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# The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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# The CORD

## A Monthly Franciscan Spiritual Review

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### Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

#### I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions	Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo	LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun	LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony	OffPass: Office of the Passion
EpCler: Letter to Clerics <sup>1</sup>	OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
EpCust: Letter to Superiors <sup>1</sup>	RegB: Rule of 1223
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful <sup>1</sup>	RegNB: Rule of 1221
EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo	RegEr: Rule for Hermits
EpMin: Letter to a Minister	SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order	SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
EpRe: Letter to the Rulers of People	Test: Testament of St. Francis
Exh: D. Exhortation to the Praise of God	UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
Exp: Exposition on the Our Father	VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
For.nVi: Flowers of Life for St. Clare	<sup>1</sup> I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

#### II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis	LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis
2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis	LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis
3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles	LP: Legend of Perugia
CL: Legend of Saint Clare	L3S: Legend of the Three Companions
CP: Process of Saint Clare	SC: Sacrum commercium
Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis	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



## Opting for the Poor

THERE IS NO DOUBT that Saint Francis wanted his followers to be poor and to be with the poor (RegNB IX.2). This is the reason why the Church's call for religious to make a preferential option for the poor speaks strongly to Franciscans. Sometimes, though, it seems that some twist the meaning of "preferential option for the poor" to justify where and how they live and for whom they minister. Anyone who has lived among the materially poor, especially in the Third World, almost feels compelled to speak out against this, particularly in gatherings where religious renewal is being assessed and discussed.

This option explicitly does refer to the materially poor. It does not mean the spiritually poor, or morally poor, or the psychologically poor. To minister among those who suffer in these ways needs no justification. Nevertheless, because we are Franciscan and because of the Church's call we are called to opt, to eliminate the material, moral, and social deprivations of the actual poor. As Franciscans it is our vocation also to be actually poor, as Pope John Paul recently reminded us. Evangelical poverty, which is voluntarily assumed, means we reject the worldly quest for status and wealth, and the misuse of power (Mt. 4:1-10), and we walk in this world as pilgrims and strangers (Mt. 10:27-29), having only what we need (RegNB VIII.11, IX.1; 1 Tim. 6:8). Our attitude is not to appropriate anything as our own, but to attribute all to God. This Gospel poverty should never be equated with that material poverty which is an evil and roared against by the prophets. Such poverty results from humanity's inhumanity to others, from greed, from injustice, from the lack of sharing, and from the deprivation of development and creativity. Let us never justify such poverty. But let us always talk of evangelical poverty when we mean the religious value that the Lord counsels. And let us clearly manifest that by a basic simplicity in total life-style as a witness to Gospel poverty. Finally, let us cease editorializing about the people to whom we legitimately minister, calling them the "spiritually

poor." At best that is only an apparent self justification deceptively telling us that we are fulfilling the call to opt preferentially for the poor!

To do so is to miss two points in the Church's social teaching. The first is that the Church wants us to change the situation where material poverty deprives people of basic, human rights and needs: food, shelter, clothing, education, opportunity, self determination, and a fair share in this world's resources. All of us, no matter where or how we live or with whom we serve, can do something to promote human development, particularly in the Third World and among the actual poor at home.

The second point is that the preferential option for the poor is not exclusive, but inclusive. Let's be honest, then. All of us are not called, or able, to be in the Third World or in material poverty pockets. In fact, those not called to overseas ministry or to specific service with the materially poor at home should not go. They probably would do harm and hurt the actual poor. I am reminded of a crying Hanson's disease person who told me she wept because "that [lady] could not look at me." The preferential option for the poor means we all can and should do something about the development of peoples, especially the deprived materially poor. All of us can sensitize others to the plight of the poor and teach people to be involved in development programs, according to each one's ability and capacity. We can all point out the unjust causes that sustain material poverty. We Franciscans, especially by our life-style, should witness to Gospel projected attitudes towards material things, our world, and even human relationships, no matter where we serve—even if that is among this world's wealthiest.

No one needs to justify valid ministries. Time spent on that is wasted time. Let us get on with God's work of upbuilding his people with human and graced dignity according to our calling. Oftentimes our calling will change. That surprises some. It should not. We ought to be ready for a change in our life, perhaps one based on the Church's option for the poor. Remember: Francis embraced a leper, and lived with the unwanted and the outcast. He overcame his own self-perception and found a giftedness from God that led him to do something that previously he felt, he could not. Ω

*Thaddeus Horgan, S.A.*

## Instruments of Peace

MATTHEW T. CONLIN, O.F.M.

AS YOU READ THESE WORDS, YOU HAVE probably within the past few days celebrated the "passing" of Saint Francis. Traditionally, this has meant the passing of Francis' soul from here to heaven. This has been the "Transitus."

I suggest that this year, after celebrating that Transitus, we celebrate something different. Let us celebrate the passing of the spirit of Saint Francis into our spirits as we allow some of his values so to penetrate our very beings that we will be forever touched by him—forever.

Francis died in 1226; we live somewhat later in 1985. Between those two dates there have been very few spots of time so ripe, so ready, so right as our times for the passing on and for the receiving of Saint Francis' spirit. It absolutely boggles the mind to think how ready we are for his spirit and his values, whether we know it or not.

In what follows, I would like to reflect with you about some of Saint Francis' values, values which we will prize only if we, like Saint Francis, have already encountered God so that God says to us, as Saint Augustine put it, "You would not seek me if you had not already found me." I suggest that if we accept these values and live them, we shall find three roles to play in life: (1) the role of being a person of compassion, compassion for a large percentage of the people on this planet, i.e., compassion for the poor and the hungry; (2) the role of being a mediator, a bringer of peace to any warring factions in our world; and (3) the role of being a model of serenity and cheerful acceptance of God's plan for us. These are the three: compassion, peace, and serenity.

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*Father Matthew T. Conlin, O.F.M., former President of Siena College, Loudonville, NY, is Vicar Provincial of Holy Name Province.*

Historians like to recall the day of Saint Francis' conversion when he kissed the leper and came to love the poor. Francis was not a social worker. He built no hospitals, opened no soup kitchens. Although he lived and moved among the lepers, he never started a leper colony. He came to the poor as a man of love, to liberate, to set free their deepest humanity which was then, as now, being brutalized. Francis sought and found solidarity with the poor; he consoled them, he embraced them, and he kissed them. He shared their pains, he reached out to those who were starved for affection and restored their human dignity. "Courtesy," he used to say, "courtesy is the sister of charity; it is one of God's qualities" (L. Boff, *A Model for Human Liberation*). But that social sin finds its real source in the human heart.

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We must let our Franciscan values move us to fulfill these two roles of bringing peace and compassion to others. . . .

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Francis met head on the challenges of his time, and they haven't changed much. Of all the challenges we face today, one of the greatest is the challenge from the poor and the dehumanizing poverty to which millions upon millions of our human race are subjected. There are those who have and those who have not. On the one hand, over a billion struggle for survival in misery, hunger, and illiteracy; the others enjoy the benefits of prosperity, taking advantage of all the goods and services available. The Latin American bishops meeting at Puebla said: "It is not fate; it is not the will of God that there be rich and poor. The cause lies in definite economic, social, and political situations and structures which make it possible for the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer" (n. 30). And they firmly rebuked any people who tend to reduce the sphere of their Catholic faith to their personal life and to their family relationships, saying that it is "only here in my personal life" or "here in my family relationships" that compassion, sin, love, and forgiveness are important." Compassion, love, sin, and forgiveness are just as important in relationships that are professional, economic, social, and political. It has been said that "It is often there in the social and political world that the most important human decisions are made; it is there in the social and political world that God is openly served or God is publicly offended" (Boff, *St. Francis: A Model for Human Liberation*).

This is the reality of the world on which Francis urges us to leave our mark. He found in the broken bodies and the broken spirits of the poor the very broken, crucified body of Christ. He found him exactly where Jesus said he would find him, waiting among people in need. Let our option for the poor bring us to be either like them, with them, or for them. Any one will do. And our motive? Compassion, mere compassion—almost the essence of our Franciscan tradition.



The values of Saint Francis urge us to play another role in life, that of being a mediator, a bringer of peace. Francis knew that within the worst of us there are hidden healing powers which may be brought to life with gentle care, compassion, and understanding. Francis had his own Theology of Liberation; it was, in Father Boff's words, "liberation through kindness," a kindness born of a deep respect for every individual. Francis was always a man of peace. Countless times he went out of his way to seek the role of mediator to bring peace. A few examples will suffice.

The Bishop and the mayor of Assisi were having a first class medieval feud. The Bishop excommunicated the mayor, and the mayor forbade anyone in Assisi to buy anything from or to sell anything to the Bishop. In its own way it was a beautiful Italian vendetta! It was also a scandal. And Francis said this: "It is a great shame for us that the Bishop and the mayor hate each other in this way, without anyone bothering to pacify them, *without anyone bothering to pacify them.*" This eager man of peace soon pacified them in a most interesting way. How often do we try deliberately to bring peace to warring factions in our own little worlds?

One day when Francis was at Siena, a city to the west of Assisi, a group of citizens were warring and killing each other. On entering Siena Francis went immediately to the trouble spot and quickly restored peace. It happened again in Bologna, to the north of Assisi, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1222.

Horrified by the violence of the Crusades, Francis sought out the Sultan Melek-al-Kamil. He started at Egypt, and then, without any defense, he faced the whole Muslim army. The story has become part of a legend, but to this day Franciscans are in charge of all the Christian

shrines in the Holy Land and we come and go as we please. We are seen as men of peace, so great was the impact which Francis made as a mediator, a man of peace, over 700 years ago.

If we are to live out this role of mediator to bring peace, then we are never to condemn; we are to seek to understand, to create peace and a new relationship where there were only antagonism, hatred, and fear. We can do that and still be as hard as nails—as Francis, the mediator, often was.

The values of Saint Francis urge us to play yet another role in life: being a person of serenity and cheerful acceptance. This is the value which we hear in this disturbing conversation between Saint Francis and Brother Leo:

One day near the Church of St. Mary of the Angels Francis called to Brother Leo and said to him: "Brother Leo, write this down." Leo answered: "I am ready." Francis said: "Write down what perfect joy is."

"A messenger from Paris arrives and says that all of the teachers at the university [where many friars were teaching] want to enter the Order. Write: that is not perfect joy."

"And though all of the prelates beyond the Alps, archbishops and bishops, and even the very kings of England and France were to enter the Order, write: that is not perfect joy. And if you were to get news that our brothers converted all the infidels to the faith, or that I received so much grace from God that I could cure the sick and do many miracles: I assure you that that is not perfect joy."

"Well, then," asked Brother Leo, "what then is perfect joy?"

"Imagine," said Francis, imagine that I return to Perugia on the darkest of nights, a night so cold that everything is covered with snow, and icicles form in the folds of my habit, hitting my legs and making them bleed. Shrouded in snow and shivering from the cold, I arrive at the door of the friary and after I call out for a long time, the porter gets up and asks: 'Who is it?' and I respond: 'It is I, Brother Francis.' The brother porter says: 'Be on your way, Now is not the time to arrive at a friary. I won't open the door for you.' I insist, and he answers: 'Be on your way now. You are stupid and an idiot. We are already many here and we do not need you.' I insist once more: 'For the love of God, let me in, just for tonight.' And he answers: 'Not even to talk. Go to the leper colony nearby.'

"Well, Brother Leo, if, after all this, I do not lose patience and I remain calm, believe me, that is perfect joy, true virtue, and the salvation of my soul."

I have no comment on this conversation because this serenity, the feeling of perfect joy, is a prize. It is the natural result of fulfilling our role of being a person of compassion in that dark, brutal, dehumanizing world where one quarter of the human race live—the world of the poor—and

of being a mediator. We must let our Franciscan values move us to fulfill these two roles of bringing peace and compassion to others; and then we shall enjoy a most fulfilling reward and become models of serenity and cheerful acceptance, so that when the very roof of our little world seems ready to collapse, we can say with patience: "Brother Leo, write it down; *this is perfect joy.*"

No one ever lived who was so perfect a model of Jesus as was Saint Francis of Assisi. Mahatma Ghandi said that. It is so interesting to think about him and so rewarding to model our lives on his. It is now 1985. We have progressed so far. We have prolonged life and developed an impressive pharmacy of drugs to kill pain or to relieve it. But millions of children in our world are so poor that they will never, never see a doctor or a nurse, and twenty-four die every minute without ever growing up. A UN official told me last week that the number had been twenty-eight. Now it is twenty-four, thanks to people who care. But for these poor there is too little compassion.

Hatred and violence stalk our world at large, and in the hearts of many there is little peace. Across our nation, at an incredible rate, families are breaking up. When was there ever a greater need for mediators, for peacemakers in family life? And how can there be serenity and cheerful acceptance of life, when drugs and alcohol have blurred so many minds?

The great novelist Albert Camus proposed this as the most important question we face: "Does life deserve to be lived or not?" We answer, Yes! We encounter God, and then we begin the process of liberation, of liberating ourselves and liberating others. Saint Francis' values become our guides, leading us finally to recognize that if, in the process, we reject any other human being, then we reject God as well. Ω

## Francis

Still singing, dancing;  
Telling stories, giving alms . . .  
For a new Master.

Walt Hund, T.O.R.

*A Commentary on the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis*

## Spirit and Life

SISTER MADGE KARECKI, S.S.J.-T.O.S.F.

### Prologue

THE PROLOGUE OF THE Third Order Regular Rule and Life is taken from the earlier version of the Letter to the Faithful, often called the Volterra Letter after the name of the place in which it was found. The Letter was written probably between 1213 and 1221. The part that makes up the Prologue is the first part of the Letter, in which Francis is instructing his followers in the essentials of the Christian faith and how one may grow closer to the Lord. Francis calls us to break with sin, to repent, and to love the Lord with our "whole heart, whole soul and mind and with our strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves."

This is a challenging call to us, but Francis teaches that if we do these things we will bring forth "fruits worthy of true penance." When he calls us to do this—to penance—he is talking, not only about doing some penitential practices or acts of penance, but about a way of life in which we bear the burdens of the poor people among whom we are living. For Francis doing penance meant breaking with the attitudes he had learned from his father, attitudes which had no place in the heart and mind of the person of faith.

The call to do penance is a call issued to every Christian. What characterizes the *Franciscan* call to penance is the setting and conditions in which we voluntarily live. In the rest of the Rule, then, a way of life is outlined which will facilitate continual conversion.

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*Sister Madge Karecki, S.S.J.-T.O.S.F., a graduate of the Franciscan Institute and a Consulting Editor of this Review, is serving as a Franciscan consultant and teacher for the Daughters of St. Francis of Assisi in South Africa. She also acts as spiritual director and retreat director.*

Further on in the Prologue Francis talks about growing closer to the Lord in terms of relationships. He calls us spouses, brothers, mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. These relationships are then depicted as the source of our happiness: "How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things, and persevere in doing them, because . . . the Spirit of the Lord God will make his home and dwelling place with them."

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The Rule ends as it began, with a call to a way of life that calls us to single-minded devotion to the Lord, union with the Church, and fidelity to the Gospel.

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In the last part of the Prologue Francis quotes extensively from John 17, the Last Discourse. He uses the words of Jesus to express his own concern for his followers and makes Jesus' prayer his prayer for them.

### Chapter One: Our Identity

THIS FIRST CHAPTER immediately focuses our attention on the fact that we are called, not to some organization, work group, or ministry, but rather to join other men and women as they endeavor to live the Gospel. We are called to a certain style of life, a way to live by following in the footprints of Jesus. This is what it means for us to live the Gospel.

Next the vows are mentioned because they help us to focus and clarify our way to live the Gospel. Again the emphasis is on a way of life: "living in obedience, in poverty, and in chastity." Unlike the older monastic communities, we Franciscans live the vows, not in a certain place like a monastery, but in the spirit of the Gospel. We are called to be obedient and poor and celibate for the good of the Kingdom.

The chapter clearly indicates that our call is to follow Jesus Christ, not Saint Francis or any other saint. Jesus is our model and guide as we journey to the Kingdom, but we are called to the Franciscan family to follow Jesus after the example of Saint Francis. How we live the Gospel is conditioned by our share in the Franciscan charism. We are willing to learn from Francis' example because it has been authenticated by the Church and in God's providence we have been led to share in his charism.

As Franciscans we live this Gospel way in the context of the larger Church. We do so to contribute to her up-building as well as to obtain strength to persevere in this way of life which is founded on faith in the person of Jesus. Further, we find strength and guidance in the Church's teaching so that we are gradually led to deeper levels of conversion. The helps for this which we find directly in our spirituality are prayer (which keeps our lives rooted in the Gospel and open to the gifts of the Spirit), poverty (which gives credibility to our proclamation of the Kingdom and our rejection of anything which might be an obstacle to its fulfillment), and humility (which keeps us ever attentive to God's providential care and aware of the truth of who we are in relationship to Him and to all our sisters and brothers.

There is a clear call to us within this chapter to give ourselves to worship: "to acknowledge, adore, and serve him in sincere repentance." This will help us to be sharers in the life of God's Kingdom.

This chapter ends with a call to obedience to those in authority within the Church and our Order or congregation. Article three is true to the Franciscan concept of obedience, which would have us also obey one another because we are sisters and brothers and like Jesus want to be of service to all. There is a special word about cooperation among all the members of the Franciscan family so that there is mutual sharing and working together wherever possible to support, encourage, and challenge one another to fidelity to what we have promised to live as members of the same family.

Through obedience and cooperation we acknowledge that we are a pilgrim people, that we are dependent on one another, and that we are willing to use those gifts for the good of others and to submit our inspirations for testing.

### Chapter Two: Acceptance into This Life

AS IN THE FIRST CHAPTER emphasis is placed on the fact that those persons who come to join us are called by the Lord himself to live a way of life, not a specific apostolate. This serves to point out the dynamic quality of Franciscan life: that there is room for everyone's gifts, as long as they are willing to share a common life-style.

This chapter highlights the fact that the ministers of the fraternity are the ones responsible for admitting the candidates into the life of the community. The ministers have the serious responsibility of testing their beliefs to see if they are in keeping with the Catholic faith and in line with the Church's sacramental life. This is necessary because we are not a community which lives for itself; rather we belong to the larger Church, and if we are to play a part in promoting her life, then those who come to

us must be deeply rooted in the Church and have a clear understanding of her teaching.

This chapter then focuses on the formation process of the individual, how he or she comes to be integrated into the life of the Franciscan family. It centers the process around the first passages of the Bible which Francis opened up to when he was seeking direction for his life: Lk. 18:22, Mt. 19:21, and Mt. 16:24. These passages point out very clearly that poverty is the framework for our life of penance. This poverty is not something forced on us, but is freely chosen, for the Lord says, "If you wish. . . ." The choice is ours.

Integrity is called for through an emphasis on continual conversion. Though we must choose once and make a commitment to follow in the footprints of Jesus, we choose daily to remain faithful to that commitment.

That commitment, by reason of its sign value, calls for some concrete and visible witness. It needs to find expression in where and how we live, what we wear, our dedication to prayer, and our concern for the needs of others. All of this is aimed at transforming us into fit dwelling places for the Trinity and to keep us honest in our commitment to a Franciscan style of life.

### Chapter Three: The Spirit of Prayer

THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS of our Rule dealt with a statement of our identity and the formation of new members into our community. The rest of the Rule describes the way of life we have chosen to live.

In this chapter we find a description of prayer in terms of our response as a follower of Jesus to the gracious love of the Father. It calls us to be persons of prayer wherever we are and at all times.

This again suggests one of the big differences between the Franciscan family and the older monastic communities. We are to be a people who are mobile, moving among the people, wherever our gifts can best be put at the service of our brothers and sisters. Ours is not a way of life marked by stability in terms of a place to live and work. We find our stability and security in Jesus and in our relationships with one another.

Prayer, then, is the foundation of our lives. Cultivating a deep and rich inner life deserves our attention. The Liturgy of the Hours is singled out as the common prayer of the community so that we celebrate this prayer in union with the whole Church. The Rule advocates this prayer as *the* prayer of the community, but also encourages us to have a strong personal prayer life.

It further encourages that those among us who have been called to live the contemplative life may be supported in this call. Besides those who

are called to the contemplative life, all of us are charged with the responsibility to do whatever is necessary to open ourselves to the Lord's gift of contemplation. We are called to take seriously the rich contemplative tradition of the Franciscan family. We need, therefore, to see how we can enhance the contemplative dimension of our lives and the life of the community. We need to nourish ourselves and grow in our capacity for silent waiting in the Lord's presence.

The Word of God and the Eucharist are singled out as the center of our life. Like Francis we find direction in God's Word and strength for living it out in the Eucharist. It is in the celebration of the Eucharist, then, that we give assent to our common faith as a community whose life goal is to live the Gospel after the manner of Saint Francis.

Clear recognition is given to the fact that there is need for reconciliation in each of our lives and that like the early Franciscans we make use of sacramental and non-sacramental confession. In this way we face the truth of who we are as redeemed and yet sinful people. We come to realize that we need one another's support and forgiveness in order for the community to be strong.

As we ask forgiveness of others and give it to others we find the bonds among us strengthened by mutual faith in the healing and redeeming love of Jesus. We are not called to stand in judgment upon one another, but rather to show the mercy of Jesus to each of our sisters and brothers. Mutual trust and respect, rather than fear and envy, characterize our life together.

#### Chapter Four: The Life of Chastity for the Sake of the Kingdom

CHASTITY IS TREATED in light of our relationship with the Lord. We remain unmarried, not for negative reasons or because we have had bad experiences with persons of the opposite sex, but because we have been called by God to give him single-hearted devotion. "Let the brothers and the sisters keep in mind how great a dignity the Lord God has given them. . . ."

As in the case of all the vows, Jesus is the norm for our living out of our vow of chastity. As seen in his own life, remaining chaste for the sake of the Kingdom does not exclude healthy and Christ-centered relationships with both men and women. Jesus clearly regarded Peter, James, John, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus as friends. Saint Francis had special relationships with Clare, Bernard, Giles, Leo, and Lady Jacopa.

The vow of chastity does not exclude relationships, but it does require that we make our relationship with the Lord our primary relationship. The purpose of the vow of chastity is to have a heart free for worship.

The Rule in fact calls upon us to realize that we are to give witness through our union with Christ to his union with the Church.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is singled out in this chapter, and devotion to her is encouraged because of Francis' devotion to her and also because she is Patroness of the whole Franciscan family. We are asked to imitate her veneration for the Word of God and, like her, to give Him birth in our lives. We are called upon to become handmaids of the Lord and servants of the Word.

#### Chapter Five: The Way to Serve and Work

TRUE TO FRANCIS' INTENTION this chapter states clearly that our ordinary way to support ourselves is the work we do. "The grace of serving or working" is viewed as the right use of the talents the Lord has given us. We are encouraged to work "faithfully and conscientiously"—that is, to perform our duties and responsibilities with care and in the best way we can.

Article 15 then deals with two dangers that we need to be aware of when doing any work: idleness and "workaholism." Idleness, whether due to laziness or lack of initiative or creativity, has negative effects on the personality. It is harmful because it prevents our developing our talents given us for the good of others, and our lives lose meaning. We fail to become the person we were meant to be. "Workaholism" means that we just keep busy as an escape or because of our insecurity about ourselves. It often arises because we do not feel accepted for who we are as a person.

Both these dangers need to be checked because they "extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion." Once prayer and devotion are gone from our lives, it is difficult to remain firm in our commitment and we run the risk of becoming rigid and inflexible because we are not open to the Spirit of God in our lives if we are not prayerful persons.

We are told that we may accept in payment "anything necessary for our own temporal needs and those of our sisters or brothers." The important words are "anything necessary." This means that we have to distinguish between what we *need* and what we *want*. We are urged to be "seekers of most holy poverty." This means that we are, as individuals and as a community, looking for ways in which we can simplify our lives and be satisfied with only what we need.

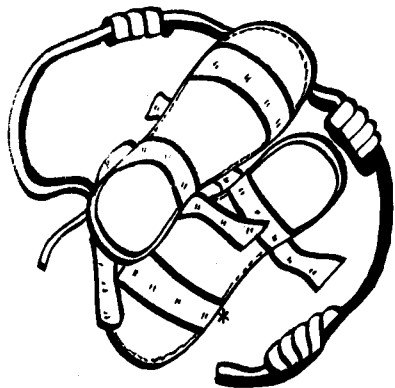
Perhaps one of the strongest statements in the Rule is in Article 16, which reads: "Whatever they may have over and above their needs they are to give to the poor." Saint Francis taught that whatever we have in excess belongs to the poor. This does not mean we are to live in destitution, only that we are to be satisfied with having our basic needs taken



care of and do not want to accumulate more than that.

Minority—that is, being little in our own eyes and in the eyes of others—describes our manner of serving and relating to other people. It is the expression of our true condition before God, and therefore the stance from which we respond to our brothers and sisters. In this way we interiorize the spirit of the Beatitudes, and our lives are marked by the gifts of gentleness, peace, joy, and the happiness we know when we are doing God's will. Then we do more than greet people with the words: "The Lord give you peace." We are living witnesses of the gift of his peace.

### Chapter Six: The Life of Poverty



THE NORM FOR OUR POVERTY and the example of a truly poor person that we need to have before our eyes is Jesus himself. We are not victims of poverty; rather we choose poverty freely because "Jesus became poor for our sake" (2 Cor. 8:9). Francis reasoned that Jesus and Mary both chose poverty, and if it was good enough for them, then it was the way we need to take in order to "follow in the footprints of Jesus."

Once again we are called to a standard of living based on our real needs and not on our wants. Franciscans often reason away this call to be poor in fact by saying: "Our benefactors gave it to us," or, "It was free." Just because we are given something, it does not automatically become in keeping with what we have promised to live as a Franciscan through the vow of poverty. We must learn to refuse things if they can compromise the integrity of our call to live poorly.

To help us in this task Francis calls us to situate ourselves among poor and oppressed peoples. The environment or surroundings in which his community lived were always important for Francis. He knew instinctively that poor people would help to keep his followers honest and persevering in their life of poverty. History proved him correct. Once his followers moved away from the poor they started becoming rich; they began to live a more monastic life in big houses, and they became very legalistic about their practice of poverty. This happened because they moved out of a situation of real poverty and were no longer close to the

people who would keep them honest.

This is not poverty for the sake of poverty, but a poverty which is rooted in the Gospel and leads to the Kingdom. Like "pilgrims and strangers" with nothing to clutter our minds and hearts, we can move about spreading the Good News. We then have no need to worry about our own security because we have confidence that if we depend on the Lord he will care for us.

The Rule is very clear in pointing out that poverty is the way to the Kingdom. "So excellent is this most high poverty that it makes us heirs and rulers of the Kingdom of heaven." If we do not take this way how shall we get to the Kingdom?

### Chapter Seven: Fraternal Love

IN BEING CALLED TO THE Franciscan family we have been called to a community which demands a very high level of trust. It does so because we are asked to share our very selves with one another and to find our security in the bonds we have in community.

This level of trust is also manifested in the words "Let them make known their needs to one another." It is only when we trust another person that we are willing to let people know what we really need to live, to let them see us when we are weak and need the strength of others, to share our hurts and our joys, our dreams and our visions for the future. We are called to have the heart of God toward one another, always ready to show the greatest respect for the person. Within the Franciscan tradition there is a profound sense of the value of the person apart from his/her usefulness. Each individual is seen as precious because of his or her inherent dignity in Christ.

Realistically we know that we hurt each other, and so we are encouraged within this chapter to do whatever is necessary to mend any broken relationships we have. This was always important to Francis because he knew that once negative feelings and hurts take root in the heart they have a way of taking over and blinding the individual to God's goodness and the goodness of others. The heart then becomes closed or filled with bitterness. Only when there is reconciliation can the heart be free for the concerns of the Kingdom of the Lord.

Finally, we are warned against self-righteousness and anger. Francis viewed both as acts of appropriation. He viewed them in this way because only God is righteous and only he can judge the heart of another. When we are angry with another person we take a stance of judgment in regard to him or her, a stance that the Rule says "hinders living lovingly."



## Chapter Eight: The Obedience of Love

THIS CHAPTER BUILDS on the preceding one. It takes for granted that the community is rooted in and built on love and that all decisions and concerns are made in light of the Kingdom of God. It instructs us to have as a priority in all our gatherings and Chapters "the Kingdom of God and its justice." To be taken up with anything less is to compromise our commitment to the Gospel.

We are urged to support one another in taking steps in faith, to live more eagerly what we have promised in the Rule and the Franciscan vision for following in the footprints of Jesus. To follow in someone's footprints means that we continually adjust the stride of our steps, the distribution of weight from foot to foot, and the pace and direction of our steps. This is what we are asked to do in following Jesus.

Minority is again highlighted as the manner in which we relate to others. Ours is not the way of control, exploitation, or manipulation. We do not wish to use other people for our own ends; rather, we put ourselves at the service of others—a service that is measured by Jesus' own service.

We are reminded that elected leadership is a role of service, and we cannot take the word of our ministers lightly. Within the Franciscan tradition the ministers have always played a greater role than simply being the administrator who assigns us work, gives permissions, or regulates the daily timetable. The ministers among us are charged with the task of calling us to continual conversion as individuals and as a community. They are to remind us of what we have promised to live. And though all of us have a responsibility to live with vision, the ministers in particular are creatively to seek ways which call all of us to a deeper understanding of that vision and more radical ways of living it out.

By accepting the role of leadership, the ministers make a commitment to be available for service to the community. Like all other roles within the community, the role of leadership is rooted in the example of service given us by Jesus.

## Chapter Nine: Apostolic Life

IN THE FIRST ARTICLE of this chapter we are given our reason for being on mission among the people: "For [God] has sent them into the world so that they might give witness by word and work to his voice and to make known to all that the Lord alone is God."

First, it is God himself who sends us among the people. Faith is spread, enriched, and nourished by sharing it with others. This is done primarily by witness and then by the use of our talents and skills for the good of

God's people. This builds up the Christian community. Secondly, our primary way to spread the faith is by giving witness that community is possible among people of differing backgrounds, ages, and personalities because we are one in Christ. Thirdly, our reason for going among the people is not to impress others, or build kingdoms for ourselves that we never want to leave or give up control of, but rather that we make Jesus and his message known. This is our way of repairing the Church and building it up in love.

We are to be people who proclaim peace, but we are cautioned to have it deep within ourselves so that there is a relationship between what we say and how we live. This peace is not something we seek after for itself; rather it is a result of living out our commitment to the Gospel.

We are asked to prepare ourselves to do whatever is necessary to promote the Kingdom. This means that we are willing to take risks and to ready ourselves even for martyrdom. This type of action is not something which belongs only to past ages in the Church. We can expect to come into conflict with persons and systems whenever we take a stand in favor of the Gospel and the way of Jesus.

Finally, this chapter closes with a call for integrity in our lives. This simply means that we are to be humble in all circumstances. It does not mean false humility or the fostering of a bad self-image. What it means is that we simply acknowledge the truth of who we are: God's children who are dependent on him for "every good and perfect gift."

Because we have been given everything as gift there is no reason to hoard our gifts or the material things we have, and there is every reason to be filled with thankfulness and the freedom to share.

For Francis God was the Great Almsgiver who gives his children everything they need. He is all rich and therefore gives us alms. But we have these only on loan, and they must be returned to him through the sharing of them with our brothers and sisters. In this way we not only give thanks with our lips, we thank him with our lives.

## Exhortation and Blessing

THE RULE ENDS as it began, with a call to a way of life that calls us to single-minded devotion to the Lord, union with the Church, and fidelity to the Gospel. This enables us to have the Spirit of God ever at work within us and opens us to the blessings he brings.

Francis knew this through his own experience; that is why he could boldly promise us life with the Trinity if we walk faithfully, even if at times haltingly, in the footprints of Jesus. Ω

## Francis and the Caves of Assisi

Brother Francis,  
Little Poor Man of Assisi,  
What did you learn  
in the caves?  
What was it that held you  
so long there,  
Just you alone with your God?  
Did you feel Jesus  
already beside you?  
Or did you first have to  
grope in the dark?  
Did you weep too  
as you lovingly sought him?  
Tell me, what was in your heart?  
Will you come back  
to the Cave with me,  
And teach me that  
closeness to find?  
Help me open my heart  
to receive Him,  
Though the way be not  
always kind.  
I have a longing  
to know Jesus better,  
The barriers and walls  
have to go.  
So please share with me  
your great secret,  
And teach me all that you know.  
Take me back  
to the caves very often,  
the crucified Lord to meet.  
In the silence I know  
I will find Him there,  
As my heart waits  
for Him to speak.

T

I'll let Him gradually  
teach me His secrets  
As His love heals all of my hurts.  
He'll prune me  
and form me as He wants,  
Then He'll send me  
once more to His work.  
They call you Francis,  
the Poor Man of Assisi,  
But you owned riches  
the world never knew,  
For the marks of your Beloved  
Christ Crucified,  
Were imprinted by Him  
on to you.  
His sufferings you bore  
in your body,  
But His peace was there  
in your soul,  
For in the lonely caves  
of Assisi,  
He became your God and your All.  
Please, Francis,  
always stay with us.  
The world needs your measure of love.  
Guide the hearts  
of your followers who love you  
From the Caves  
to God's glory above.  
Lead us to the feet  
of Christ Crucified,  
By the way you  
yourself once trod,  
For through the lonely  
caves of Assisi  
You marked out the  
pathway to God.

Gladys Michaud, S.F.O.

*A Short Biography of Saint Agnes of Assisi:*

## "The Most Prudent Virgin, Our Sister"

SISTER CHIARA AUGUSTA LAINATI

TRANSLATED BY SISTER JANE FRANCES

AGNES FAVARONE, the sister of Clare "by birth and in her purity" (CL 24) is not a figure easy to describe without yielding to the impulse to embellish the few stories we have, tales which are sketchy and meager in their facts, with conjectures which are only probable and very likely suggested chiefly because of her position in Clare's background. She is a figure whose outline is nebulous, and she is probably intuited more and better the less one seeks to circumscribe her within precisely defined lines.

The second daughter of Favarone and Ortolana was born to the noble Assisi family about 1197. Her "Life," included in the fourteenth century *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals*, affirms that at the time of her death, shortly after the demise of Clare in 1253, she was about fifty-six years old.

She was not given the name of Agnes at the baptismal font: it was given later, after her conversion, and it was imposed on her by Saint Francis after "the innocent Lamb (Jesus Christ) immolated for our salvation, for whom she strongly resisted and manfully struggled" (*Chronicle*), resisting the attack of her relatives who had decided to tear her from the cloister of San Angelo di Panzo, in which she had taken refuge with Clare.

In all likelihood her baptismal name was Catherine. According to the sixteenth century *Life of Saint Clare* by Ugolino Verino, and really first pointed out by Fausta Casolini, her Uncle Monaldo, turning to Agnes in his attempt to take her back to her home, addressed her by the name of "Catherine . . . thus was Agnes called at that time (cf. *AFH* 13 [1920], 175). It is the name of the fearless virgin of Alexandria, whose bones in the church erected on Sinai were the object of the devotion of those pilgrims who, in journeying to the Holy Land, intentionally disembarked at the Egyptian port of Damietta in order to pass through Sinai and Gaza on their way to Jerusalem. Ortolana, the mother of Clare and Agnes,

made a pilgrimage to the places sanctified by the presence of the Messiah. Possibly her devotion to the martyr of Alexandria, intensified during the pilgrimage, later on suggested the name of her second daughter. The same lively devotion was surely practiced in the home of Ortolana's daughters, and this would explain why many of the little monasteries of the Poor Sisters were dedicated to Saint Catherine of Mount Sinai.

The childhood and youth of Agnes ran parallel to those of her sister Clare, who was three or four years older. They were united by the same emotions and deep affection for one another. Their initial attraction to the religious life, however, was different. If Clare followed the interior voice which called her to a life completely dedicated to God, not wishing even to hear marriage spoken of, for the younger Agnes, the serene family life which her mother led with her husband and three daughters may have made this path of life, shining with the intimate joy of a marriage and motherhood blessed by God, appear brighter.

In fact, the author of the Legend of Saint Clare, in referring to Agnes' call to the religious life, describes it as one of the first fruits of Clare's powerful prayer in the silence of the cloister:

Among the first of the prayers which she offered to God with all the ardor of her soul was the very intense petition that the harmony and close spiritual relationship which she enjoyed with her sister in the world might henceforth become a union of wills between them in the service of God. Therefore she prayed insistently to the Father of Mercy, that to the eyes of her sister Agnes, still at home, the world would lose all of its attraction, and that God would become so sweet to her that she would turn to his love rather than any consideration of marriage, so that together with her, Agnes would wed the Spouse of Glory in perpetual virginity. The unaccustomed separation, because of their mutual affection despite different sensibilities, was painful to both of them [CL 24].

It is easy to imagine how interminable the days must have seemed to Agnes after Clare's flight. She was only fourteen or fifteen years old and certainly did not find in her younger sister Beatrice that sustaining affection which Clare's presence provided. Passion Week opened into an Easter more than ever beclouded with homesickness for the absent one. Neither the pressure of the family's love nor their violence had succeeded in bringing her home. Easter Week also passed; and as Agnes recalled each day with nostalgia the sweet memories connected with Clare, her mind and heart were fixed ever more frequently on the road her sister had chosen. On discovering its profound hidden riches, the young Catherine, set aflame by the Holy Spirit, began to burn with the same exuberant fire as burned in Clare, in a longing to give herself completely to the Lord Jesus and to his Reign, as Clare had done.

Sixteen days after Clare's flight from the paternal home, therefore the 14th or 15th of April 1211, Agnes at last joined her sister in the Benedictine monastery of San Angelo di Panzo. She demonstrated firmness in her intention of dedicating all to the service of God like her sister. Clare's joyful embracing of her sister on seeing that her prayer had been granted, was at the same time the reception of the first novice.

Agnes' remaining with her sister produced new and more violent reactions from the family, who were not disposed to tolerate from a child a second time an action which appeared as an affront to the wealth and power of the noble family. A squad of twelve cavaliers pounced on the two sisters in the serenity of the quiet Monastery of San Angelo where Clare, "who understood the Lord better, was teaching her sister" (CL 25).

"They were filled with rage; yet they concealed their cunning purpose under a calm and peaceful exterior and then entered the place. Turning to Agnes—for they had now given up all hope concerning Clare—they said: 'Why did you come to this place? Get ready at once to return home with us.' When she answered that she was resolved never to leave Clare, one of the knights, unable to contain his fury any longer, rushed upon her and brutally assailed her with blows and kicks, and then seizing her by the hair, began to drag her away. The others had, meanwhile, run forward to assist their companion, lifting her up in their arms to carry her away. Agnes, finding herself seized, as it were, by savage beasts, and snatched away from the embrace of her divine Lord, loudly called upon Clare, saying: 'Help me, my dearest sister, and do not permit me to be separated from my Lord!' Her captors were still dragging her down the slope of the hill, Agnes resisting with all her might. Her garments had been torn to pieces, and her hair was scattered about in handfuls. Clare had meanwhile fallen on her knees, beseeching her divine Lord with tears in her eyes, to endow her sister's soul with fortitude and to bring to naught the attempts of men by his almighty power.

Suddenly the body of Agnes became so firmly rooted to the ground and so heavy, that all of them with their united efforts could not carry her over a little brook they had to cross. They asked a number of men who were engaged in the vineyards and in the fields close by to help them. But even then they could not raise the body in the least. Seeing themselves baffled in their attempt, some of them treated the evident miracle in a scoffing fashion, saying: 'She must have been eating lead all night; no wonder she is so heavy.' But when one of her uncles, Count Monaldo, in his rage, drew his poignard to stab her, the hand which held the weapon was seized with a most acute pain which troubled him for a good while after. At this juncture, Clare appeared upon the scene of conflict and begged her kinfolk to desist from all further attempts and to leave Agnes, who lay there half

dead, to her care [Tr. by Fr. Marianus Fiege, O.F.M.Cap., from the *Legend*].

When it was over, Clare was anxious about her sister who had endured so many blows while the armed men were dragging her up the mountain slope. She questioned Agnes, who replied that, by the grace of God and Clare's prayers, she had suffered little. After this episode of violence "the Blessed Francis, with his own hands cut her hair and gave her the name Agnes, now that, for the Innocent Lamb, she had strongly resisted and manfully struggled" (*Chronicle*).

"From then on, guided by Saint Francis together with Clare" (CL 26), Agnes progressed so rapidly in the way of holiness that to her companions her life assumed a tenor both extraordinary and supernatural. Her penances and mortifications which were the same as those of Clare herself, caused amazement because she was so young. The rough horsehair cilice, unknown to anyone, she girdled at her sides from the beginning of her religious life until her death,<sup>1</sup> and her fastings were so severe that most of the time she lived only on bread and water.

Agnes was charitable and most tender, turning maternally to anyone suffering and full of merciful solicitude toward all. Writing to Blessed Agnes of Prague about her sister, Saint Clare described her as "a most prudent virgin," and this is the judgment of a Saint who knows how to measure persons and things by the standards of God himself.

We do not know the time of the following episode—whether it preceded or followed Agnes' departure for Monticelli—but the event certainly corroborated for Clare her conviction of the sanctity of her younger sister. We cite from the *Life* as contained in the *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals*:

One time Agnes, alone in the silence of the night, was praying with great devotion. The blessed Clare remained to pray nearby and saw her sister raised from the ground and, while suspended in the air, crowned three separate times by an angel. The following day when Blessed Clare questioned Agnes about the vision she had had, Agnes parried the question. Finally, bound to Clare by the precept of obedience, she related as follows: 'At the first crown I reflected devotedly on the goodness and patience of God and in what manner and how much he lets himself be offended by sinners, and I meditated with deep sorrow and suffering. In the second crown-

<sup>1</sup>Since she imitated Clare in this penitential practice, it is very likely the following, described in the *Legend* regarding Clare's mortification of the flesh: "She was accustomed at times to wear a rough shirt made of horse's hair twisted in a knot, which was fastened to her body on either side by little raw cords.



ing I pondered the ineffable love which he brings to sinners and how, for their salvation, he underwent death and his most bitter passion. At the third, I meditated on the souls in purgatory and their suffering and how, by themselves, there is no way they can obtain relief (ibid.).

The crucified God-man in Agnes' meditation concurs with all seraphic spirituality, spreading out its vast shade of salvation over the drama of sinners and of the saved who are still engaged in their final purification.

### A Nostalgic Addio

"LATER ON, Blessed Francis sent her, as abbess, to Florence, where she brought many souls to God as much by her example of holiness of life as by her sweet and persuasive words filled with the love of God. Fervent in her disdain of the world, she implanted in the monastery, as Saint Clare eagerly desired, the observance of evangelical poverty" (ibid.).

It is not easy to clarify the events which are buried in a paucity of information; only the general outline of facts is clear, and it is this. Saint Francis' passing through Florence aroused enthusiasm among the Florentine men, several of whom immediately embraced his own evangelical

life; but it also kindled fervor among young people and matrons of noble families who, in imitation of all that Clare had recently done, desired to leave all to dedicate themselves exclusively to the service of God. They did not wait long to accomplish their desire; and, not having as yet a monastery, they withdrew into the home of one of their number while waiting for Providence to provide a more suitable place. The date of the beginnings of this community of Florentine women, who took San Damiano as their model, is not known. It is easier to identify the place where the community started. We know that Lady Avegnente di Albizzo, who apparently was abbess of the monastery in 1219, owned an estate in the region of Santa Maria del Sepolcro at Monticelli. The estate had been given to the Roman Church for the building of a monastery, and the property was accepted by Cardinal Ugolino in the name of the Church in 1218. With that act, the noble Florentines, gathered at Avegnente, made themselves a dependency of the Holy See. Lady Avegnente, as has been said, seems to have been the abbess in 1219 of this constituted community, which from its first years was in contact with San Damiano. Together with the Rule of Cardinal Ugolino of 1218-1219, they observed the same *Observantiae regulares*, that is a sort of "constitutions" based on the writings and words of Saint Francis which was then in force at San Damiano.

The gift of a contiguous piece of ground by Forese Bellicuzi made the erection of a monastery possible. The building they had previously occupied was probably a simple house which could not accommodate the growing number of nuns.

This is the community to which Agnes was sent with the responsibility of bringing to Florence the genuine spirit of Clare. To her was entrusted the government of the new group of Poor Sisters.

A precious document, a letter which Saint Agnes sent to her sister after her arrival, sheds light on the profound pain caused by her separation from San Damiano, as well as on the conditions in the new community, blossoming in an atmosphere of peace and unity. The same letter, which is undated, also gives us indications which can be valid chronological references.

"Know, my Mother," writes Agnes among other things,

that my spirit is in the greatest tribulation and immense sadness, and I am extremely depressed and saddened, and am almost unable to speak, because I am physically parted from you and from my other sisters with whom I believed I would live and die in this world. . . . O most sweet mother and my lady, what shall I do, what shall I say, now that I can no longer hope to see my sisters again?

On the other hand, I am much consoled and you can rejoice with me,

because I have found here great harmony and no divisions; more I cannot say. And all have received me with the greatest gaiety and joy, and with most devoted reverence they have promised me obedience. I beg you to have the most solicitous care for them and for me as for true sisters and daughters, knowing that I and they desire at all times your admonitions and commandments. Know further that his Holiness the Pope has granted everything that I wished for and you desired regarding that matter about which you know. I beg you to ask Brother Elias to visit me more often and to console me in the Lord [ibid.].

The "Privilege of Poverty," hinted at in the letter, was granted to the nuns of Monticelli by Pope Gregory IX on May 1, 1230. Moreover, in wishing to determine a date for this letter, we note that Brother Elias is not referred to either as Vicar or as Minister General in this letter, and this would imply that it could not have been written between 1217 and 1221, in which period he was in the Orient as Minister Provincial, nor between 1221 and 1227, during which time he was Vicar, nor the years following 1232, because in the chapter of that year he was elected Minister General.

It is probable, therefore, that Agnes' departure from Assisi for Monticelli, the departure desired by Saint Francis and the cause of profound pain for the obedient sister of Clare, would not have occurred in 1221, as traditionally claimed. If one concedes that the letter still reflects the wounds suffered by a recent separation rather than those described after many years of separation from San Damiano, the letter would probably have been written somewhere around the years 1228-1230.

#### At the Bedside of the Dying Clare

A MIST ENVELOPS Agnes' stay in Florence as well as the itinerary which brought her back to Assisi. Many monasteries vaunt that they were founded by Agnes on her return trip to Assisi, and it could be that the traditional date, which is not established by documents, does have some correspondence with reality. Historically, however, we know that after a decade, Agnes is again found in San Damiano assisting Clare in her long agony.

According to Mariano of Florence, who writes in the 1500s, Agnes' departure from Monticelli was concomitant with the worsening health of the Saint. Having received news of it, Agnes would have hastened to begin the journey with several extern sisters of Monticelli, whose purpose in going would have been to take in and preserve the last words of the Mother of the Order, and to bring back their memories to the Florentine foundation. According to this sixteenth-century narrator, Saint Clare's veil, which is still preserved as a relic at the Poor Clare

Monastery of Firenze-Castello, would have been given by the Saint herself to the sisters who accompanied Agnes at this time.

Whatever the exact time of Agnes' return to San Damiano, her presence at the bedside of the dying Clare is undeniable. Clare has words of infinite tenderness for her who was so oppressed by sorrow that she could not restrain her copious and bitter tears or the plea that her sister not leave her abandoned—words which made a great hope flower in Agnes' heart. "It is the will of God, dearest sister," Clare comforted her, "that I go; but stop weeping because you will come to the Lord very soon after me, and he will give you a very great consolation before I part from you" (CL 43).

The evening of August 11, 1253, in her anguish of separation, Agnes thought of her sister, forever blessed in the embrace of her Spouse, and she remembered, too, the promise of a few days earlier. The next day, when, with universal rejoicing, the body of Clare was blessed by the Pope and was already being revered as that of a Saint as it was carried up the slope of Assisi to be placed in the same sepulchre that once held the mortal remains of Francis, Agnes would certainly have recognized in that solemn prelude of canonization the great consolation which Clare had predicted.

And the promise was very soon fulfilled, because

a few days later, Agnes, called to the wedding of the Lamb, followed her sister Clare to the eternal delights, where both these daughters of Sion, sisters by nature, by grace, and in the Kingdom, praise God without end. Truly, she received that consolation which Clare had promised before departing. In fact, as she was preceded by her sister in passing from 'the world' to the Cross, so, while Clare began to shine with signs and prodigies, Agnes, following her, left the passing light of the world and awoke in God [CL 48].

The news of Agnes' death, spreading through Assisi, drew throngs of people who had a great devotion to her. Hoping to see her mortal remains and to be spiritually consoled, extraordinary numbers mounted the wooden steps which led to the Monastery of San Damiano. But the iron chain by which the steps could be drawn up or let down suddenly broke under the excessive weight. With a great crash the steps crumpled, falling upon the crowd standing beneath and dragging in its ruins all who had been crowded there.

The unexpected catastrophe should have had disastrous consequences, considering the throng which remained crushed under the weight of the overloaded steps. The name of Agnes and her merits were invoked. Immediately the wounded and the bruised got up, laughing as though

nothing had happened.

This was the first of numerous interventions by Agnes, who by this time was joined with Clare in glory. Like her sister, she will be forever prodigious in her intercessions on behalf of all who, in her name, ask to be freed from incurable diseases, from blindness, and from diabolical possession. Her interventions continued all through the fourteenth century and finally became a cult ratified by the Church. Her name appears in the Roman Martyrology among the Saints on November 16, and her remains lie in the Basilica in Assisi which encloses the body of her "Mother and Lady," Clare. Ω

## Sin's as Hot as Rage

Sin's as hot as rage;  
sin is rage.

Burns to dust  
requests for reprieves.  
Spits white lead till must  
goes stale, and man believes  
a cold cup clanging bars  
twists and melts and chars.

Love is water-bright;  
love is bright,  
and cool as peace.  
Fills the soul's empty  
room with release.  
Silver-smooth as a key,  
undoes dams of bar, fetter.  
Take. Drink. Love's far better.

*Elizabeth R. Mattax*

## Book Reviews

**Finding Peace of Heart.** By Joseph Folliet. Translated by Paul Burns. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982. Pp. vi-133. Cloth, \$10.00.

*Reviewed by Father Sergius Wroblewski, O.F.M., who worked in Chicago's inner city and taught at the Franciscan Institute (St. Bonaventure University) during the summers, before going this past year to South Africa.*

We live in a world that offers little peace within or without. In the outside world more than forty wars are being waged. And in human hearts peace is as rare as a rose in winter.

The search for peace is intense and widespread in our times—a fact attested to by the high incidence of alcoholism and drug addiction.

Folliet, in this book, addresses himself to peace within. He rightly argues that there can be no peace without unless there is first peace of heart.

This peace, however, does not come easily. Achieving it takes work; a price has to be paid for inner serenity. Prayer, repentance, ridding oneself of vices, closeness to nature, and health care are some of the "works" which bring peace but obviously require personal discipline and close attention to moral values.

Folliet explains all this, not in a series of heavy chapters with philosophical or psychological analyses, but in short, entertaining essays and poems that clearly and progressively convey the message. The book is enjoyable even as it unfolds serious and significant points about peace.

Saint Augustine's definition of peace stands out. And then gradually one finds oneself at the feet of Christ, who gives hope and love, the fruit of which is peace.

This is a book for anybody searching for peace or for anybody whose mission it is to spread it.

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**Coping with a Gentle God.** By John Powers, C.P. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1985. Pp. 140. Paper, \$6.95.

*Reviewed by Father Luke M. Ciampi, O.F.M., author of Rebuild My Church and Watering the Seed, and Founding editor of Padre. Father Luke, who has taught at several of the Immaculate Conception Province's institutions over the years, currently serves as Director of the Christian Formation Center in Andover, Massachusetts.*

Director of the radio program *Crossroads* and the television program

*The Chalice of Salvation*, Father Powers has given us a handbook to guide the Christian in learning how he lives, loves, copes, and walks with God. It is meant, he says, to be more an exercise in questioning and wondering than in finding answers, for growth does not come without asking questions. As such, the book is a handy tool especially for private retreats. It provides as much insight into God's love for us in a disordered, troubled world as it does into the fears, angers, and pains that often prompt us to ask why we were created in the first place. Throughout, the reminder is hammered home that the God who loves and who creates out of love is a *gentle* Being.

The book reads easily and smoothly. It can be covered in a few sittings, but deserves a second and more thoughtful reading. Father Powers punctuates his reflections with frequent asides of imagination, story, and biblical passage. He begins at the beginning of things, the Creation, and concludes with that same beginning, to show the continuous outpouring of creativity on the part of God into the hearts of his beloved children.

God's creativity, or gift-giving, is both personal and relational. He creates in the first place as an expression of himself, and he interrelates with what he has created, remaining always intimately involved. He is purposeful in the sense that he has given every living being a reason for being, and that reason is unity with himself. Thus God's creativity did not end on the seventh day, but continues to flow on forever in reposeful union with all his creation.

Each person's vocation, therefore, is to walk with God as his companion.

Created free, we may choose to accept that companionship, living and coping with God's love, or we may choose to live instead as children of whatever else we value more, such as money, fear, anger, lust, power. God did not create us as finished, mature adults, but as creative children with the potential to be self-creators. The questions we ask ourselves in this maturing process are the following: Where do I come from? Where am I going? How do I get there? The answer should of course be always the great Gift-Giver, the gentle God, Creativity itself.

The human family initially rebelled against being children of God. Now each of us must seek to grow up as a child of God, maturing into what we were created to be. Having once rejected God's Garden, we must travel now in search of a new Garden, his Kingdom. We are to do so, not alone, but with the gentle, loving God at our side. And the only way of coping with God's love is by loving in return. This is the task of the maturing Christian.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom path God and man walk together as companions is not a place in the far-off future, but it is the Kingdom gift of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. So the major question we face is whether or not we accept the gift and walk with our God in the process of growing into the mature Christian. On the back of this fundamental question rides the rest of Father Powers' theme. Walking with God affords us a positive, realistic image of the world in which all reality cries out with the presence of God. Greater even than the wonders of creation must be our awareness of these wonders, an awareness by a human being that he or she holds a royal position in the crea-



tion that is God's image and likeness.

The essence of sin is forgetfulness of this truth; it is a walking without God, and not missing him. Fear is an enemy that makes us dwell on our unworthiness and tempts us to regard ourselves as sinful beyond redemption. Self-hate, in other words, is a devil that seeks to convince us God is first of all a punisher, not a gentle lover. Our gently loving God, however, teaches us to love ourselves despite our "brokenness." Children of God are those who have a growing acceptance of themselves as they are, not as they would wish to be. Authentic self-love, then, is relational; it can be found in the dynamic, honest relationship we establish with God, with others, with ourselves.

When a maturing child of God walks with his or her God and bravely accepts his love, he/she becomes a blessing in the lives of others. For there is a great deal of company on the road one walks with God; God walks with our every neighbor and thus teaches all of us how to love and bless one another.

Finally, the question: What is love? What is not love? Father Powers refers us to Christ, showing how Jesus, our Model in all things, exemplified in his earthly life the description Saint Paul gives in 1 Cor. 13. As we exemplify this love in our own lives, like Jesus, we touch the lives of others; we grow in self-knowledge; we dispel our fears. And walking thus with God, we become decision-makers and indulge in creative choice-making. We learn to live the present Kingdom as mature Christians, in peace amid the stresses, pressures, and conflicts of everyday life. And then, sharing always the companionship of our *gentle God*, we are

able to rest with him on a seventh day that lasts forever.

Between introduction and conclusion, Father Powers uses ten chapter headings that serve as both an outline and a road map for travelling the road of coping with a gentle God. We recommend this book to the laity as well as to clergy and religious.

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**Healing in the Catholic Church: Mending Wounded Hearts and Bodies.** By Joseph M. Champlin. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1985. Pp. 176. Paper, \$5.50.

*Reviewed by Father Julian A. Davies, O.F.M., Ph.D. (Philosophy, Fordham University), Head of the Philosophy Department at Siena College and Associate Editor of this Review.*

Three main areas are discussed in this valuable book: healing, preparing the sick for death, and comforting the grieving. After an introductory chapter detailing the healings of Brother André of Montreal, Father Champlin goes on to describe the work of the well known healing priests Ralph Diorio, Edward McDonough, and Matthew Swizdor. (There are of course others whom he does not mention—e.g., Father John Lazanski.)

Father Champlin then goes on to consider ordinary healing, speaking first of its biblical basis and then of the possibilities for all Christians to be healers—possibilities he illustrates from his experience. He devotes a chapter to obstacles to belief in healing: that it was only for apostolic times, that God doesn't intervene in nature, that it shouldn't be necessary. The whole book

is an answer to the first two objections, and a special concluding chapter on "Why bad things happen to good people" outlines the Christian perspectives which respond to that difficulty. He has an extended treatment of the Sacrament of the Sick, in the course of which he explains the development from Extreme Unction as the sacrament preparing for the journey to eternity, to Viaticum as the Sacrament for that purpose. Healing of the spirit through the sacrament of reconciliation, and healing of the emotions through counseling and prayer are discussed. Some practical advice on how to visit the sick is given.

The third area discussed is comforting the grieving, and again practical advice is abundant: advice for pastors and the pastoral team, and advice for friends and relatives. Father Champlin documents his narration abundantly. He has put in one place much that has been written recently, and he has enriched his presentation by narration of personal experiences. An unstated premise is that healing includes much more than physical restoration to health; it also means relieving emotional pain and helping others to work through their painful losses, too. That brings healing right into the lives of all of us. Father Champlin deserves our thanks for this fine book.

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**The Awakening Call: Fostering Intimacy with God.** By James Finley. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1985. Pp. 157. Paper, \$4.95.

*Reviewed by Father Joseph Scerbo, S.A., Ph.D. (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley—with special concentration on psychology and spiritual*

*direction and their interaction), Program Director at the Christian Unity Center, Graymoor, New York.*

For those who seek intimacy with God in the silence of contemplative prayer, James Finley's second book, *The Awakening Call*, is just that. This book is a prayer journal. It is both a prayer and the record of an inner journey which Finley wrote to enhance his efforts to clarify for himself his own journey towards God in prayer.

It is suitable for beginners in that it emphasizes the fundamentals of contemplative spirituality. It is also a practical book in that the author makes excellent use of examples, many drawn from married life and the relationships of parents with their children. As the reader progresses through Finley's glimpses of the spiritual life, he/she must be ready to have his/her contemplative heart strings tuned. There are six chapters, each devoted to a specific theme which Finley feels to be of significance in developing a contemplative way of life. He maintains throughout the book a sense of God's incomprehensible, lavish, and ineffable love. He continues to use Merton and other formative influences to express his own intuitive convictions about what it means to be faithful to God in prayer. Nearly every chapter contains a section devoted to reflecting on passages taken from *The Cloud of Unknowing* and/or the writings of Saint John of the Cross. Yet Finley intends, not to analyze the two masters and explain them in conceptual terms, but rather to use them as a way of getting in touch with the formative influences on his own life and thus share with the reader what he gained in his

experience of the masters' wisdom concerning the "one thing necessary."

Influenced by Trappist Daniel Walsh's philosophical meditations on the mystery of our creation in God's image and likeness, together with Merton's notion of the true self, Finley presents a renewed dynamic and creative emphasis on the primacy of love in God's personal creation and on the self fashioned in that love. I welcome his developing spirituality of the Self-in-God.

As in listening to Barber's musical *Adagio for Strings*, the reader's heart will definitely be stilled with awe and gratitude for the touch of God leading to transforming breakthroughs into what Finley describes as "an obscure realization of one's perfect union with God in Christ." Throughout the pages of this book, one is called to see what being poor enough means in the light of allowing God to fill the "place" that he alone *can* fill.

Finley wants most of all to have the reader see the paradox of "the beyond

in our midst." This reality can be identified and described as the transfiguring love of God and Christ through the Holy Spirit, here and now, in the ordinary spilled coffee and burnt toast, "doing their best" people who, like you and me, possess a subtle burning fire, a desire without name that we intuit to be the presence of God calling us to transfiguring union with himself. Finley's work is an encouragement and provides guidance for those who are spiritually thirsty and seek to surrender more fully to the touch of God's love awakening us to who we are in his Love.

I have tucked this book under my arm on many a hiking trip or walk or bus ride. It has occasioned for me the emergence of a new rhythm through an old one that is dead—as in listening to a stirring piece of music—so that one is caught up in the *awareness* that it is God who will bring to fulfillment the desire for him that he has placed within us.

Pick up the book. It's a good one.

## Books Received

- Dollen, Charles, *Prayers for the Third Age: A Devotion for Mature Catholics*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1985. Pp. 191, including Index. Paper, \$7.95.
- Doyle, O.F.M., Stephen C., *The Pilgrim's New Guide to the Holy Land*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1985. Pp. 216, including Index. Paper, \$7.95.
- Ogrodowski, William, *A Catholic Book of the Mass*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1985. Pp. 156, incl. Bibliography. Paper, \$6.95.
- Powers, C.P., John, *Coping with a Gentle God*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1985. Pp. 140. Paper, \$6.95.
- Rowthorn, Jeffery W. (comp. & ed.), *The Wideness of God's Mercy: Litanies to Enlarge Our Prayer*. Vol. I: *Prayers for the Church*; Vol. II: *Prayers for the World*. Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1985. Pp. xxviii-223 and xxii-211, including Bibliographies. Paper, \$29.95 the set.
- Scheidler, Joseph M., *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*. Foreword by Franky Schaeffer. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985. Pp. 350, including Index. Paper, \$9.95.