasts of St. Peter through elaborate illuminations and special readings.78 Therefore, the most logical conclusion involves a mutual agreement between the patrons and the Carmelites regarding the choice of St. Peter for the fresco cycle subject. Furthermore, the

76 Ibid., 21.
77 Holmes, “Currency of Miracles,” 158-159.
78 For a detailed description of the *Lectionarium antiquum* and its emphasis on St. Peter for the Carmelites, see Peter Howard’s chapter in Eckstein titled, “Carmelite Liturgy and the Frescoes of the Brancacci Chapel,” 2003.
brotherhood would exert even greater influence over many details in the cycle and the arrangement of the scenes, again, based on the stories emphasized in the *Lectionarium antiquum*. This inspiration becomes evident when exploring the paintings as a visual sermon.

From Eremitical to Mendicant

During the fourteenth century, the Carmelites, while remaining a primarily contemplative order, became more involved in leading an active life to adapt to the needs of their local laity. Members continued to sleep in individual cells and remain mostly silent, but this transition to living as an order of friars that wanted to share the message of God with the population necessitated developing regular sermons. Rather than build an entirely new method, the Carmelites resourcefully looked to the sermons and approaches used by their mendicant brethren. Since the Carmelite audience was mostly comprised of the working class, they directly borrowed from Franciscans, who shared a similar church population. This especially proves to be the case regarding the Florentine Carmelites of Santa Maria del Carmine.

Prior to the fourteenth century, written records of Carmelite sermons remain scarce. Nevertheless, an investigation into the library records of the Florentine Carmelites reveals that the brotherhood kept numerous examples of sermons on file. In particular, scholars previously misattributed one set of sermons to Carmelite Johannes Paschal, and noted this as one of the earliest examples of Carmelite sermons known. More recent scholarship, however, reveals that the Carmelites appropriated this 1333 sermon cycle consisting of seventy sermons directly from

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the popular fourteenth-century Franciscan sermons of Bertrand de la Tour, who worked as a writer, theologian, and advisor to the pope.

In 1333, the year of the Franciscan Bertrand’s death, the Carmelite Paschal’s name suddenly appeared on this compilation of sermons.\(^{82}\) Therefore, Paschal not only adopted Bertrand’s writings, but he assigned his own name to Bertrand’s works following Bertrand’s death. For centuries, scholars believed this particular collection of sermons to be those of a Carmelite, when in fact, a Franciscan originally penned the documents. This very collection of sermons existed in the fourteenth century library listing for the Florentine Carmelites under the authentic authorship of Bertrand de la Tour. Likewise, this Carmelite library collection also included Augustine’s *de Doctrina Christiana*, Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, works by Dante, and Bonaventura’s *Super Sententiiis I-IV*.\(^{83}\)

As the Carmelites made the new transition into actively preaching, they drew directly from their Franciscan brothers for sermon models and materials, using Paschal’s collection as a primary reference. In doing so, the Carmelite sermons closely resembled the Franciscan tradition of preaching from the heart, telling Biblical stories that speak of the humanity of Christ and his relationship with others. For sermons, the basic outline included a preface, introduction to the theme, explaining the scripture historically, and then applying commentary on how the sermon relates to the lives of the listeners. In contrast with Dominican sermons, the Carmelite sermons did not reference classical figures or deities, nor did their messages focus on doctrine.

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\(^{83}\) For a complete list of their collection, see K. W. Humphreys, *The Library of the Carmelites at Florence at the End of the Fourteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Erasmus Booksellers, 1964).
suitable for the elite. By building their sermons off those of their Franciscan predecessors, as well as referencing the same works that inspired the Franciscans, the Carmelites naturally followed the Franciscans and began to place Carmelite messages on the walls of their own churches. From this association, one can read the Brancacci Chapel fresco cycle as a visual sermon that would speak to anyone in the Carmelite audience, and do so in a way designed to enhance and prolong the influence of their verbal sermons.

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CHAPTER IV
BRANCACCI CHAPEL

The Artists

Tommaso di Christofano di Fino, born in Panicale in 1383, assumed the nickname Masolino, or “Little Tom.” At an early age, Masolino studied under the painter Agnolo Gaddi, son of Taddeo Gaddi, student of Giotto. After Agnolo’s death in 1396, Vasari states that Masolino then studied in Ghiberti’s workshop before returning to his preference for painting; however, there is debate whether Vasari confused Masolino with the goldsmith Tommaso di Christofano de Braccio. This experience, nevertheless, could have contributed to Masolino’s lasting soft, graceful, and elegant Gothic style in his Carmine art. Documentation also links Masolino to repairing the scenery paintings used in the sacra rappresentazione that were performed each year in the Carmine for the Feast of the Ascension.

Born in 1401, Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone, better known as Masaccio, or “sloppy Tom,” endearingly earned his nickname, according to Vasari, by neglecting his personal appearance and disregarding worldly goods. No documentation states under whom Masaccio trained, but he developed a close friendship with Filippo Brunelleschi and Donatello, and he quickly learned to apply their revolutionary ideas in architecture and sculpture to painting and to use mathematical linear perspective. Consecutively, this technique became popular through his work in the Brancacci Chapel. Masaccio’s sudden and unexplained death at twenty-seven left the chapel unfinished, as well as a gaping hole in the art community of Florence. Vasari tells us

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86 Ibid., 9.
that when Brunelleschi heard the news, he cried and repeated over and over, “We have suffered a very great loss in Masaccio.”

Brancacci Chapel Commission

Around the time of Felice’s trip to Cairo, those that ran in his social circle began hiring artists for major family projects, which may have given Felice the encouragement to fund his own family chapel decorations. In an effort to keep up with the fashionable trends of Florence, Felice may have chosen Masolino for his similarities to the popular style of Gentile da Fabriano, who was working on another project at the time. Felice also hired Masaccio, possibly because he already painted for the Florentine Carmelites, including the lost Sagra that they commissioned for the consecration of the Santa Maria del Carmine in 1424 or later, which was subsequently destroyed around 1600 for remodeling. In this work, Masaccio depicted both portraits of local citizens, as well as the artists they frequently employed. Given that the Brancacci Chapel frescoes would depict numerous contemporary portraits as well, Masaccio had already proven his aptitude for this task with the Sagra. Given the uncertainty of the Sagra date at 1424, however, the Carmelites may have hired Masaccio for the Sagra based on his Brancacci Chapel work instead.

These speculations as to why Felice hired these two artists are further complicated by the fact that no documentation of the commission survives. Ultimately, it is possible that Felice simply provided the funds and the subject matter, while the Carmelites hired the painters.

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Regardless of how they received their contract for the fresco cycle, Masaccio and Masolino worked in the Brancacci chapel for only a few years, as Masolino left for Hungary in 1425 and then Rome in 1427, and Masaccio went to Rome in 1427, and died shortly thereafter.\(^91\) The frescoes remained incomplete for another sixty years until Filippino Lippi assumed responsibility and finished the chapel. Filippino Lippi’s father, Fra Filippo Lippi observed Masolino and Masaccio at work, as he joined the Carmelite brotherhood at an early age.\(^92\) Fra Filippo Lippi’s experience and artistic skill opened the path for his son to be the perfect artist to hire to complete the frescoes in a way that would be visually harmonious. Since these men began work in the chapel, artists and historians have focused primarily on Masaccio’s ingenuity, rather than an iconographical message of the chapel frescoes as a whole.

**Chapel History**

The chapel has a long history of art and alteration, and has drastically changed since the artists first began painting there, yet the original intention remains apparent. As stated in Chapter II, in 1434, the Medici exiled Felice Brancacci as an opponent of the Medici family. Medici supporters subsequently vandalized parts of the chapel, scratching out some of the contemporary portraits of other Medici enemies that Masaccio had included, such as those in *Peter Raising the Son of Theophilus at Antioch* (Figure 13).\(^93\)

By 1460, the Carmelites rededicated the chapel in the name of Mary, and the Compagnia di S. Maria del Popolo, a women’s group within the Carmelite Order, began using the chapel for

\(^{91}\) Berti, *Masaccio*, 38. Masolino never returned to working in the Carmine, though a great deal of debate surrounds the end of his life, the year of his death, and the whereabouts of his burial.


their meetings.⁹⁴ When the Carmelites commissioned a new altarpiece for the church, the Compagnia di S. Maria del Popolo prioress, who was related to the Brancacci family, received permission from the family to move the original high altarpiece of S. Maria del Carmine, the Madonna del Popolo, or Madonna of the People, into the family chapel.⁹⁵ In placing the new altarpiece in the Brancacci Chapel, the Madonna covered a portion of the original fresco work in the middle of the altar wall. With the presence of this new group, the original Gothic window was shortened to make room for the Madonna icon, which reduced the amount of light that entered the chapel and destroyed some of the surrounding decorative paintings.⁹⁶ As this women’s group began regularly meeting in the chapel, they left further traces of their presence as the animal fat candles they burned during their devotions left soot along the walls and ceiling.⁹⁷

Twenty years later, the Brancacci family was freed from their exile and permitted to return to Florence, where they hired Filippino Lippi to finish the chapel frescoes.

During the years that followed the arrival of the Carmelite women’s group and the completion of the paintings by Lippi, the Brancacci Chapel received occasional cleaning maintenance, primarily with attempts to remove dust and dirt from the fresco walls. The first record of restoration to the chapel appears in a 1565 book written by the painter Alessandro Allori, Bronzino’s pupil and nephew, titled Rules of Design and Drawing. Allori wrote that the Brancacci Chapel now appears much lovelier, “so much more so now that the monks have had it

⁹⁴ Shulman, Restoration, 9.
⁹⁶ Shulman, Restoration, 10.
⁹⁷ Ibid.
washed, like new, that one can see much better than one did before."98 To clean the walls, the monks simply dusted the frescoes with a linen cloth or a soft piece of bread, a practice that continued into the early twentieth century.99 In 1734, the Carmelites hired painter Antonio Pillori to clean the frescoes again, and he applied a layer of beverone, or glue, to brighten the faded colors.100 Over time, however, the beverone would collect dust, dulling the colors further.

Amid these cleanings, alterations took place as a result of changing tastes and styles in Florence. Around the 1670s, a new floor, new altar, and marble wall slabs were installed, and someone added paintings of foliage to hide the nudity of Adam and Eve.101 Between 1746 and 1748, Vincenzo Meucci repainted the newly raised ceiling vault, replacing the first ceiling and lunette paintings with a scene of the Virgin giving the Carmelite habit, the Brown Scapular, to St. Simon Stock (Figure 14).102 Structurally, the altar wall changed in 1746 with the insertion of a new Baroque altarpiece and steps that destroyed much of the lower altar wall frescoes, as well as a relocation and further resizing of the window.103

In 1771, the chapel sustained further damage when a fire broke out, devastating the entire church, leaving it in ruins. The fire spared only the Brancacci Chapel and the Corsini Chapel, which occupied the left transept, and today these are the only two pieces of the original structure that remain standing. While the Brancacci Chapel escaped total destruction, smoke and heat

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98 Shulman, Restoration, 16.
100 This same procedure was used to enhance numerous other frescoes, including those by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel.
101 Roettgen, Italian Frescoes, 92.
103 Shulman, Restoration, 17.
damaged the frescoes, leaving them dirty, the colors dull, and the gilding reduced.\textsuperscript{104} The calcium-based decorations in the newly remodeled vault broiled under the excessive heat, leaving a dark stain all around the chapel ceiling. The iron-based pigments throughout the lower registers of the chapel altered their colors slightly, and some sections crumbled to the floor.\textsuperscript{105} While much of the crumbled chunks were reattached to the walls, the entire chapel remained covered in thick layers of soot and dust, veiling the once clear scenes. Later attempts to clean the frescoes typically ended in adding further layers of \textit{beverone} to rekindle the once vivid images.\textsuperscript{106}

By the nineteenth century, historians had many years of damage and alterations to contend with if they wanted to restore the Brancacci Chapel. From soot, dust, abrasions, repainting, layers of \textit{beverone}, and total destruction of some scenes, the frescoes had changed so much that historians no longer knew how the original paintings looked. In the 1830s and 1860s, scholars called for restoration, hoping that a simple cleaning would at least remove the worst of the deposits. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the same basic cleaning with damp linen occurred, this time making an extra effort to remove some of the \textit{beverone}.\textsuperscript{107} Not until 1932, when two sides of the marble altarpiece were removed, did the push for total restoration develop.

Removal of the Baroque altarpiece revealed brilliant versions of the fresco colors that had not been seen since the 1600s, including bright blue skies and vibrant clothing. The shock of discovering such colors immediately revealed that historians knew very little about Masaccio and Masolino’s work in the chapel. Following this discovery, researchers used a microscope and

\textsuperscript{104} Christiansen, “Some Observations,” 5.
\textsuperscript{106} Shulman, \textit{Restoration}, 18.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 18 – 19.
scalpel to scrape away bits of dirt and dust from small test sections of the frescoes, searching for more of the brilliant color. Their efforts could not remove enough of the extensive damage, however, and as such, no one would provide the necessary funding to continue their research.\textsuperscript{108} Over the next fifty years, war, bureaucracy, poor funding, and disagreement over rights to access and methods would prevent anyone from restoring the chapel.

In 1981, a new restoration program began under Ornello Casazza of the Art Superintendency of Florence, with the intention to clean and explore the ceiling, clean the entirety of the wall frescoes, and create an environmental system that would protect the frescoes from further damage.\textsuperscript{109} First, researchers completely removed the altar to reveal any hidden frescoes, as well as allow more light to enter the chapel. The full removal of the altarpiece revealed more of the brilliant colors already found, as well as the sides of the four frescoes of \textit{Peter Baptizing, Preaching, Distributing Alms, and Healing} on the altar wall. The center section revealed a barely-remaining fresco by Masaccio that would have completed the cycle (Figure 15).

Researchers also examined the lunettes for traces of the original paintings. It remained a mystery as to who started work in the chapel first, and if Masaccio worked for or with Masolino. Historians hoped that seeing Masaccio’s hand in the lunette art would reveal his presence as a dominant artist from the beginning of the project.\textsuperscript{110} For this process, a restoration team cut away and removed a few small sections of Meucci’s frescoes and \textit{sinopie}, looking for evidence of the original frescoes underneath the eighteenth century layers. After discovering some red

\textsuperscript{109} Olmert & Quattrone, “The New Look,” 95.
\textsuperscript{110} Due to the destruction of the original ceiling for the new Baroque vault, the lunettes were the earliest surviving paintings in the chapel for researchers to examine for Masaccio’s hand, since procedurally, the artists worked from the top down.
clay below a test location, researchers removed a large section of the frescoes and found some of the fifteenth century sinopie still intact. This legitimized complete detachment of the Baroque paintings and revealed light sinopie for the lunette frescoes, which included sketches by both artists.\textsuperscript{111} This realization meant that Masaccio began working in the chapel at the same time as Masolino, and that the two worked as equals, rather than as teacher and pupil.

Using ultraviolet photography, researchers also distinguished between original work and that which had been repainted. Paints, despite appearing similar in color, will often emit florescence differently because of different chemical materials or age. The most sensational discovery from this test revealed that Masaccio did not cover the genitals of Adam and Eve in the original painting of the Expulsion from Eden (Figure 16). Further research using thermovision and infrared technology confirmed that Masaccio did not include the leaves in his sinopia either.\textsuperscript{112} As the original design did not include these leaves, the restorers, after much debate, decided to remove the added layers of paint and reveal Masaccio’s fully nude parents of humanity.

The restoration revealed features no one had seen for centuries. For example, the cleaned skies now reveal clouds and atmospheric perspective along mountaintops of the Tribute Money and snowcaps on the mountains in The Distribution of Alms (Figures 17 and 18).\textsuperscript{113} The dull and rickety structure in the Raising of Tabitha now appears vivid and symmetrical (Figure 19). The location for Peter Healing with his Shadow transformed from a dark, narrow alleyway into a

\textsuperscript{111} Shulman, Restoration, 88, 93 – 94.
\textsuperscript{112} Olmert & Quattrone, “The New Look,” 98; Shulman, Restoration, 148 – 150.
recognizable open piazza from downtown Florence (Figure 20). Furthermore, one can now see the actual shadow of Peter as it casts across the ground towards the ailing.

The cleaning of the frescoes allowed researchers to better discern the various giornate, or day’s work, throughout the cycle. The giornate reveal continuous landscapes completed in one day that pass from one scene, behind pilasters, and appear in the neighboring scene, such as from the Tribute Money to Peter Preaching (Figure 21). This artistic decision indicates that the designers considered the chapel as a whole when planning each individual scene.

The Chapel Frescoes

Today, recently cleaned frescoes greet visitors to the three-sided chapel (Figure 22). Procedurally, the ceiling and lunettes would have been the first sections of the chapel painted, but those frescoes have since been destroyed. In 1550, Vasari writes that the four gospel writers originally covered the ceiling, and four additional scenes covered the lunettes. He describes the lunette scenes of the Calling of Peter on the left wall and the Novicella on the right wall, but the subject of the two frescoes divided by the window remained unclear until scientific investigation revealed the sinopie of Peter’s Denial of Christ and Christ’s charge to Peter to Feed My Sheep.

Along all three walls, two rows of frescoes guide viewers around the chapel, with a Baroque window that divides the altar wall in two. Beginning at the entrance, the upper right

116 Vasari, Lives of the Painters, 166. For an example of how the Gospel writers may have looked on the ceiling, see Spinello Aretino’s The Four Evangelists fresco on the ceiling of the sacristy of San Miniato al Monte in Florence, Italy, 1388.
shows the *Temptation of Adam and Eve*, while the upper left shows their *Expulsion from Eden* (Figure 23). Below these scenes, on the left are *Paul visiting Peter in Prison*, and on the right, *Peter being Freed from Prison* (Figures 24 and 25). On the left wall, the artists depict Christ as he instructs Peter to pay the *Tribute Money* at Capernaum and below, *Peter Raising the Son of Theophilus at Antioch* and *Peter Enthroned at Antioch*. On the right wall is the *Raising of Tabitha* and *Healing the Cripple* above and the *Crucifixion of Peter* and the *Disputation with Simon Magus* below (Figure 26). On the altar wall, four smaller scenes occupy the space, which depict from the upper left in clockwise order, *Peter Preaching, Baptizing, Distributing Alms*, and *Healing with his Shadow* (Figure 27).

In 1932, the complete removal of the Baroque altarpiece exposed portions of a painting below the original window, which the scholars who restored the chapel fifty years later identified as Masaccio’s *Crucifixion of Peter*. Since the *Madonna del Popolo* later hid this scene, Lippi compensated for the covered fresco by painting a new crucifixion scene on the unfinished right wall, rather than complete Masaccio’s work with a conclusion to the scene of Peter’s encounter with Simon Magus, such as a depiction of the fall of Simon Magus. In doing so, Lippi altered the original plan for the right side wall. Lippi made further changes to the cycle plan by incorporating Paul into the scenes with Peter. Paul, who had been previously absent from the frescoes completed by Masaccio and Masolino, appears as an important character in Lippi’s work. This change followed the Battle of Anghiari, which occurred on June 29, 1440. According to legend, a former Carmelite, Andrea Corsini, rose from his tomb to instruct the

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119 Ladis, *Italian Art*, 249.
Florence military to engage Milan on the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul.\textsuperscript{120} As the Florentines engaged in battle, both Peter and Paul appeared in the sky as a sign of the foretold victory of the Florentines. In the following years, sermons that included this tale, as well as ones that included the stories of Peter and Paul in the \textit{Golden Legend}, were in demand, as is indicated from the Carmelite sermon borrower lists from the 1480s.\textsuperscript{121} This increased interest in Paul earned him a spot among the frescoes of Peter, because his presence reaffirmed Florentine success, as well as the efficacy of calling upon Peter and Paul as predicted by Andrea Corsini.\textsuperscript{122}

No record remains of the original altarpiece that rested below Masaccio’s \textit{Crucifixion} scene.\textsuperscript{123} Donatello’s sculpture of the \textit{Ascension} with \textit{Christ Giving the Keys to Peter}, or another like it, may have been destined for the chapel and would have fulfilled the missing significant scene of Peter’s spiritual life (Figure 28). This relief sculpture stood less than sixteen inches high, and would have provided the missing scene, while not hiding the fresco on the wall below the window. The only record of Donatello’s sculpture places it in a 1492 inventory of Medician art without explanation as to how they acquired it.\textsuperscript{124} Since the Medici has previously used art for political agendas, as well as claimed art in lieu of debts, the family may have claimed the altarpiece upon their return from exile as compensation for Felice’s debt to Cosimo de Medici.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 154. The Florentine Carmelites kept records of who borrowed texts from their collection, as well as what was borrowed. During this time, there was an increase in frequency in texts borrowed that related to both Peter and Paul. For more information, see Newbigin, “Playing in the Piazza, 154, note 41.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 151, 154.
\textsuperscript{124} Christiansen, “Some Observations,” 10.
\textsuperscript{125} Kent, “Culture of Artistic Patronage,” 66.
The missing scene could have equally been fulfilled in the lunette scene of Christ’s charge to Peter to *Feed My Sheep* or with the famous miracle plays of the Ascension performed yearly in front of the chapel. These plays used inventions from Brunelleschi and scenery painted by Masolino to dazzle and convert audiences with depictions of both the Ascension of Christ and His Delivering the Keys to Peter.\(^{126}\)

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CHAPTER V
THE VISUAL SERMON

To fully appreciate the original meaning of the fresco cycle, any changes since Masolino and Masaccio abandoned the chapel must be ignored, as later additions or alterations did not complement the original plan. Also, the political and religious climate of Florence had altered over those sixty years, which changed the desires of the patrons. Lippi’s Crucifixion and the entrance pilaster scenes of Peter in prison, as well as every addition of Paul are the known alterations that deviate from Masaccio and Masolino’s design. As such, this thesis omits these and considers all of Lippi’s other contributions as part of the original cycle plan. To consider anything Lippi added would be to disregard the vast array of changes that took place in Florence from the 1420s to the 1480s in regards to politics, economics, and the relationship between the city and the papacy.

As artists, both Masolino and Masaccio brought previous experience in fresco painting and story-telling to the Brancacci Chapel. Even though each man would have heard numerous sermons while working and attending church services, it is unlikely either of them studied scripture with scholarly interest. Instead, they heard the standard rhetoric of medieval sermons and conversed regularly with the Carmelites, who provided the artists with an outline for what scenes to include in the Petrine cycle and in what order. The presence of the Carmelite friars in various scenes throughout the chapel establishes evidence that the Carmelites took an active role in dictating how the artists told the story of Peter. To develop the plan for the chapel frescoes, the Carmelites turned to their recently developed preaching tradition.

127 This decision is based on written records of what was finished before Masaccio left for Rome, as well as the discoveries of sinopie underneath the paintings.
Most medieval sermons during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries followed a general outline of senses or methods of interpreting scripture, beginning with the literal and moral, and concluding with the allegorical and anagogic. Each step in the interpretation becomes progressively more complex and provides a deeper understanding of the embedded meanings within scripture and allows the preacher to translate these revelations to the laity. Like the Franciscans, the Florentine Carmelites primarily used the first two senses in their preaching, and used the deeper senses in broad generalizations towards the end of their sermons to reach their working class parishioners. Just as the Franciscans created a *muta predicatio* with a fresco cycle of St. Francis on the walls of Assisi’s medieval basilica, the Florentine Carmelites used their Franciscan-inspired sermons to decorate the Carmine. Using this approach in the Brancacci Chapel, the Carmelites formulated an arrangement of Christian scenes to tell a visual sermon on more than one level. More specifically, the Carmelites grounded their *muta predicatio* in the narrative, expounded on the moral lessons, and closed with a generalization of universal themes. In this way, the entire chapel fresco cycle serves as a teaching device, as well as Christian guidance, for all who enter.

**Literal**

The first part of delivering a Carmelite sermon involved describing the literal or historical story, which refers simply to an unembellished description of the words or images being examined. To include the literal in a sermon, a preacher would translate the written word in the vernacular as a form of storytelling, providing no additional interpretation. When viewing art depicting Christian stories, the laity could recognize the parts of stories they had heard before.

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and understand the details of the account, regardless of literacy. At this level of the *muta predicatio*, all viewers could glean some meaning from the frescoes, even if they could not identify every scene depicted.

On the surface, several literal interpretations of the Carmine cycle exist. The frescoes clearly depict the events in the spiritual life of Peter from Bethsaida in Galilee, as described in the four Gospels, 1 and 2 Peter, Acts, and Galatians in the Bible, as well as the *Golden Legend*. Scripture explains that Peter the fisherman, along with his brother Andrew, became members of the first twelve disciples called by Jesus. As the oldest disciple, Peter took the lead, often speaking for the group, and he is cited in scripture more than any other follower of Christ. His role served as a surrogate for every man who never had the opportunity to interact with Jesus; Peter became Jesus’ friend, voiced his personal revelations, opinions, and concerns, and he represented human fallacy in his denial of Christ during his Passion. Following the crucifixion of Christ, Peter carried the message of Christ forward, establishing the first churches in Antioch and Rome, and lived the remainder of his life as a missionary, converting Jewish and Gentile listeners alike for nearly thirty years.

As the name-saint of the founder of the chapel, Peter supplied the most obvious choice for the subject of the chapel decoration. Similarly, the dedication of the Carmelite Order to the papacy made the life of Peter an approved subject for a chapel in their church. The Church considers Peter to be the first pontiff, and church leaders built the heart of the Catholic Church, St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, on what is believed to be the grave of Peter. Furthermore, according to scripture, Peter was the first of Christ’s disciples to preach a gospel sermon. In Acts 2 and 3, the scripture describes two of Peter’s sermons, both of which focus on portraying the historical facts of the life of Christ, the moral lessons than can be gleaned from his life, his
representation as God’s Messiah, and that belief in Christ will lead humanity to the Holy Spirit.

After this message, approximately three thousand people converted (Acts 2:41). The new Carmelite devotion to preaching made the first Christian preacher an excellent example to use for the fresco cycle. As a muta predicatio, these images told visitors of Peter and his actions during his lifetime, including his pioneering act of preaching about Christ, and enhanced the newly delivered sermons of the Florentine Carmelites. As most visitors would have some familiarity with Bible stories, they could easily recognize key traits in each of the scenes of the life of Peter and understand the story taking place.

The muta predicatio provides further historical meaning by depicting Carmelite friars in some scenes, such as Peter Enthroned at Antioch and Peter Preaching (Figure 29). Having long debated their origins from the time of Elijah, depicting the friars in the chapel validated their claim as an ancient order. Images of friars in their contemporary white habits alongside Peter tells viewers that members of this order stood present during these early Christian events and serve as witnesses that the illustrated stories describe facts. The Carmelites found further vindication of their order and its purpose in the Brancacci frescoes because the acts of Peter that the cycle depicts include the same acts of charity and alms-giving that the Florentine Carmelites embraced. As with the efforts of the Sant’Agnese and San Frediano confraternities, the Carmelites sought to legitimize their place in history by affiliating themselves with Peter, who set a precedent of caring for others that they followed. Just as Peter serves as the viewer’s proxy who accompanied Jesus, the contemporary Florentine Carmelites carried forward Peter’s life as a disciple and missionary.

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130 Eckstein, “Mythic History,” 16.
131 Ibid., 20.
Along with supporting the Carmelites, the cycle confirms the role of the papacy. Since the beginning of the Great Schism in 1378, numerous accusations arose challenging the authority of Peter over the other apostles, and thus, the papacy as the leader of the Christian Church.\textsuperscript{132} Both the Carmelites and the Brancacci remained adamant supporters of the pope, and used the chapel to authenticate papal authority.\textsuperscript{133} As the person Christ charged to “feed his sheep,” (John 21:17), the chapel depicts Peter alone on the altar wall engaging in the four roles of missionary work belonging to the papacy and church: preaching, baptizing, healing, and providing alms. Complementing the altar wall, the lunette scenes would have combined to indicate a special relationship between Christ and Peter, as Christ tested Peter’s faith to strengthen him as the leader of the church.\textsuperscript{134}

Thus, while Felice Brancacci chose the subject of the chapel based on the family patron saint and possibly his experiences in San Pietro a Grado in Pisa after his storm at sea, the ultimate Carmelite design used the story of Peter to further the local agenda of proving Peter had the authority to lead the church, in a time of challenge to papal authority. Combined, these literal interpretations of the muta predicatio remind viewers of the story of Peter, as well as the origins of the Carmelite Order, their role in the community of Florence, and the legitimacy of the pope in the aftermath of when the office had been sorely contested. As literal recounts of local and Christian history, anyone familiar with Christianity or the local Carmine neighborhood would recognize the most basic level of the chapel fresco sermon.

\textsuperscript{132} Molho, “Iconography and History,” 54.  
\textsuperscript{133} Christiansen, “Some Observations,” 9; Molho, “Iconography and History,” 55-56; Rowlands, \textit{Saint Andrew}, 27.  
\textsuperscript{134} Molho, “Iconography and History,” 59-60.
Moral

Even if some church visitors could not recognize every scene portrayed, the moral level of interpretation allows viewers to still decipher some meaning from the *muta predicatio*. To advance the literal word into interpretation, preachers would examine the moral meanings within the text to provide instruction to the laity on how to properly behave as Christians. Just as sermons lectured on how to be virtuous, these messages also warned against succumbing to vices.¹³⁵ This instruction provided meaning for personal and social living, including behaving as upstanding citizens of the community and having civic pride. Often, the beginning of the sermon would announce the theme that would recur throughout the message.¹³⁶ As visitors would walk along the nave to reach the Brancacci Chapel, the *Expulsion* (Genesis 3) would be the first scene they would encounter. Introducing the main theme for the *muta predicatio*, this image reminds viewers of humanity’s fall from grace into a harsh world, full of hardship and the need for salvation.

The direction Adam and Eve are walking as they leave Paradise in the *Expulsion* guides viewers into and around the chapel.¹³⁷ As Peter’s spiritual journey covers the remainder of the chapel walls, his image tells viewers that through faith and good deeds, they will find comfort and healing. Figures in contemporary clothing, including the local wools and silks, cityscapes matching Florentine streets, portraits of contemporary citizens, and images of people just as impoverished and in need as those in the Carmine neighborhood invite viewers to imagine themselves walking along with Peter (Figures 30 and 31). Whether they need healing, donations,

spiritual resurrection, or guidance, the *muta predicatio* promises that God will provide through the papacy and the church. The walls provide instructions, encouraging individuals to listen to the preaching of the word, be baptized, help others, and above all else, never lose faith. All of these elements further reiterate the already strong lay devotion towards almsgiving and caring for others, and reaffirm the local traditions as led by the Carmelites. Even as Peter faces enemies and doubters, Christ works through him in the lives of everyday people. Just as Christ saved Peter, everyone else can be saved through the church.

Specifically, this interpretation of the literal word into moral meaning would speak to the laity and Carmelites by revealing the virtues to pursue and the vices to avoid. As viewers walked around the chapel, each scene described for them the triumph of good over evil. As Peter follows Christ’s instruction to virtuously obey the state laws and pay the tax in *The Tribute Money*, divine intervention miraculously provides the necessary funds. When Christ and his disciples arrive in Capernaum, a tax collector demands that the two-drachma tax be paid. Peter, upon telling this to Christ, asks if they ought to obey this rule of an earthly king. Christ explains in a parable that while the realms of kings and God are distinct, it would be best to offend no one and still pay the tax. He then instructs Peter to go cast a fishing line into the nearby sea, and he will find a coin in the mouth of the first fish he catches that will provide the tax fee for both he and Christ (Matthew 17:24-27). By living as a virtuous citizen and avoiding conflict, Heaven delivered what Peter needed.

By turning from evil paganism and accepting Christianity, King Theophilus of Antioch gains virtue as well. As Peter came to Antioch to preach, Theophilus hears of his actions and insists he stop speaking to his people. When Peter continues delivering his sermons, Theophilus imprisons Peter without food or water. Others beseech the king to release Peter, speaking of the
miracles Peter can perform in the name of Christ. Theophilus concludes that if Peter can resurrect his deceased son of fourteen years, then Peter may have his freedom. While the *Golden Legend* never claims that Peter successfully resurrected the king’s son, the text explains that the entirety of Antioch did convert to Christianity, the king included.\(^\text{138}\) In the *muta predicatio*, viewers see the converted king as he watches Peter bring his son back to life in the *Raising of the Son of Theophilus*.\(^\text{139}\) Beside this scene, the story concludes with the rewarded Peter on his throne in Antioch, serving as the first Holy See.

Tabitha, too, as a virtuous woman who spent her time doing good works and deeds of charity in Joppa, experiences the mercy of God.\(^\text{140}\) As a dedicated disciple to the Christian faith, her friends and family refused to accept her passing from illness. Those who had tended to her body heard the disciples of Christ had arrived in town, and someone sent for Peter. They brought Peter to Tabitha’s body and proceeded to show him the garments and items she would make for others as works of charity. Recognizing that the citizens of Joppa still needed Tabitha’s presence, Peter prayed and subsequently resurrects her on behalf of her mourning friends, as depicted in the *Raising of Tabitha* (Acts 9:36-43). Just like Peter’s sermons, this act alone converted many within the city to Christianity.

Beside Tabitha, Peter appears again, this time healing a lame man outside of the local temple. Having been lame since birth, the man spent his life begging for alms, unable to work and provide for himself. Every day, others helped carry him to the temple gate, where he begged from those whom he knew to already possess virtue as they entered the temple of God. Upon Peter’s arrival, the man asked him for money, but Peter had none to give (Acts 3:1-10). Instead,

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\(^\text{139}\) Ibid., 162-166.
\(^\text{140}\) In some texts, Tabitha is referred to as Dorcas.
Peter commands the lame man to stand and walk of his own accord, which he does, leaping and shouting, praising God. The lame man’s hope in the righteous combined with Peter’s steadfast virtue physically healed a man who was destined to live a cripple forever.

The Carmelites took care to include warnings of vices to avoid as well. Just as Adam and Eve’s Fall leads to their Expulsion, Ananias’ withholding money during the Distribution of Alms, ended in his death (Acts 5:1-11). In another town, Peter’s followers began redistributing the wealth, making sure everyone had their needs met just as Christ would have instructed them to do. One man, Ananias, sold some property but only contributed part of his earnings to the group allotment. Immediately, Peter knew Ananias had withheld money for himself and accused him of lying not to his fellow citizens but to God. Immediately, Ananias fell dead and this struck fear in all who witnessed the event. As Ananias succumbed to the vice of greed, the fresco depiction of this story directly confronts viewers with the image of Ananias’ dead body in the foreground of the scene.

Just around the corner from this story and opposite that of King Theophilus, viewers see Simon Magus, who theologians often associated with the Antichrist. Simon Magus was a sorcerer living in Jerusalem who claimed to have knowledge of immortality and equated himself with God, performing miracles since childhood. Word comes to him of Peter and the disciples performing their own miracles in the name of God through use of the Holy Spirit. Simon Magus sought to prove to the disciples that he was, in fact, God, and he performed his magic. Peter knowingly refuted each of Simon's actions as mere tricks, causing him to flee to Rome, and Peter followed. In Rome, Simon won the attention of the Emperor Nero, convincing the ruler that Simon was God. As he proved his powers by levitating high above the crowd, Peter commanded the angel of Satan helping Simon to cease, causing the magician to fall to his death. The muta
**predicatio** in the Carmine teaches that as he practiced sorcery and worship of pagan idols, Simon Magus impressed Emperor Nero and others with his tricks. Simon Magus’ sinful vice, however, would later cost him his life. Had the original artists completed the chapel, visitors would have seen an image depicting the magician’s fall to death from the *Golden Legend* beside the portrayal of Simon and Peter before Nero.¹⁴¹

These depictions of virtuous Christians receiving grace and healing teach viewers to follow in the footsteps of these figures if they want to receive God’s gifts. Likewise, witnessing the fall and death of those who give in to greed and Satan’s sorcery warn chapel visitors of their fate if they become entranced by the same vices. Even without knowing the details of each story, the laity can discern the messages of morality in the Carmine *muta predicatio*. The presence of Adam and Eve at the entrance set the stage for this theme, and each individual scene compiles to reiterate humanity’s responsibility to live a just and moral life.

**Allegorical**

The designers of the Brancacci Chapel sought to continue the sermon and convey deeper interpretations of scripture through the sermon on the walls. Rather than depict the scenes in chronological order, the designers arranged episodes of Peter’s life based on themes just like the designers of the St. Francis cycle in Assisi did with their *muta predicatio*. In doing so, clergy and some parishioners would recognize the disarray of scenes and look for other meanings regarding their arrangement. By examining this organization in the Brancacci Chapel, the exegetical conclusions of the visual sermon appear.

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The lunettes relate to the life of Peter as recounted in the Gospels. Across the left and right wall, the lunettes unite through maritime scenes, and each side of the divided lunette over the window relates through the theme of faith.142 Next, the upper left and right wall scenes correspond through miracles. On one side, Peter miraculously finds the coin in the mouth of the fish; on the other, he resurrects Tabitha and heals the lame man. Also in these, the artists place the hands of Peter with the tax collector and Peter with the cripple virtually overlapping one another across the room creating a visual parallel to accompany the theme of miracles (Figure 32).143 The bottom scenes each reflect Peter’s encounter with powerful rulers, Theophilus and Nero, with each ruler sitting on his throne directly opposite the other. Finally, the four altar wall scenes depict the acts of Peter, with the landscapes paired on top and the city scenes paired below as if the same space continues across the scenes. In the two lower scenes, Masaccio used the same one-point linear perspective for the city buildings on each side, with the vanishing point in the center of the missing fresco he painted below the window.144

Through this thematic arrangement, Peter not only literally represents the first pope, as previously established, but he also symbolizes an allegory for the unified church body and the role the church plays in the salvation of society. On his throne in Antioch, Peter stands for the church he established there, converting an entire population. Sitting high so that all can see, Peter represents the church and explains the need to reach all who have not heard the story of Christ. Had the fall of Simon Magus appeared opposite Peter Enthroned, the message would articulate the ultimate triumph of the church over Satan and all that represents evil in this world.

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142 Lavin, Place of Narrative, 136.
144 Lavin, Place of Narrative, 137-138.
Through the scenes of *The Raising of the Son of Theophilus* and the *Raising of Tabitha*, the artists place focus on the bystanders, as they express shock and amazement over the miracles.145 This emphasis translates to the chapel visitors, making them a part of the crowd and inviting everyone to imagine themselves present to witness these miracles. The presence of the Carmelite friars in their recognizable habits would further enhance this ability of the imagination.

The scenes speak specifically to the Carmelites and clergy as well. The four scenes of Peter on the altar wall not only explain his role as pope, but allude to the tasks Christ delegated to the church to acquire new members and care for those who needed aid. As the redeemed sinner and as the Church, Peter demonstrates the manner in which the Carmelite church should function under papal leadership, and likewise, local citizens can witness the care that their local church will provide for them, should they remain virtuous and loyal. This deeper allegory of Peter as the Church and the Church as the healer created a reciprocity between the Carmine and her Florentine citizens of mutual care and loyalty.

Masaccio’s *Tribute Money*, while revolutionary in artistic style, also conveyed a deeper meaning in the sermon. His work in this scene is often cited as one of the first artistic instances of one-point linear perspective in painting, in addition to his *Holy Trinity*. Despite the continued use of isocephaly in this work, Masaccio’s advancements of Filippo Brunelleschi’s discovery enhances the realism of this scene, aiding viewers in imagining themselves as a part of the story. Rather than focus on the role of the church, however, this scene represents an allegory of the relationship between church and state.

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145 Molho, “Iconography and History,” 61.
At the time Masolino and Masaccio painted the fresco cycle, Florence initiated new taxes to help in the fight against enemies, and began heavily taxing churches. Instead of placing the focus on the miracle of Peter finding the money in the fish, Masaccio focuses on Christ’s command to Peter that the tax must be paid (Matthew 17:24-27). He even paints the scene of Peter paying the tax collector as more prominent than the miracle. The message that God will provide for those in need remains, but another message prevails; this design implies that the papacy agrees with state taxes. By trusting in Christ, faith provides the ability to follow the laws of the state and pay the taxes. During a time when people challenged the authenticity of the papacy following the Western Schism, the Florentine Carmelites chose to carefully emphasize the ecclesiastical authority of the pope while allocating power to the state as well.

The entire design of the chapel frescoes accentuates this theme through the depiction of contemporary buildings from the streets of Florence. Masaccio personally extends his depiction of current society by including portraits of himself, and his friends, Masolino, Donatello, Alberti, and Brunelleschi in scenes such as the Peter Enthroned at Antioch and The Tribute Money (Figure 33). While some laity would recognize these deeper interpretations of the stories of Peter, this level of interpretation would primarily benefit the contemplative Carmelite friars. As they viewed the fresco sermon during meditation, the Carmelites would receive reminders of their role in the church and their duty to tend to Christian followers, while simultaneously setting an example of being compliant Florentine citizens. These reminders allegorically couched in civic pride would also provide inspiration on how to translate these same ideas into verbal sermons that the congregation would understand. In this manner, the muta predicatio could both

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speak to the clergy and laity, while simultaneously serving as an *ars praedicandi* to help new preachers develop a message for the various Petrine feast days.

**Anagogic**

After entering the chapel, visitors can look at any scene in the cycle and derive some meaning from it. Whether it be historical information concerning the life of Peter, the legitimacy of the pope, the authenticity of the Carmelites, moral guidance, or deeper understanding about the role of the papacy and Church, the message surrounds viewers. No sermon would be complete, however, without a conclusion, and the Brancacci Chapel sermon provides its own with a powerful anagogic message. The designers of the chapel did more than just arrange the frescoes by visual subject and themes; by adding the additional scenes of Adam and Eve at the beginning and arranging the cycle by liturgical themes, the creators of the Brancacci Chapel reveal a cosmic conclusion to their sermon of the life on Peter. To follow this arrangement, the entrance arch provides the first clue with the *Temptation* and *Expulsion of Adam and Eve*. The *Expulsion* greets visitors, reminding them of a world full of sin and the need for redemption.

Inside the chapel, the lower wall scenes sit the closest to eye level, whereas the upper scenes require craning the neck to see. Knowing these lower scenes would be more prominent to viewers, the designers divided the lower chapel walls by liturgical themes of good and evil. Left, or *sinistro*, often signified evil in church symbolism. This representation has its roots in scripture, as Old and New Testament verses alike repeatedly cite the right hand of God as good, exalted, and powerful. Artists commonly used this imagery in their art and in Last Judgment scenes, in particular, such as the fifteenth century *Last Judgment* by Fra Angelico (Figure 34). At the end of times, Christ calls the righteous Christians up to Heaven, while simultaneously
casting sinners down to an eternity in Hell. In these depictions, the redeemed rise to the right hand of Christ, while the sinners descend to Hell on his left.  

The designers of the chapel arranged the frescoes accordingly, based on the location of the altar wall. While facing the altar wall, the lower images on the viewer’s right depict the evil Emperor Nero and the pagan magician Simon Magus, culminating in the death of Ananias. On the viewer’s lower left, the scenes include the converted King Theophilus and the people of Antioch, miracles, and Peter enthroned as the first pontiff of the Church, concluding with the faithful being healed by Peter’s shadow. Through this thoughtful arrangement, those on the viewer’s left rise up, either from sin, illness, or death to salvation and purity. Those on the viewer’s right ultimately fall to their death. As viewers in the chapel imagine themselves joining Peter in these scenes, they become transported to a spiritual realm where they can connect with God and meditate on the fate of their human souls.

In the Brancacci Chapel, the message of the sermon is clear: only through the church can humanity receive the salvation the first parents forced them to seek. As visitors exit the chapel, the Temptation of Adam and Eve bids them farewell, reminding viewers that as they return to the material world they must take care to avoid temptation and falling from grace. The four gospel writers that would have lined the ceiling accented this theme, encouraging viewers to adhere to the teachings of the gospels, as well as the teachings of their church leaders, just as Peter preached the gospel to his followers.

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148 This visual arrangement portrays the good on Christ’s right, and therefore, the figures are depicted on the viewer’s left. Likewise, the damned on the left of Christ are to the viewer’s right.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Time has changed the appearance of the Brancacci Chapel since the first plans for its design. Based on the descriptions from Vasari, the recent cleaning, and the discovery of the sinopie, one can fill in the gaps lost from the original cycle. While these paintings are a revolution in art theory and practice, the cycle served as more than an art lesson in fifteenth-century Florence. Through careful arrangement of figures and architecture, along with thematic visual analogies and contrasts, the designers presented a visual sermon that teaches a greater message of faith, salvation, and the authority of the church.

This thesis takes previous research examining the history of Florence, the Brancacci family, and the Catholic Church and combines it with the history of the Carmelite order to propose a holistic way of interpreting the chapel fresco cycle. While the Brancacci family paid for the construction and decoration of the chapel, the Carmelite friars played a commanding role in dictating the choice and arrangement of the scenes from the life of Peter. In doing so, I argue that the Carmelites designed a muta predicatio for themselves and their laity, which preached a message of obstinacy against earthly suffering and temptation with the promise of an eternal reward for the faithful.

As a whole, this chapel served as a medieval sermon with local Florentine elements for the regular congregation, the local Carmelites, as well as visiting clergy, and guests on feast day celebrations. This thesis also shows that the Brancacci Chapel sermon established the history of the Carmelites to the laity and friars from other orders who may doubt their claims. Using the Bible and the Golden Legend, the designers of the Brancacci Chapel creatively made the cycle both about worship and civic pride as they told the world about Christianity, the church,
leadership, politics, and salvation all through the life of the chief of the disciples. To do so, the Carmelites designed the fresco cycle to visually represent one of their new sermons. In the same way the Franciscans developed their sermons and then created a *muta predicatio* in Assisi, the Florentine Carmelites sought to visually speak to their audience through this art commission.

By using the fourfold method of interpreting scripture, the Mendicant Orders developed popular sermons that would explain scripture in a meaningful way, while guiding their listeners to living a Christ-like life. The Brancacci Chapel designers use these same four senses to articulate the sermon of Peter on the chapel walls. Literally, the frescoes speak to the life of Peter, the history of the Carmelite order, and the legitimacy of Peter as the first pontiff of the Catholic Church. Morally, the *muta predicatio* teaches viewers that virtuous Christians, such as Peter, Tabitha of Joppa, and those who are sick or injured, will ultimately receive God’s mercy and reward. Those who succumb to the vices, however, will meet their death and be removed from God’s presence. The visual sermon provides several allegories as well, including messages of Peter as the Church, revealing her roles in the lives of Florentine citizens, as well as her promises to care for them. The allegory of church and state preaches obedience to earthy law while simultaneously remaining true to God. Depictions of contemporary Florentine streets, citizens, and clothing portray Florence as equivalent to cities such as Galilee, Antioch, and Rome, where many of Peter’s miracles through the Holy Spirit took place. This delivered a message of faith that God’s grace would reach present day Florence. Finally, an arrangement of scenes by liturgical themes transports viewers to a spiritual realm where they can feel a direct connection to God and meditate on the eternal afterlife in the anagogic conclusion to the *muta predicatio*. 
Together, these four senses unite on the Brancacci Chapel walls to present visitors with a visual sermon that served to both enhance present day Carmelite sermons, as well as assist Carmelites in formulating new sermons that would be understood by their congregation. My proposal of this fresco cycle interpretation is not exclusive to the Brancacci Chapel, however. Just as the Franciscans designed a muta predicatio in Assisi, so too could this method of interpretation be applied as a general praxis for understanding other church cycles in which the resident clergy played a large role in commissioning or designing the work. While a family may visit a chapel regularly, the church walls belonged to the clergy and, as such, had to fulfill their needs. Whether the Brancacci visiting their family chapel, laity attending church services, or the friars spending regular time in the space, the Brancacci Chapel sermon sought to teach and inspire all who come to experience her silent message.


Bonaventura. Opera Omnia. Edited by the Studio et Cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura. Quaracchi, Italy: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1887.


Figure 1. Brancacci Chapel, Masolino, Masaccio, and Filippino Lippi, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy, paintings from 1424-1427, 1480s. View from church nave. Reproduced from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cappella_brancacci_03.JPG.
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Figure 3. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy. View of right wall. Photograph by Andrea Maxwell, 2012.
Figure 4. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy. View of altar wall. Photograph by Andrea Maxwell, 2012.
Figure 5. Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy. Exterior. Photograph by Andrea Maxwell, 2012.
Figure 6. *Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew*, Deodato Orlandi, San Pietro a Grado, Pisa, Italy, c. 1300. Reproduced from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/db/Copia_di_basilica_di_san_piero_a_grado%2C_storie_di_san_pietro%2C_san_paolo%2C_costantino_e_papa_silvestro_01.JPG.

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Figure 14. *Virgin giving the Carmelite habit, the Brown Scapular, to St. Simon Stock*, Vincenzo Meucci, Brancacci Chapel, 1746-1748. Photograph by Andrea Maxwell, 2012.
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Figure 20. Peter Healing with his Shadow, Brancacci Chapel. Reproduced from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masaccio_-_St_Peter_Healing_the_Sick_with_his_Shadow_-_WGA14187.jpg.
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Reproduced from
Figure 22. Diagram of chapel scenes, Brancacci Chapel. Reproduced from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brancacci.jpg.
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Figure 27. Peter Baptizing, Brancacci Chapel.
Figure 28. *Ascension and Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter*, Donatello, 1425-1427.
Reproduced from ARTstor.

Figure 29. Detail showing Carmelite monks in *Peter Enthroned at Antioch*, Brancacci Chapel.
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Figure 33. Self-Portrait of Masaccio and his friends, detail from *Peter Enthroned at Antioch*, Brancacci Chapel. Photograph by Andrea Maxwell, 2012.
Figure 34. *Last Judgment*, Fra Angelico, fifteenth century. Reproduced from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fra_Angelico_JungsteGericht_berlin.JPG.