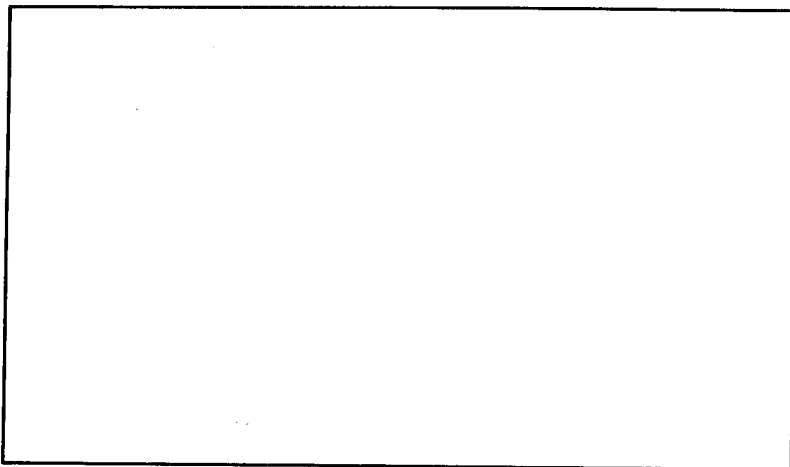


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JULY-AUGUST, 1985

The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions

BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo

CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun

EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony

EpCler: Letter to Clerics¹

EpCust: Letter to Superiors¹

EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹

EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo

EpMin: Letter to a Minister

EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order

EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People

ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God

ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father

FormViv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221

LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God

LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours

OffPass: Office of the Passion

OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix

RegB: Rule of 1223

RegNB: Rule of 1221

RegEr: Rule for Hermits

SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady

SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues

Test: Testament of St. Francis

UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare

VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

¹I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis

2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis

3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles

CL: Legend of Saint Clare

CP: Process of Saint Clare

Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis

LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC: Sacrum Commercium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

EDITORIAL



Francis' Compassion at San Damiano

DID YOU EVER THINK that Saint Francis considered the life at San Damiano rather harsh and possibly a bit too austere for the Poor Ladies? Both the Legend of Perugia and the Mirror of Perfection would lead us to believe that it was such compassion for them that caused him to write a fourth private letter to them to encourage them in their way of life. According to the Legends,

When he thought of them [the Poor Ladies], his spirit was always moved to pity because he knew that from the beginning of their conversion they had led and were still leading an austere and poor life by free choice and out of necessity [LP 45; *Omnibus*, 1025].

and "... knowing from the beginning of their conversion they had led a life of great confinement and poverty, he always felt the greatest pity and compassion for them..." (SP 90; *Omnibus*, 1223).

Indirectly, Francis appears to be blaming himself for their condition since it was through his inspiration and by his example that they had given up all things and enclosed themselves at San Damiano. He knew that according to the Church women religious must remain enclosed, mainly for their own protection; but he further knew that neither his sympathy nor any suggestion to ease their way of life would change the hearts and minds of Clare and her sisters. So, wisely, he encouraged them in the way of life they had so zealously embraced. His fourth private letter to the Poor Ladies is, in a sense, more directive about how they should live their life than even the Formula Vitae he had written for them (*Omnibus*, 76). In the latter document he simply confirms them in their inspiration to live according to the perfection of the Holy Gospel and promises to care for them personally and through his brothers. But in his fourth letter to the Sisters (*Omnibus*, rev. ed., 1944), he gives them a more practical way of living out the spirit of their vocation. It is as though Francis himself had done a great deal of negotiating on the place of the Poor Ladies in the Church and had finally realized fully the value of the enclosed life and the manner in which it could be lived out for the salvation of souls. Instead of allowing his compassion and pity to be

manifested to them, then, he encourages them in the way in which they have begun under obedience to the Spirit; he admonishes them to use wisely the alms given to them; and he goes a step further by mentioning how the ill and the well should act in light of their condition in the monastery.

Francis' own interior insight tells him to instruct the ill to accept their illness as a great labor for the good of the universal Church and to urge that those who are well and serve the ill should care for them in that same spirit. Thus he is able to give the Sisters a universal, catholic understanding of their way of life. He and his brothers had no problem seeing their labors as universal—as important to the Church; and often they even saw the fruits of their labors. But realizing how little fruit would be apparent to the Poor Ladies in their hidden lives of prayer within the enclosure, he draws this explicit connection for them, between their hidden lives and the life of the universal Church. Ω

St. Frances Ann Thom, O.S.C.

Go Forth, My Soul

Over Umbrian hills your laughter rang—
dear Clare, the silent one;
Your footsteps swift and soundless
praising Brother Sun.
Hands held out to you were filled,
and broken hearts were healed.
The desperate, the leprous one
all hurts to you revealed.
Your constant gaze at the Eucharist
effected many a cure,
But it was your life of holiness
that did God allure.
"Go forth, my soul," you could surely say
with faith and certitude,
For Christ awaited His poor bride
amidst heaven's multitude.

Sister Frances Ann Thom, O.S.C.

Clare of Assisi: The Mirror Mystic

REGIS J. ARMSTRONG, O.F.M.CAP.

THE JAPAN TIMES of 14 May, 1982, contained a cultural note by columnist Lewis Bush describing for curious Westerners the three *Sanshu no Jingi* or Imperial Treasures of Japan: the sacred sword, the jewel, and the mirror. In discussing these symbols of sovereignty, the author singled out the mirror and wrote: "The mirror is to be found in the place of the deity in all Japanese shrines, for it is symbolic of the human heart and is said to reflect the image of a god."

Is it all that surprising that the Japanese count the mirror as one of their ancient imperial treasures? People have been fascinated with these shining reflective objects for centuries, as archeological excavations and ancient literature have so frequently proven. How many stories or images of our traditions capture or portray people staring at themselves or sneaking glances in a mirror! There seems to be something expressed by a mirror concerning our sense of vanity; perhaps this alone is a key to understanding its place as an important fixture in the homes of so many. At the same time, the mirror also reflects our sense of propriety—the haunting questions of everyday life: "Do I look all right?" or "Are my clothes in place or properly matched?" The Japanese have been honest enough, then, to realize these two concerns of human nature—vanity and propriety—and have rightly enshrined something close to the human heart, a mirror, as something that reflects to us the image of the god that we might see in ourselves.

Father Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., is Vice-Rector of the Athenaeum Antonianum in Rome, a Consulting Editor of this Review, and a member of the staff of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University. All citations of the writings of Saint Clare are from the translation Father Regis published in collaboration with Father Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M. (see the inside front cover of this issue).

It is a curious point that within the Platonic tradition the mirror is also enshrined. Plato himself wrote of the mirror of the world and of created things that reflect the divine Ideas (*Republic*, VI [509c-510a]). One of his most prolific disciples, Philo, in commenting on the Exodus of the Chosen People, used the mirror as a metaphor to describe the soul's passage from knowledge of self to moral purification and from knowledge of the sensible world to knowledge of the intellect. Philo, furthermore, linked the reflection of a mirror with the illusions and fallacies that can be discovered in the world in which we live (*De migratione*, 17; *Vita Moysis*, II, 15). The biblical Book of Wisdom obviously reflects this Platonic approach as we see Wisdom referred to as "that spotless mirror of God" (7:26). The theme easily passes into the New Testament literature, as Paul writes: "Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12a); and again, ". . . we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect" (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul is clearly referring to us, his readers, as mirrors reflecting the love of God to one another in the first instance, while in the second he writes of the effects of contemplation of the Lord. James, meanwhile, uses both of these senses in his Letter (1:23-24), as he considers the person who listens to the word of God and pays no attention to it. "To listen to the word and not obey," he writes, "is like looking at your features in a mirror and then, after a quick look, going off and immediately forgetting what you looked like."

It is this life of
contemplation—contemplation of "the
mirror of eternity"—that leads to
transformation into the image of God.

Thus we discover in ancient literature, both secular and religious, a fascination with this reflective, frequently highly polished piece of metal and find it becoming an apt image for the search for self-knowledge, moral or inner purification, or the assimilation of a moral ideal. As William Johnston, S.J., notes in his book, *The Mirror Mind*, it is one of the most prominent theological symbols of the spiritual tradition, not only in the Judeo-Christian world, but also in Hindu and Buddhist literature.

It is difficult to know how Clare of Assisi (†1253) learned of this image; yet among the great medieval mystics she uses the mirror theme in a most beautiful way. When we consider the poverty of sources concerning Clare, especially the small number of her writings that have been left to us—we have only five works: her Rule and four letters to Agnes of Prague, which have been definitely authenticated—the theme of the mirror becomes a central theme in her spiritual theology. No doubt Clare, a somewhat well-to-do young woman of Assisi, used a mirror during those carefree days prior to her embrace of religious life. This may have prompted her sensitivity to and appreciation of the mirror as a valuable instrument of spiritual growth as she heard of it through the friars, monks, and clergy who visited her in the little monastery of San Damiano. Herbert Grabes, a German medieval scholar, discovered 250 works written in the Middle Ages that contained the Latin word *speculum* (mirror) or its equivalent in the title. Thus we can see not only Clare's feminine attraction to the image, but also a "mirror literature" that was well established at the time she entered religious life.

For the medieval author the mirror signified a tableau, a portrait or a description upon which a bystander could gaze and receive information or norms for everyday life. Two styles of mirror emerge in the literature of the Middle Ages: the instructive, and the exemplary. Among the mirrors of "instructive" spiritual literature—that which assists us to know an ideal and to confront ourselves in light of it—we discover the *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Hugh of Saint Victor (†1141) and the *Speculum Universale* of Raoul Ardent (†1200). Some titles of works in the "exemplary" spiritual literature—which presents a normative knowledge or a vision of self leading to moral or spiritual purification—are the *Speculum Fidei* of William of Saint Thierry (†1148), the *Speculum Caritatis* of Aelred of Rievaulx (†1166), and the *Speculum Virginum* by an unknown author of the twelfth century that teaches the virgin "how to please the eternal Spouse through the beauty of a holy conscience." All of these works contain moral directives for dispelling sin, purifying the conscience, and disclosing illusions; and all use the simple act of looking into a mirror as a technique of spiritual growth. It is not likely that Clare read these works—there is no evidence of a library at San Damiano and no information on her literary background. Therefore, we must suppose that she heard this mirror imagery used in the sermons or conferences delivered by those who ministered to or visited the Poor Ladies at San Damiano. These would have been not only friars, but also Cistercians, curial officials, cardinals, and even the popes.

Clare's use of the mirror, however, enriches the literature by applying the mirror approach to spiritual development as a woman. Clare is far

more graphic or practical in suggesting the use of the mirror than the male authors had been. "Inasmuch as this vision is . . . the mirror without blemish," she writes, "look upon that mirror each day and study your face within it, so that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes and cover yourself with the flowers and garments of all the virtues" (Letter IV to Agnes of Prague, 14-17). This is a truly feminine piece of advice: practical, concrete, down-to-earth. We do not discover in other medieval literature the same directives of looking upon the mirror each day, studying our faces within it, or adorning or covering ourselves with the virtues perceived. Moreover, as a woman, Clare deftly uses the medieval mirror, which as a convex surface has many dimensions, to reflect different aspects of the same mysteries found in the Incarnate Word. "Look at the parameters of this mirror," she exhorts us, "at [its] surface, [and] in [its] depths" (Letter IV, 19-23). At every turn, Clare perceives new aspects of the "marvelous humility, astonishing poverty, and ineffable charity" of Christ her Spouse (cf. Letter IV, 18-23).



Above all, though, Clare's use of the mirror image reflects a profound Christocentric focus in her spiritual life and greatly contributes to the development of the Christ-Mirror theology based on Wisdom 7:26 and developed in the Pauline writings and the Letter of James. The mystery of the Incarnate Word permeates the writings of Clare from the earliest Letter to Agnes of Prague (1234/35) to her last written work, her Rule, which was approved in 1253, a few days before her death. In many ways Clare brings attention to "the King of the angels, the Lord of heaven and earth" (Letter IV, 21) and repeatedly advises Agnes of Prague and her own sisters at San Damiano to keep him always before their eyes. "As a poor virgin, embrace the poor Christ," she urges Agnes; and in her Testament she reminds her sisters that "the Son of God became for us the Way (cf. Jn. 14:6) which our Blessed Father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example" (Test 2). Above all, Christ is the Mirror "suspend-

ed on the wood of the cross" who prompts within us a more and more

fervent expression of love (cf. Letter IV, 24, 27), and from this perspective we see Clare, the Mirror Mystic, shine brilliantly and clearly in her writings.

It is in the Third Letter to Agnes of Prague that we find Clare introduce the image of the mirror for the first time. After encouraging Agnes to persevere in the demanding life of poverty and enclosure which she had recently embraced, Clare writes:

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in *the brilliance of glory!*
Place your heart in *the figure of the divine substance* [cf. Heb. 1:3]!
And transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead through contemplation [Letter III, 12-13].

This could only be the advice of a contemplative person: place your mind, soul, and heart before and in the presence of the transcendent God! It is a call to put aside all cares, preoccupations, and worries and to be changed into the image of God through a life of contemplative prayer. A century before, the Cistercian mystical theologian William of Saint Thierry had written:

Since the human person still sees in a mirror and in an enigma passes like an image, it is in a mirror that we are taught by metaphor, and it is by a yet more obscure enigma that we are trained, in the simple and evident image that we are more sweetly affected [*Mirror of Faith*, 23; p. 55].

This would be too abstract or philosophical for Clare. She sees the struggle in much simpler terms which can be stated thus: "Gaze into the mirror that is Christ, and let yourself be like him." It is this life of contemplation—contemplation of "the mirror of eternity"—that leads to transformation into the image of God.

One curious aspect of this passage is the rather obscure manner in which Clare encourages Agnes to this contemplation of Christ. The two passages taken from Hebrews 1:3 are clearly Christological; yet, taken out of context and used as they are in this Third Letter, their Christological dimension can easily be overlooked. Perhaps Clare is simply exhorting Agnes to embrace a life of contemplation in the "light of God's countenance"—as William of Saint Thierry describes it—"that is, in the mirror that is the vision of God" (*Golden Epistle*, II, xvii, 271). Perhaps her use of an image of the glorious Christ was meant to provide Agnes with a more consoling means of perseverance in the contrasting life of poverty and hiddenness that she more seriously embraced at the time she composed this letter. (Gregory IX's Bull, *Pia credulitate tenentes*, acknowledges Agnes' renunciation of a somewhat active ministry in a hospice for the poor, to live an enclosed life of poverty and

contemplative prayer.) Whatever the case may be, Clare encourages a position of prayer before the mirror of eternity, Christ; for that mirror reflects the glory of the Father and gives us knowledge of his being. Such an attitude of contemplative prayer encourages acceptance of the difficulties and tensions assumed in our daily following of Jesus.

Fifteen years later, however, we find Clare taking a different approach in her use of the mirror theme. The Fourth Letter presents us with excerpts from the same passage in Hebrews, as well as that key phrase of the Book of Wisdom which, as we have seen, calls Wisdom "the brilliance of eternal light and the mirror without blemish" (Letter IV, 14). But we are confronted with those virtues of poverty, humility, and charity that Clare sees in the reflection of the mirror. Throughout the next section there is a beautiful blending of images: the spatial—the parameters, surface, and depth of the medieval convex mirror; and the temporal—the infancy, hidden years, and crucifixion. From every angle, in other words, the scenes and events of Christ's life reflect the same characteristics or virtues, although the image is brought to clear focus in the crucified Lord whom Clare pointedly identifies as the Mirror. "That Mirror," she writes, "suspended on the wood of the Cross, urged those who passed by to consider, saying, 'All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering'" (Letter IV, 24–25). Thus her metaphor now brings into focus the reflection of the Incarnate Word and encourages us to concentrate on its clearest expression, the Crucifixion. Clare beautifully returns to a Christ-Mirror typology missing in the earlier medieval spiritual writers but contained in such apocryphal literatures as the *Ode of Solomon* and the *Acts of John*. "Christ himself is a Mirror in whom each person can know himself," we find in these works—a sentiment that is echoed in the thought of this thirteenth-century contemplative woman. Yet Clare presents this thought in a far more concrete, fleshed-out Christology which was becoming more and more typical of the Franciscan school, and in doing so she contributes to the mirror literature of Christian spiritual theology.

At about this time the famous Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas wrote in his *De Veritate* (XII, 6): "You will never find the saints saying that God is a mirror of things, but that created things are themselves the mirror of God." This is the marvelous understanding in Clare's use of the mirror image that we find as we blend the images of the Third and Fourth Letters to Agnes of Prague. Christ, the Son of God, became like us creatures and as such mirrored or reflected "the splendor of eternal glory." "the brilliance of eternal light," and "the figure of the divine substance." More wondrously, however, Jesus, the God-man, is the mirror giving us reflections of the qualities or characteristics of God: his

"blessed poverty, holy humility, and ineffable charity." This Mirror, Christ, not only reflected for Clare the indescribable attributes of glory, wonder, and brilliance; he also revealed those qualities that are so endearing, appealing, and irresistible to the human spirit and that prompt deeper and more thorough expressions of love.

This consideration of "creatureliness" may possibly have led Clare to move from her focus on Christ the Mirror to the challenge of her own life and those of her sisters to become mirrors themselves.

It is difficult to know when Clare wrote her Testament. There is so little written about this document in her early biographical material and the manuscript tradition is so weak that some critics have suggested that she never wrote it at all. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to consider the Testament as a work of the last years of Clare's life. Certainly many of the issues or themes found in this document can be found in the Rule as well as in her final letter to Agnes of Prague which, as we have seen, dates from the last year of Clare's life. When we examine these three documents—the Testament, the Rule, and the Fourth Letter—in close proximity, we appreciate Clare's vision of the role she and her sisters have in the plan of God.

The sixth section of this document uses the mirror metaphor in three instances as Clare encourages the Ladies of San Damiano to consider their vocation:

For the Lord himself has not only set us as an example and mirror for others, but also for our [own] sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life, so that they in turn will be a mirror and example to those living in the world. Since, therefore, the Lord has called us to such great things that those who are to be models and mirrors for others may behold themselves in us, we are truly bound to bless and praise the Lord and to be strengthened constantly in him to do good [Test 6].

We can easily see Clare revealing her understanding of life in San Damiano as a reflection of that "Mirror suspended on the wood of the Cross." In this sentiment, is she not echoing that thought of Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (see above) which encourages contemplation of "the brightness of the Lord . . . as we are turned into the images that we reflect"?

As we have seen, Clare encourages Agnes of Prague to look upon the Mirror, Christ, every day and to study her face within it. She gives her this piece of feminine advice in the hope that Agnes will change her outward appearance by adorning herself within and without with those virtues revealed in Christ. It is a simple call to become a reflection of that upon which she is gazing. Clare gives essentially the same advice to her sisters at San Damiano in her declaration that the Lord has set them as an

example and mirror for one another, for sisters of other monasteries, and for those living in the world. It is as if Clare discovered this means of perseverance—reflecting daily on the mirror that is Christ Jesus—and then realized that this summarized or captured succinctly an essential element of the life of San Damiano, of her enclosed sisters throughout the world and throughout history. Thus the followers of Clare have lived their calling in history, contemplating the mystery of the poor, humble Christ and becoming a reflection of him to one another and to those of us who are called to live a Christ-like life in the world.

The mirror: that simple, reflective, polished piece of metal that has fascinated us in so many lands and in so many times, can be seen as a prominent theme of spiritual literature. It is certainly one key opening the treasures of that great contemplative woman, Clare of Assisi. She would have it become a tool or instrument of spiritual growth especially for her followers, who are called to live one of the most demanding and challenging vocations of all enclosed women religious.

The author notes, in the article from the *Japan Times* we cited at the outset:

Mythology records that Izanagi, the male creative deity, gave his children a polished silver disc before which he bade them kneel each morning and examine their reflection, counseling themselves to think of heavenly matters, subdue passions and all evil thoughts, in order that the mirror reveal a pure and lovely soul.

Clare, like many other Christian authors, realized that Christ himself is that silver disc, that Mirror. It is he who calls us to reveal God in our poor, humble, pure, and lovely souls. Ω

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"In the Name of the Lord. Amen":

Clare's Testament, and the Spirit of Prayer

SISTER DIANA VAN BAER, O.S.C.

THE "PRAISES OF THE TESTAMENT," traditionally read with Clare's Testament, speaks of an incorruptible testament of love, a desirable treasure of poverty, of the legacy left by Clare to her sisters. What was Clare's legacy? During her life, the praise of God was always on her lips; she would tell the sisters that they should praise God for every beautiful, green and flowering tree that they saw, for every human being that they met, for every creature. For all of these—always and in all things—God should be praised. When she came to write her Testament, the same message is present: the thing she really wanted to leave her sisters, when the time came for her death—the most important gift she had for them, as for us today—was just this quality that she herself possessed so fully, and that led her always, and in all things, to praise God for all she saw. She was able to recognize his gifts, to be aware of them, to dwell on them, to rejoice in them, to remember them, and to confess them. If we can do the same, we too will praise him and bless him, we will thank him, and give him the glory.

Clare begins her Testament: "In the name of the Lord. Amen. Among the many graces we have received. . . ." And then she stops. She seems almost to interrupt herself, as though this is too cold, too bare a statement. It is not a past gift she wants to talk about, but an ever-present giving, which establishes and maintains a living link between the Father and herself—between the Father and us. So she adds: "and continue daily to receive"—which we are receiving every day. It is increasingly given, for though it is a gift, whole and entire at the beginning, it is given afresh every day, and with each passing day the gift grows, its content becomes richer and deeper, and this depth and richness is still gift. In the same

Sister Diana van Baer writes from the Bethlehem Monastery of Poor Clares, Campbelltown, New South Wales.

way life itself is a daily gift, and one which we fully discover and appreciate only when it has grown to maturity. Only as we grow older and wiser do we come to know more fully what the life God gave us at birth is about—just as a plant, a tree, or a shrub that we are given as a slip, and which grows over the years, is every bit as much a gift at the end as the original slip from which it grew; by our tender care we have helped it grow, but it is still gift.

“Among the many graces which we have received, and continue daily to receive, from the liberality of the Father of mercies”—Clare’s actual words are “from our giver, the Father of mercies,” and it was important to Clare that he is *our* benefactor, *our* Father—and for which we must give deepest thanks to our glorious God, our vocation holds first place. Indeed because it is the more perfect and the greater among these graces so much the more does it claim our gratitude. Therefore the apostle says, ‘Know your vocation.’ ” We see here both a mounting sense of praise to the Father (“to him most glorious”) and an insistence that we should not, through false humility, hesitate to acknowledge the greatness of God’s call, for the word Clare uses, *agnosce*, implies knowing the full worth of something, recognizing it for what it is in fact.

Do I know what Christ has done to me?
All prayer is concerned with answering
this question, with trying to fathom
God’s action in my life.

She then tells us what that vocation is, for “the Son of God became for us the WAY, and that way our blessed father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.” So this vocation is not only to be accepted from God; it comes to us through Francis, and from him, for not only are we to consider the immense gifts which God has showered upon us, but we should especially consider those he has worked in us through Francis. And Clare does consider them. Rollo May interprets “to consider something” as to take a starry eyed view of it, to look at it from the vantage point of the stars, to see it in God’s light. And this is what Clare does: she dwells on the gifts God has showered upon her, she describes them in detail. Referring to her life before she knew Francis, she tells of the incident when Francis, before he had either brethren or companions, immediately after his own conversion, while he

was building the Church of San Damiano, had prophesied “concerning us what the Lord later fulfilled.” She does not hesitate to say that the Lord *had* fulfilled Francis’ prophecy, and that the Father had been glorified by her life and the lives of her sisters.

Clare was not afraid to recognize what God was doing for her, and through her, as through the little group gathered around her. Why should she be? It reflected on him, not on herself. This was the Lord’s doing; so why should she not rejoice? This is an important element in her understanding of God: she can acknowledge his work in her, for as Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, the more grace is multiplied among people, the more thanksgiving will well up to the glory of God. “Made richer in every way you will be able to do all the generous things which, through us, are the cause of thanksgiving to God . . . thus increasing the amount of thanksgiving that God receives . . . , for that makes them give glory to God” (2 Cor. 9:12). Paul even makes this the reason he asks for their prayers: “The more people there are asking for help for us, the more will be giving thanks when it is granted to us.” So Clare rejoiced in what God had done for her, just as Mary glorified God for the great things he had done.

Perhaps this was one way in which Clare allowed her devotion to the Eucharist to shape her very life and being, in shaping her attitude to prayer. Francis wrote about the Eucharist, and he spoke of reverence for it and for all connected with it; and though Clare in her writings has little to say on this, there is a strong tradition among the Clares of devotion to Christ present in the Eucharist—a devotion which is rooted in Clare’s relation to Christ so present. We know that this relation was very real, and that it exercised a profound influence on Clare—it was to Christ present in the Eucharist that she turned, confident in his will and power to help, on the occasion of the Saracen invasion and when the monastery was threatened; and much of her time was spent sewing for the churches around Assisi so that they would be fitting places for Christ’s presence.

The Greek term *Eucharist* includes both blessing and giving thanks, as does the Hebrew *Barak*. While our Eucharist is a sacrifice, then, it is more: it is also a prayer of blessing and a prayer of thanksgiving. For the Jew, to bless and to give thanks for something or somebody are not two activities, but one. Not only are blessing and giving thanks related—thanksgiving and remembering are also interconnected. Thanksgiving is calling to mind the things we have to be grateful for, thinking of them, remembering that for which we wish to give thanks, recognizing and acknowledging that they have happened. This remembering, thanking, blessing type of prayer, so deeply rooted in Old Testament piety, was very alive to people of the Middle Ages. They were

at home with it, and Clare was shaped by it. In the face of God's goodness to her, of the greatness of his mercy, this thanksgiving became a necessity for her, the foundation of her prayer, as it is the basis of all Christian prayer. Essentially it is a type of prayer which is itself a response to the word of God which is recognized as a living reality that has intervened personally in life, a response to the goodness of God towards oneself. Clare was so conscious of this action of God in her life, that she could not but give him praise and glory. Somehow the presence of God is reason enough for this blessing of him, as when the shepherds at Bethlehem (having found Jesus with Mary, as they had been told) went away blessing and glorifying God.

Not only is it important to recognize God's gifts and to rejoice in them, for Clare it was also important that she recognize how, and through whom, they came to her. She would not have us ignore the human channels, the real people who have loved us and led us to God; we are not to climb up to him with their help, and then knock them out of the way or try to do without them. They remain an important part of life and of prayer. That we can take comfort, strength, and consolation from their influence on us and the help they have given us in our life with God—this is an added reason for giving glory to God:

In this therefore we can behold the great kindness of God towards us, who of the abundance of his mercy and love deigned to speak thus through his saint of our vocation and election. And it was not of us alone that our most blessed Father prophesied these things, but of all others likewise who were to enter the holy calling to which God has called us.

So Clare is comforted, and she includes us in that comfort. But she is also realistic. It is not only comfort and strength that this thought brings, it places upon us the responsibility of making some return: "With what solicitude, therefore, and fervor of mind and body must we not observe the commandments of God and of our Father, that with the help of God we may return to him with increase the talent he has given us." And it is in this that we are to be an example and a mirror for those living in the world, so that this in turn is reason for praising God—for being strengthened in the Lord more and more to do good.

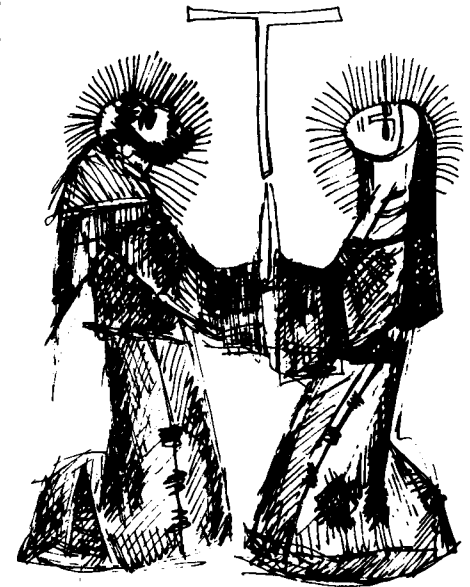
In this first section of the Testament several words occur which are important for prayer. We are to *give deepest thanks* to our God, to *consider* the immense benefits he has showered upon us, to *glorify* our heavenly Father, to *behold* the great kindness of God towards us, to *observe* the commandments of God, to *return* to him with increase our talent, to *bless* the Lord, to *praise* him, to be *strengthened in him* to do good. What is this but prayer—a deep awareness of God's action in our life, and a response in love to all that he is doing there? Alan Ecclestone, in *Yes to*

God, speaks of prayer as making the most of our moments of perception—our praying is what we have managed to make of life so far, and our desires for the continuance of the journey; it notices and interprets what we have come to know of the God who acts upon us and of faith, hope, piety, and love. He laments that so often we fail to hold our current experience within the field of the spirit long enough to understand what it is about, and what it is that God is doing in our lives. When Christ had washed his disciples' feet, he asked them: "Do you know what I have done to you?" He asks this same question of us all, and he asks it in all sorts of situations. Do I know what Christ has done to me? All prayer is concerned with answering this question, with trying to fathom God's action in my life.

So when Clare thinks of her conversion and her promise of obedience to Francis, she is not afraid to dwell on what God had done for her through Francis, and to draw comfort from it; she recalls that Francis himself rejoiced greatly in the

Lord upon seeing her closeness to God and her response to God and that of the first sisters, ready and eager as they were to embrace a life of penance. Moved to love for them, "he bound himself always to have, in his own person or through his order, the same diligent care and special solicitude for us as for his own friars." She insists that he was to her a pillar of strength, and after God her one consolation and support. He was founder, planter, helper in the service of Christ: ever solicitous in word and work to foster Clare and her sisters, "his little plants." She speaks of a very real, human, loving care on the part of Francis; she expresses how important it was in her life; she remembers it with gratitude and rejoices in it—and it forms a significant element of her prayer of blessing and thanksgiving.

The Rule for a New Brother speaks of prayer as an "echo of our life"; if it is an echo, then everything in life, all that is real in it, must find a place in our prayer. We are perhaps more used to taking the difficult situations



of life to prayer, as we struggle to bring our lives into tune with what God is doing, but the good parts of life belong there too, and maybe they are the more important part of prayer. As for Clare herself, she can no longer separate out Francis' action in her life from God's, just as she could not talk of her promise to Francis apart from her promise to God:

For love of that Lord who was poor in the crib, who lived a poor life, and who hung naked on the gibbet of the Cross, may the Lord Cardinal always cause his little flock to observe the holy poverty which we have promised God and our most blessed father Francis, and may he always strengthen and preserve them in this poverty. For this is the little flock which the Lord and Father has begotten in his holy Church by the word and example of the blessed father Francis, who followed the poverty and humility of his beloved Son, and of the glorious Virgin, his Mother.

But there is another aspect of Clare's life and prayer, which is also reflected in her Testament. Prayer is not only blessing and thanksgiving for all that God has done in our lives; there is another element, as we struggle with the difficulties of life, the things we find hard to accept in ourselves or in others, the things we don't like and don't want, the calls from God to go beyond—sometimes far beyond—that for which we feel able, the call to cope with the one situation we had hoped we would never have to face, the acceptance of failure or limitation of any kind.

Clare faced these too. She recalls that after her decision to do penance she promised obedience to Francis; only when he saw her readiness for a life of penance did he finally give her a rule of life. Her obedience to Francis presupposed this readiness for a life of penance, but it was penance lived within the context of a vowed life, a life of obedience.

How do we see Clare's approach to penance? Her conversion, her life of penance, was a life of going continually deeper into the mystery of God. The Son of God *was* her WAY, and when we travel this way many things in our life will seem out of place; as we discover God, or are discovered by him, we must leave behind anything we see in our lives that is incompatible with what we discover, that he shows us to be out of place, that cannot stand before his gaze. Speaking to Agnes of Prague about penances, Clare insists that "by thy life thou praise God." It is this that is important, not what we do, but our very life. Is this a life of penance? Or is it a life of prayer?

In her Second Letter to Agnes, Clare writes: "Behold him, consider him, contemplate him, imitate him"—desire to be like him. This is a description of a life given over to prayer, but also of a life of penance. The phrase so familiar to us from Vatican II, "constant prayer and ready penance," is no cliché; the two go hand in hand and must of their very nature do so. We cannot support a life of penance unless we are living a

deeply prayerful life; it can be sustained only by a life of prayer. This is borne out in the Rule (ch. X) where Clare urges us to "strive above all things to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation, to *pray* tribulation and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, reprehend, and blame us"—prayer and penance.

That Clare herself had to face up to this leaving behind of anything that God shows us is out of place in our lives, anything contrary to his will and call for us, and that she had a real struggle in accepting the one situation she had hoped she would never have to face, is indicated in the Testament, when she speaks of the role of Abbess.

We know that Clare had a deep reluctance to take on this office and refused to do so in the first years at San Damiano. It was only at Francis' insistence that she finally accepted it. This was one of the very few instances where Francis intervened explicitly, and she was called on to obey in an area where she found great difficulty. Strangely enough, she never resigned the office, though Francis' example in resigning as Minister General might have urged her to do so, to lay aside the burden and leave the governance of the community to another. She did not do this, and it seems worthwhile to ponder why she did not. After all, forty years is a long time; there must have been others who could have taken her place.

In wondering why, I think we find the clue where Clare speaks of the role of Abbess and that of the sisters. It is significant that in the Testament she uses the very words Francis used in *his* Testament to describe what took place when he overcame his reluctance and repugnance to kiss the leper. He says,

When I was in sin, the sight of lepers nauseated me beyond measure; but then God himself led me into their company, and I had pity on them. When I had once become acquainted with them, what had previously nauseated me became a source of spiritual and physical consolation for me.

The Latin has *Quod videbatur mihi amarum conversum fuit mihi in dulcedinem animi et corporis*—what seemed to me bitter, was changed into sweetness of soul and body.

For Francis this was a formative experience, which led him far beyond what he felt drawn to or could have done naturally—a real going beyond himself to find God's will in place of what he himself wanted. Clare took up these words to describe her own experience of going beyond what she felt she could cope with; towards the end of her Testament she urges ready obedience upon the sisters in accord with their promise to the Lord, and then she continues: "Thus the mother, seeing their charity and humility and the unity that exists among them, will carry more lightly

the burdens of her office, and what is painful and bitter will, by their holy living, be turned to sweetness for her." In Latin: *Quod molestum est et amarum, propter sanctam earum conversationem, ei in dulcedinem convertatur*. What is troublesome and bitter will, on account of their holy living, be turned to sweetness for her.

Not what *seems* bitter, as with Francis, but what *is* bitter—and burdensome. Where Francis found peace as he took pity on the lepers among whom the Lord led him, and in a way it was the lepers who helped Francis experience this peace as it was through them that his life and God's will coincided, so Clare found peace with her sisters, in whose midst the Lord placed her as mother and Abbess—and it was through their holy living that she came to experience this peace. Why was it such a bitter thing for her—*molestum et amarum*—to be Abbess? And why did she so long resist it? Her choice of words, modeled on those of Francis, indicates that it was indeed, like his, an experience that was to be decisive in her following of the Lord, and one in which she was to find peace and sweetness as she left behind her own will and preference to follow where the Lord led.

The reason may be connected with Clare's background: her family belonged to the upper classes of Assisi, and the traditional role of Abbess was very like the role she would have played had she made a good marriage. Was this why Clare feared the position of Abbess; was she afraid that she would be unable to rise above it—that she would become a great lady with authority over a large household and many servants under her care and direction? Perhaps she was afraid of this, terribly afraid of being sucked back into the very type of life she thought she had left behind in her search for simplicity of life after the example of Francis. The very thing she was perhaps running away from, certainly shunning, was suddenly very much with her, and how was she to cope with it? Probably too, it was the very role for which she was, by nature, fitted, and she may have sensed this.

It is often easier when we find this type of difficulty in our lives to say: "I won't touch it. I would only make a mess of it. The only safe thing is to leave it severely alone." Clare had to face the fact that she could not do that, she had to take it up and find a way of being Abbess that wasn't like being a great lady. God was calling her to cope with it, to make something more of it than that. And she had to take the risk that she would fail. Did she have it within her to be Abbess in this way? She was put in a situation which, in a sense, forced her to discover and develop the ability to do so, which called it forth in her, as she struggled to hold onto her first call in this new situation. It involved a struggle for her, tempted as she seems to have been to push it aside. And the struggle

would have brought a deeper understanding of herself and of the life to which she was called.

Clare did find great peace and contentment. The fact that she did not resign this office probably indicates that she had found a way to integrate it into the simple way of life she had undertaken. The love and respect in which she was held by her first sisters—some of whom lived with her for forty years—also points to the same conclusion. And when we think of those first sisters, we find them always in the background. They lived the life as fully as Clare herself; yet she never tried to draw them out of their hidden life; for the Clares' vocation *is* to a hidden life, and Clare protected her sisters from a misinterpretation of that vocation. She understood so fully the simplicity and hiddenness that Francis was striving for, and she would not force others into the limelight by stepping back. Any insistence that others become Abbess in her place would probably have put a false emphasis on the role and its importance. What is really important is to follow Christ.

The fact that she did not resign the office indicates that she had found a way of being Abbess that *was* simple and hidden—that did not make her sisters feel that it was more important to be Abbess than to be a sister. She was one of them, she had found a way of being a mother to her sisters while remaining sister to them, one of them. There was no hassle about the position, no need to resign, no one felt she needed a chance to do the job. Because she had accepted it against her own inclination, she was led to plumb more deeply her following of Francis in the footsteps of Christ and so win through to peace and contentment in God's will.

This element of struggle in Clare's life and prayer is important if we are to see the whole picture; it provides a balance to what might seem an overemphasis on blessing, praising, glorifying God, thanking him for all his goodness—or if not an overemphasis, a failure to give full weight to this real aspect of life. Perhaps too it was precisely for this experience, for all that it taught her of God and the ways of God, for all that it taught her about herself, that she praised, blessed, and glorified him most of all—that he was a God who could lead her beyond all that she had envisaged when she set out, beyond all that she had thought she could respond to, all that she could achieve on her own. As she says in the Testament, the greater and more perfect this grace of our vocation is, so much the more should we give thanks for it—and we can be sure she did.

Her example in this is important for us; this is a path along which we can all follow her, for at some time in life, maybe often, we will be faced with failure, with the one situation, the one difficulty we dread above all others, the one demand we feel we simply cannot cope with. What are we going to do with it? Clare's struggle as she took on the task of being

mother and Abbess to her sisters can guide us on our way. And her last words, spoken softly to herself as she lay dying, are words we can take with us in and through our lives as we too struggle. They comforted her at the end of her journey; they can comfort us during ours: "Go forth; go tranquilly and in peace, for thou wilt be well escorted. For he who created thee has provided for thy sanctification—and after he had created thee, he infused into thee his Holy Spirit. He has ever watched over thee as a mother does her little child." Clare spoke to her own soul, and we can do the same: "Blessed be thou, my Lord, who hast created me." Ω

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for Mary Thomas

my god
cord binds this worm
and my all
dawn breaks
dwelling light
shadows
thistle
and bread feeds
sparrow song
sunflowers
keep
the light
gray nun
and candle smoke
presence

Bernard Kennedy, O.F.M.

The What and Why of J. D. Scotus

The love of God
is the what
and the why.
All else is still
the love of God—
filtered in a sieve.
Murder, for example,
is the murder of God,
in the long run.
O soldier,
if you must kill,
don't kill God.
Love is central,
and Christ is our Lover.
But Christ is
a little to the side—
from the eastern Mediterranean
region, in the reign
of Caesar Augustus.
Nothing is really
central, you know,
but the love of God.
Christ works this out,
in time and history.
He is a Lover—not
abstract love.
Christ "on the side"
provides the strangeness
of Calvary.
Hanging between two thieves,
hides the fact that

He
should have been alone,
on a cross of glory.
What were they doing there—
those other two?
They were not framing Christ,
but fulfilling
the love of God,
in the pain and pathos
and tenderness that is
Calvary.
O God, your mystical
sense of humour puts
Christ in the center of
a mix-up.
He should have died
alone,
but this little joke
keeps Him from becoming
self-centered.
A man can never be
centered in a picture-frame.
That was the trouble
with Caesar,
Napoleon, and Hitler.
Christ is paramount
and central,
but life is not like
a picture-perfect album.
God and men are
a little mysterious.

Patrick G. Leary, O.F.M.

Following the Footsteps of Christ

SISTER CHARLENE TOUPS, O.S.C.

ONE COULD SAY that this time of sharing is a consideration of the "spirituality of a Christian leader"—specifically, a Franciscan leader. We do not look back to Francis and Clare merely to give glory to God for their exemplary example of Christian leadership. No. They always point us to Christ. In examining our roots, each of us faces in Francis and Clare the call, the challenge, to *know Christ* as they did, to walk in his footsteps, to follow his model of leadership.

"The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters which the Blessed Francis founded, is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (Rule, I, 1). To observe the Gospel—with these words our Sister Clare begins and ends her Rule. They form the framework not merely of her written words, but of her whole life. Jesus is the source of her life; he is the goal of her life; he is the Way whereon she walks through life into Life. And like Francis, who shows and teaches her this Way, Clare, too, comes to *know Christ*.

Jesus as Servant

CLARE ALWAYS POINTS us to the Gospel. Rooted in those timeless words is an ancient yet ever new image of the Christian leader: the Person of Jesus. Looking at Jesus, the apostles and other early disciples, one sees emerge a strong image of the New Testament leader as one who serves. This is true whether one is called to serve in a leadership position of much power and authority or whether one exercises the participative leadership of responsible obedience with the Christian community.

Sister Charlene Toups, a member of the Poor Clare community of New Orleans, LA, originally presented this paper at the Federation Assembly in St. Louis, October, 1980. She is currently serving as vocation director for her monastery.

"I am in your midst as one who serves," says Jesus. Others may "lord it over" those subject to their authority, but with you "it cannot be that way: the greater among you must be as the junior, the leader as the servant" (Lk. 22:24-27). Clare echoes this teaching in her Rule (X, 3): "for thus it ought to be, that the Abbess be the servant of all the sisters."

"Do you understand what I have done?" Jesus asks after he has girded himself as a servant and washed the disciples' feet. "As I have done, so you must do. I have given you example" (Jn. 13:12-15). By her life Clare shows that she understood her Lord's action well, even to the point of literally washing the feet of the sisters who served outside the monastery (CL 12).

Jesus is our Servant/Leader, and it is
precisely as Suffering Servant that he
leads us to life.

Before going further, I invite you to look carefully at Jesus' teachings on servanthood. In John's gospel account, the washing of the feet takes place at the Last Supper just prior to Jesus' Passion (Jn. 13:1-16). Luke's account of the dispute over "who is the greatest?" likewise takes place in the Last Supper setting (Lk. 22:24-27). In Matthew and Mark Jesus' teaching about leadership with service is closely linked with prophecies of the Passion (Mt. 20:24-28; Mk. 10:41-45) and a question for those who would seek a place of honor in the kingdom: "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" (Mt. 20:22). Each incident is in some way connected with the Passion of Christ, and this is no accident. Do we not recall each year the prophecies of Jesus as the Suffering Servant? Jesus is our Servant/Leader, and it is precisely as Suffering Servant that he leads us to life.

Jesus is not only a Suffering Servant, but also an Obedient Servant. Time and again the gospel accounts present him as coming to do the will of the Father. In obedience Jesus listens intently to the call of the Father and faithfully responds to it. In obedience also he listens intently to the cry of the brothers and sisters who make up his Body on earth and responds in love to their plea for mercy, healing, forgiveness. Clare recognizes this call of a servant/leader to obedience. With zeal she attends obediently to the call of the Father in the depths of her being. She is docile to the Spirit at work within the community. She obediently responds in service to the needs of her sisters. Attentive to the cries of the

whole of Christ's Body, she responds in prayer for the sick (CL 32-35), for those afflicted by demons (CL 27), and for the plight of Assisi itself in time of war (CL 21-23). Always she remains an obedient "co-worker of God himself," supporting the "frail and failing members of his glorious Body" (Ltr. III, 3).

Servant Women of the New Testament

AS ECCLESIAL WOMEN called to be leaders, we look as Clare did to Jesus, the supreme model of leadership through service. In our desire to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus, we may also look at the women of the New Testament to perceive some of the forms our servanthood takes. Continually we get glimpses of these first female disciples, and these brief glances reveal them as ministers, as servants of the Lord.

Let us look first to Mary, the servant, *the* handmaid of the Lord par excellence. We see her in the Gospels listening attentively to the Word and conceiving it in her heart. She brings Jesus to birth and nurtures him. Just as "the Virgin of virgins carried him in her body," writes Clare, so can the sisters "carry him in a spiritual way" (Ltr. III, 3). Clare recognizes that her contemplative mission is to carry within herself the "seeds of growth of the Christian people" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 9). This seed which is the word of God "grows out of good soil watered by the divine dew; it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that eventually it bears much fruit" for the Kingdom (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 40). Throughout her writings Clare exalts Mary as a mirror and model of gospel servanthood. It is only by listening to and conceiving the Word in one's heart and by bringing Jesus to birth in one's life that a Christian leader is able to bring Jesus to birth in one's sisters and to nurture the Christ-life within community.

Next, let us consider the small band of women who follow Jesus around the countryside attending to his needs. Scripture tells us little about these women save that they ministered to Jesus and his disciples, caring for them out of their own resources (Lk. 8:3). Although the Gospels are not specific, I think it is a safe guess that this ministry meant tending to some of the behind-the-scenes daily elements of life: food, laundry, etc. Clare knows that part of her call as servant leader entails dealing with the tedious yet essential nitty-gritty affairs of the monastery. I am sure she must have occasionally had some of the administrative or business headaches a leader in community faces today. Clare brings to the humdrum affairs of life (to the duties that might be regarded as "uninspiring" or "boring" in quality) an attitude of service, an attitude of ministry to the Body of Christ in and through these duties. Being called to leadership renders Clare "the more ready to serve." She never shrinks

from a menial job, wishing to serve rather than be served. She chooses to perform the lowliest tasks herself rather than bid others to do it (CL 12). Clare and the women who minister to Jesus are vibrant models of true *diakonia*.

Turning now to that climactic moment when Jesus hangs dying upon the cross, we again see a group of women. They are standing beneath the cross, not doing anything, just simply *being there*. Truly, those also serve who stand and wait. Leaders in community will often find themselves standing there beneath the cross: when *being there*, sharing the pain or the need of a sister, when agonizing through painful decisions that must be made for the good of the community or an individual sister, when sharing in the powerlessness of the women beneath the cross—in all such situations, what these leaders will find themselves doing is undergoing the pain of being unable to *do* anything. But in such moments they are not *called on to do* anything, except *be there*, waiting in trust and in hope for the revelation of God's time and God's plan. Clare stands there at the foot of the cross with her sisters, being there when they need her most, for

when temptation troubled a sister, or, as sometimes happens, sadness took hold of anyone, she would call her secretly and console her amid tears. Sometimes she would throw herself at the feet of the sorrowing, that by motherly consolation she might allay their grief [CL 38].

It must have been difficult, too, for Clare to stand by powerless through the years of strife and turmoil that divided her brother friars after Francis' death. Yet she stands there, a beacon of strength and fidelity to the early friars who come to her for spiritual comfort and encouragement.

Even beyond death we see women ministering to the Lord as they bring spices to his tomb. There is in this action a personal and intimate aspect of servanthood. This is the act of one who is more than a friend. It is an act of love—an act of caring that goes even beyond the point when the loved one can respond (or so they thought), a reaching out above and beyond the call of duty. This kind of reaching out, perhaps even in just little things, adds to the quality of life in community. It says, "I am your sister. I care." This personal extra touch is characteristic of Clare. Her biographer states that she "did not love the souls alone of her daughters; she was also most thoughtful for their bodily welfare. Thus frequently in the cold of the night she herself would cover the sleeping sisters" (CL 38).

Clare as Servant Leader

CLARE ALWAYS REGARDS herself as servant and handmaid of Christ and of the Poor Sisters of San Damiano. She remains always a faithful servant

of her Lord Jesus. As a truly faithful servant of her sisters, Clare as leader calls the community to thanksgiving for the vocation they have received (Clare, Test, 1), and she calls them to fidelity in responding to this gift of vocation:

YOU
ALONE
SUFFICE
FOR
US

St. Francis of Assisi

What thou holdest now, hold fast; what thou now dost, do henceforth and never abandon, but hasten with swift pace and light step and feet un stumbling so that even thy steps stir up no dust, securely, joyously, promptly, and prudently on the path of happiness [Ltr. III, 3].

With sisterly encouragement Clare always builds up her sisters in the Lord. To Agnes of Prague she writes: "I have heard the most worthy report of your holy conversation and life . . . and have therefore rejoiced exceedingly in the Lord and am glad of heart" (Ltr. I, 2). When necessary, she also gently admonishes:

I beg thee to refrain from any indiscreet and impossible austerity in the fasting which I know thou hast undertaken . . . render thy reasonable service to Him, and let thy sacrifice be ever seasoned with wisdom. . . . Our flesh is not of brass, nor is our strength that of stone [Ltr. III, 4].

By her example throughout her life and constantly in her written words, Clare is most firm as she calls the sisters to "embrace as a poor virgin the poor Christ" (Ltr. II, 3). Just as the section on poverty is at the heart of her Rule, so too, it forms the centerpiece of the legacy of her Testament. Her letters, too, are permeated with spiritual advice and sisterly encouragement to live faithfully the gospel life of poverty and humility. In fact, many of her words addressed to the abbesses who were to follow her are specifically concerned with fidelity to Lady Poverty: "The other abbesses who shall follow me in my office are bound always to observe holy poverty unto the end and to cause it to be observed by their sisters" (Test 12).

Clare's vision of a Christian leader is an echo of Christ's teaching. A leader in community is to profess gospel poverty (Rule IV, 3) and observe the common life in all things (Rule IV, 10). She is to rule by her virtue and example (Rule IV, 7), to show no favoritism (Rule IV, 8), and to be the consoler and refuge of all (Rule IV, 9). As servant of all the sisters, a leader is to provide for the needs of all, especially the sick (Rule VIII, 5-7), and she must charitably correct them when necessary (Rule X, 1). Through consultations and communal decisions, a leader shares her

burden and calls forth a responsible obedience on the part of community members (Rule IV, 13-14). In her Testament, Clare succinctly advises those called to leadership on their role:

I beseech that sister who shall be entrusted with the care of the sisters to govern others more by her virtues and holy life than by her office, so that, encouraged by her example, they may obey her not only out of duty but rather out of love. Let her be prudent and watchful toward her sisters as a good Mother toward her daughters; and from the alms which the Lord shall give let her take care to provide for them according to the needs of each one. Let her also be so kind and approachable that they may reveal their necessities without fear and have recourse to her at any hour with all confidence as may seem good to them for themselves or for their sisters [Test 19].

Clare's vision of the Christian leader closely parallels that of Francis, for they are both deeply rooted in the Gospel image of Christ as servant/leader. Though she did not seek it, Clare discovered herself being called to servanthood in the ministry of leadership. She received this call as a gift, a gift no less precious than the call of her vocation, and she used this gift wisely for the good of the Church as a good steward. Many who read these pages have also received a share in this gift, a commission from the Lord through community for the service of God's people . . . a very precious part of his people, your sisters. Saint Paul reminds us always to "stir into flame the gift of God bestowed on you," for "the Spirit God has given . . . makes us strong, loving, and wise" (2 Tim. 1:6-7).

If the Lord calls us to a ministry, he forms and shapes us for that ministry, as Clare discovered. He calls us to listen and respond to his word—as Jesus did, as Mary did, as Clare did. With a total *fiat* "love him in complete surrender who has given himself up entirely for thy love" (Ltr. III, 3). In our "yes," he will shape us like clay in the hand of a potter, molding and fashioning us into the image of Jesus his Son—who came among us as Servant/Leader. Ω

An Ancient Little Church

An ancient little Church
(Chapel rather)

Along a hillside road
Out of Assisi;

A young man working,
Praying there
On its façade
Calls out to people passing,
Simple people
Like himself,

"Come help me build
—rebuild God's Church;
For in it will some ladies

Come to live
Alive with love;
By whose living

All who come to know of it
Will bless God
And love Him

For the example of such lovely living
In their midst."

And the simple people did help,
And they sang
At their work

Because the young man sang
And his song was catching,
Alive with love of God
And fellow man,

And joy spilled all over
All around him.

And the Church was rebuilt
And the adjoining house
Made habitable—

Poor, very poor,
But habitable.

And one day a lady did come.

Her name was Clare
And she was alight
With love of God
And fellowman.

They say she was beautiful;

I believe she was;

Her beautiful soul shone through

Her beautiful body:

There was nothing in her
In the way
To stop it.

She lived there forty years

With a few Sisters
And God.

She didn't go anywhere else;

She didn't do
Anything much
That you or I don't do.

It was how she did what she did
and why. . . .

A woman sweeping up

As women do,
And putting flowers
In the Church,

In the dining room;

Making—mending clothes,

Making bread

And altar bread;

Tending the sick and the garden,

And listening

When others needed one to hear them

Sob or sing

Or let off steam.

In all this finding God,

Meeting Him,

Reflecting Him,

Alight with love of Him

And her fellowman.

It was her unerring, inner sense

That God is all

In all,

And all that matters,

That let go everything else

But love

But God.

But since living day to day

Went on—

That was God.

And since to live one must work—

That was God,

And God is love,

And love is service

And song and prayer.

And she sang at her living

Because the young man

Taught her to,

And his song was catching,

Alive with love of God

And fellowman,

And all he ever said to her

Seemed right for her,

And joy spilled all over,

All around them;

And all the world came to know

More of God,

More of love,

More of joy,

Because she dared to live

Alight with God

And nothing else.

Sister Clare Ellen, O.S.C.

Book Reviews

Clare: Her Light and Her Song. By Sister Mary Seraphim, P.C.P.A. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1984. Pp. 401. Cloth, \$18.00.

Reviewed by Sister Frances Ann Thom, O.S.C., A Consulting Editor of this Review and co-author of Two Prayers for Two Stones, an anthology of poetry published by the Franciscan Herald Press in 1976.

There is something strangely enticing about reading a new life of Saint Clare interwoven with the influence of Saint Francis. It reminds me of reading the Scriptures; each reading brings a freshness and a new life to the person who reads it. This is certainly true of this new life of Saint Clare! Sister Seraphim has artistically woven these two lives together, forming a masterpiece of language, poetic style, deliberate simplicity, and a vast amount of research, to create an historical setting for sanctity among heresy and orthodoxy, kings and peasants, popes and magistrates, crusades and civil strife. Through this interweaving of elements Francis and Clare emerge clothed in robes of prayer, holiness, simplicity, and loyalty to the Pope and the Roman Church.

Unlike the usual "saint story," the author has employed the technique of allowing other persons to tell the tale through their reflections or reminiscences of Clare as she lives and breathes, forming deep relationships in their lives and the lives of others. Particularly touching is the reflection of Sister Ortolana, Clare's own mother

turned Poor Lady under her daughter's guidance. One can truly feel with this woman as she meditates on past events in which she and Clare have shared. Here is her Clare, her once little girl, now a grown woman establishing an order which would revolutionize the past concepts of monastic living.

Another artful technique is that of geographic distance. The author places Francis and Clare at a distance physically while allowing each of them to express the same sentiments at the same moments to emphasize the unity of soul which they experienced. Their chronological age difference does not interfere with the life of the spirit as they wend their ways to the Lord.

The counter movement which Francis has established by living the literalness of the Gospel in poverty of place, goods, and life-style is manifested strongly in Clare's adherence to the privilege of poverty whereby the Poor Ladies may refuse to accept gifts bestowed upon them by their generous benefactors. Their lives of prayer and solitude will not be confused by the dictum that work is prayer, but they will clearly understand their role in the Church as working to sustain themselves while praying to sustain the entire world! That this concept was effective is obvious:

The sick and suffering come daily now to the door of the monastery, for they trust in the compassion with which they will be received. As far as their own poverty permits, the sisters share what they have. While Clare tends to their bodily ills, the poor and distressed pour out the sorrows of their hearts into her

sympathetic ear. She can do little more than promise them the prayers of the Sisters, but this is all they are seeking. Already people are noticing that God seems to be especially gracious in response to the prayers of the Poor Ladies [p. 115].

Thus both streams of the Gospel life, action and contemplation, flow together with varying degrees of emphasis.

Many readers who have the idea that women were considered ornamental and second class in the 13th Century will be surprised to read: "In the University of Bologna, there were even some women professors on the faculty. One of them, Marie de Novella, became professor of mathematics at the age of twenty-five" (p. 106). I do not feel I have done or can do justice to the elegance of style, the freshness of approach, or the depth of research which the author has lavished on this wonderful contribution to the Poor Clare heritage. Sister Seraphim, thank you for your insights and scholarship about our holy Foundress.

Gospel Radicalism: The Hard Sayings of Jesus. By Thaddée Matura, O.F.M. Translated by Maggi Despot and Paul Lachance, O.F.M. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984. Pp. x-198. Paper, \$8.95.

Reviewed by Father Raphael D. Bonanno, O.F.M., who directs the House of Prayer in Emmaus-Qubeibeh, near Jerusalem, and edits the Holy Land magazine.

This book makes for challenging reading. One reads enough about Christ's coming, his life and Resurrection, and his Church; but this book is

one of the few that takes up the problem of Jesus' personal demands on his believers.

Matura, after a brief history of the word, defines *radicalism* early on in his book as "the ethical teachings of Jesus that bear radical traits—that is, unusual, paradoxical, decisive or absolute characteristics." In chapter two he presents the radical texts taken mostly from the Synoptic Gospels. They treat mainly of discipleship, renunciation, material possessions, family ties, and love of neighbor. In chapters three, four, and five there is textual analysis of these passages from Matthew/Luke, the double tradition, and Mark. Chapter six delves into the radicalism of the Beatitudes in an interesting comparison of the two versions in Matthew and Luke. Chapter seven presents seven independent *logia* of Jesus: e.g., "The kingdom of God has suffered violence and the violent take it by force" (Mt. 11:12).

Chapter eight is very interesting because Matura compares the radicalism of the Synoptics with other NT writings. Here he shows the continuity and discontinuity between the Master and his disciples, what the early Christians put into practice and what they left aside. For example, Jesus insisted radically on monogamy in marriage (no divorce) over the past customs and laws of Moses and the Jewish people. The ninth chapter sums up the content of the Synoptic radicalism in four poles of radical thought: viz., following Jesus, love, unpretentiousness, and sharing. Matura asks whether this radicalism is literal or merely figurative. While Jesus uses strong images like cutting off one's hand if it sins, still his intention is stronger than the image. He demands a correct behavior

of the whole person—soul and body, mind and hand. He does not tolerate those who preach but do not live what they preach.

Chapter ten dwells interestingly enough on the motives for Gospel radicalism:

The vocation narratives do not explicitly say why the disciples immediately answered Jesus' call, but the implied reason is that they wanted to be with Jesus and to follow in his footsteps. The texts on renunciation directly affirm that it is because of Jesus [Mk. 8:35; 10:29], on account of his name [Mt. 19:29], the gospel [only Mk. 8:35], the kingdom [Mt. 19:12], and in order to be a disciple and to be worthy of him that one accepts his demands and acts on them [p. 172].

Whatever the motivations of the disciples, they are always connected to the person of Jesus.

Chapter eleven treats of the recipients of the message of radicalism. This chapter is as important as the previous one on motives because of the practical consequences involved. If, e.g., the recipients are only the Twelve, then the rest of the Church goes free. If on the other hand Christ's demands are truly universal, then all his believers, clergy and laity alike, are bound to observe them.

In the twelfth and last chapter Matura discusses the relevance of radicalism. In one section he pointedly asks whether Christ's demands are utopia or reality, for the many or for the few. Matura believes that "no texts authorize us to envisage a special elite for whom certain demands would be reserved" (p. 182).

The entire scope of Jesus' radical demands, the author feels, "can be summed up in a few essential points: the primacy of Jesus, unconditional love of

neighbor, freedom vis-à-vis possessions, and sharing with the poor. The fact remains that these are exorbitant demands before which one feels small and poor, if not powerless" (p. 185).

This was my own reaction too, upon closing the book. If Christ demands these things of me, how can I humanly fulfill them? I doubt that humanly it is possible. God never demands of us what we cannot do, however; if he challenges us to stretch and to grow, he also gives us the grace and means to do exactly that. People who water down Christ's demands of them in their personal lives seem to distrust fundamentally what Christ has promised each of us: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Or Saint Paul's cry: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

This Gospel radicalism is a healthy tension without which our Christian life would stagnate. I can understand people's underlying fear of fanaticism when we treat of Gospel radicalism. One of the safeguards, though, is the Church. The Church interprets the Gospel to us today. It avoids, or should avoid, the luxury of complacency and the disequilibrium of religious exaggeration. But the reasonable middle road is still a far cry from the world's norms and spirit. The Church calls us to be different, by the mere fact that we follow Jesus. Church history is full of examples of heretics who went off the deep end and thought they could interpret the Gospel better than the Church. They are no longer, but the Church lives on.

I suppose our problem today is more on the side of complacency than of exaggeration. This book takes direct aim at the softness of us Christians. I recommend it.

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