

THE FRANCISCAN ELEMENT:  
DANTE AND AESTHETICAL IDEALS

Upon the death of Beatrice Portinari in 1290, Dante Alighieri sought consolation in philosophical and theological studies.<sup>1</sup> Most current biographers and commentators agree that he pursued these studies in his native Florence at the Dominican studium at Santa Maria Novella and the Franciscan studium at Santa Croce.<sup>2</sup> In asserting this conclusion, Papini rejects any possibility that Dante's grasp of philosophical and theological matters, so evident in his writings, could have come from an intellectual apprenticeship with Archbishop Rainaldo Concoreggi during his sojourn in Ravenna, as some Dante biographers contend, since Concoreggi was a Gueff and a favorite of Boniface VIII.<sup>3</sup> If it is a reasonable assumption that Dante matriculated in the two mendicant studia of Florence, what then was the intellectual atmosphere of these studia?

The Dominican philosopher and erstwhile poet, Remigio Girolami, dominated the instruction at Santa Maria Novella during the final decade of the Thirteenth Century. From his prolific pen issued a constant stream of funeral panegyrics, sermons, prologues, verses, expositions and treatises, while princes and kings frequented his lectures. Remigio had been a deacon at the University of Paris where he imbibed deeply of the new scholastic philosophical developments of Thomas Aquinas who had visited Santa Maria Novella during June, 1272 when Dante would have been seven years old. Recalled from Paris to Florence about the time of Beatrice's death, Remigio served twice as Prior of Santa Maria in 1294 and 1313. From 1309 to 1310, Remigio was the Provincial of the Dominicans' Roman Province. No doubt, at Santa Maria Novella Dante encountered Aquinas' Summa Theologiae and Summa Catholicae Fidei contra Gentiles.<sup>4</sup> Dante's immersion in Remigio's writings found fruition in the initial verses of the Convivio and the Petrine invective in the Paradiso.<sup>5</sup>

The influence of the Spiritual Franciscan, Pier Giovanni Olivi, at Santa Croce between 1287 - 1289 persisted through his disciple, Ubertino da Casale. Of French origin, Olivi was heir to the Johannine scriptural theology and the Augustinian mystical tradition through the apocalyptic teachings and pronouncements of the late Twelfth and early Thirteenth Century abbot, Joachim of Flora. Though posthumously condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Joachim and his apocalyptic vision continued to have popular impact especially in the fertile field of the Spiritual Franciscans. Joachim's credibility as a prophetic figure was based on a contrived interpretation of some vague symbolic personages in the