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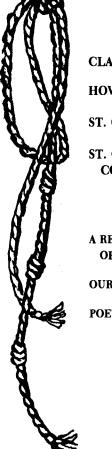
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JULY-AUGUST, 1987

The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



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The CORD

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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

1, 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).

A REFLECTION:

Biblical Fidelity in the Life of Saint Francis and of Saint Clare

DAVID TEMPLE, O.F.M.

Fidelity or faithfulness is one of the constant themes in the word of God. At its highest point it is an attribute of God. God is faithful to his word. He is faithful to the covenant. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament ring with the record of God's fidelity.

This biblical element is ever-present in the life of St. Francis and in the spiritual response of St. Clare. Francis before his conversion went by fits and starts. But, once he had set himself toward God, he was careful to hold with great fidelity to the course. Clare is constantly calling for fidelity in herself and in her Sisters.

The Old Testament witnesses to God's fidelity and it calls man to be faithful. God is the "rock". He stands firm and faithful in fulfilling his promises. He does not go back on his plan. He does not retract his word. He remains as faithful and as unchanged as the heavens.

The divine fidelity is praised in the psalms. It is acclaimed in the canticles and it is declared by the prophets. The word of God repeatedly calls upon man to imitate the fidelity of God.

Saint Francis and Saint Clare responded with a kind of biblical fidelity to the grace and gift of vocation. Throughout his whole life as a Friar Minor Francis was reminding and urging himself to be completely faithful to the fullness of the call. Both Saint Francis and Saint Clare in their Rules call for a profession that is directed toward observing the Rule faithfully. Likewise in both Rules there is a call to labor faithfully and devoutly.

The high point of the New Testament is the fidelity of lesus. He is the faithful Servant. He fulfills the whole of the Scripture. He keeps all the promises of God. As the true and faithful doe he gives himself completely to carry out the work of the Father. It is by the fidelity of Christ that men are strengthen and make fathful to their vocation.

iniversity

In the Franciscan application of the biblical ideal of fidelity faithfulness must be shown in external deeds which are the proof of the interior purpose. But even more in the Franciscan vision is the call to cradle fidelity in the heart so that from this deep source it may inform every thought and deed of the person. Fidelity must be in the inner intent. It must give the direction to the purpose. It is to give the true bent to the desire.

Because of the deep roots of fidelity in St. Francis the brothers could in a certain manner make out what he would do in a situation. Yet in some instances they were taken completely by surprise because the fidelity of Francis went beyond their calculation as faithful-

ness was expressed in a new manner.

Four Popes had experience of the fidelity of St. Clare. The biblical ideal of faithfulness was well known to them. But they had a demonstration from Saint Clare of fidelity to poverty which was beyond anything they had ever seen.

In the bible fidelity is not a passive element. On the contrary it is a highly positive factor. In Franciscan spirituality likewise fidelity is active. It is dynamic. It moves forward. It pursues aims. It achieves goals. The faithful person in the bible is not standing still. He is

going on. She is moving forward.



Clare of Assisi: An Enabling Leader

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

SINCE VATICAN II almost every religious congregation has experienced at least some changes in their governmental structure and the way authority and obedience are lived out within those structures. Leaders and members alike struggle to find a model of governance which will allow for both enabling leadership and responsible obedience. Since the common experience of the exercise of authority prior to Vatican II was authoritarian, coming to a new model of leadership has not been easy.

St. Clare of Assisi (1194 - 1253) who was a strong minded medieval woman is someone whose life provides us with some helpful insights into what it takes to be an enabling leader. She was the leader of the community at San Damiano from 1216 until her death in 1253.

The testimonies found in Clare's cause for canonization¹ provide us with eye-witness accounts of her style of leadership which emerges as clearly what we would name enabling. The document of Clare's canonization process is, I think, one of the most neglected, but one of the richest sources we have for gaining information about her life and her manner of governance.

The process for her canonization was begun only two months after her death. On October 18, 1253, Pope Innocent IV charged Bishop Bartolomeo of Spoleto with promoting the cause for Clare's canonization. The investigative team was made up of members of the secular clergy and the Friars Minor. Among the friars were Leo and Angelo, two of Clare's most trusted friends, and Marco, the chaplain of the monastery of San Damiano. After

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a month of preliminary preparations the investigation began. In all, twenty persons were questioned about Clare's character, spirituality and daily life. Each of the people interviewed knew Clare for at least seven years and many of them knew her since she weas a child. Fifteen of them were nuns who lived with her and rubbed shoulders with her daily. They saw her in a variety of situations in which she related to various people.

Historically the testimonies are of significant value because they were given soon after Clare's death. The passage of time neither dulled nor sweetened the memory of Clare for the witnesses. They simply reported their experiences of her to the investigators.

What emerges from these testimonies is a portrait of what we might call today an enabling leader. In evaluating the testimonies one has to consider medieval values, language and manner of speaking. Once these are taken into consideration, Clare becomes a clear example of someone who had learned that the call to leadership was a means to enflesh Jesus' mission "to serve and not be served."

The accounts given by the witnesses confirm Clare's noble status and the wealth of her family. They also show that from her youth she was a lively, generous and compassionate person. From her mother she had learned the importance of prayer. Her spirit of prayer grew throughout her life and manifested itself in fidelity to her Beloved through loving contemplation. All of those she lived with testified to her deep love of the Word of God and her desire to hear good homilies. They also spoke of her spiritual gifts: reading hearts, prophesying, healing as well as the gift of tears.

None of her gifts come out as strongly though as her ability to serve others without making them dependent upon her. As one reads the testimonies, it becomes obvious that this kind of service was the fruit of her love, a love that was refined and sharpened through the self-discipline of fasting and penance. Clare did not have a morbid pre-occupation with ascetical practices, but rather saw them as a means for purifying her love of others. Clare artfully blended firmness of conviction with flexibility and openness to others. Perhaps it was her manner of leadership which caused none of the witnesses to remark about her administrative skills, but all of them comment on her ability to stir in them a greater love of Jesus.

A careful study of the testimonies reveals Clare's way of relating to people. She seems to have had a gift for friendship and a way of bringing out the best in others. The sixth witness to be questioned was Sister Cecilia, daughter of Messer Gualtieri of Spello. She lived with Clare for thirty-nine years. She summed up Clare's role among the sisters and her ability to call them beyond themselves by her example:

God had elected the Lady Clare to be the Mother and principal Abbess of the Order in order that her example should confirm the other sisters of all the monasteries of the Order in their observance of this holy religion and that she would watch over the flock.²

Further, Sr. Cecilia reported that Clare was dilligent in giving exhortations to the sisters, caring for them, showing compassion toward the sick, and being of service to them.

Clare related to the sisters very lovingly and as Sr. Cecilia has said, her example confirmed them in their way of life. Her leadership was indeed enabling. It enabled people to be themselves in her presence, and vet it inspired growth in them.

From what we know of Clare's family, education and personality, she could have easily adopted an authoritarian style of leadership; which was characteristic of the abbesses in monastic communities of the Middle Ages. Her strong and determined personality would have lent itself to an authoritarian mode of leadership, yet she chose another way to exercise her authority within the community of San Damiano. It was a radical departure from the then-current model of leadership. Hers was an example of servant leadership; a style of leadership which proved to be both administratively effective as well as enabling for the membership of the community. She made a prophetic decision not to accept either the cultural or the ecclesial model of leadership, but rather take the biblical model of leadership found in the person of Jesus.

Most of us who have been in religious life for a number of years have grown up with an authoritarian model of authority which produced a passive form of obedience. Due to this fact there are many members of religious communities who are still struggling to find a healthy and creative form of obedience appropriate to adult behavior.

Evelyn and James Whitehead point out that an authoritarian form of leadership is a kind of paternalism. In their book Seasons of Strength they call paternalism "a false love." Further, they go on to say that "Where genuine love wants the continued growth of the beloved, paternalism wants continued dependence." We see nothing of this in Clare who confirms others in their pursuit of the Gospel and their desire to grow in love. All of the witnesses spoke of her great respect for the sisters in the community and also those who came to the monastery to seek her guidance. She had no need to keep people dependent on her; it was only the larger good of the community which prompted her to act.

The paternalistic leader on the other hand does not set to strengthen

the power of the group, but seeks to substitute for it. If the group shows any sign of independent power the paternalistic leader interprets it as a sign of ingratitude. If the leader has a strong need to exercise control he or she may see it as betrayal.

The paternalistic view of leadership, the Whiteheads point out, comes from the illusion that power is a personal possession. This attitude is

characterized by an "I have it. You don't" feeling.4

Paternalism affects both the leader and the group. In this mode of leadership those in authority become unaccountable to the membership. Such leaders do not allow or encourage members to question them about how the community is being governed. This leads to social and psychological distance. The leaders become unapproachable because they are viewed as the "ones who know what is best." Leadership then becomes a privileged class. The leaders become recipients of special privileges. The result is a double standard of behavior in the community.

The effects of paternalistic leadership can be crippling for life on some of the members. Under this kind of system passivity grows and there is a tendency to leave things up to those in authority because they are responsible. There is no mutuality in this model of leadership. There cannot be because it would be too threatening to both, those who are

leaders and those who are members.

There is also a diminishment of creativity among the members. Since leaders are viewed as smarter, holier, wiser and better, being creative is not perceived as a responsibility belonging to each member. The usual attitude is one in which the general feeling is that if new or different ways of doing things are to come about then they should come from the leaders!

Once leaders are seen as belonging to a special class of people then the membership no longer see them as servants of the common good. Members begin to view leaders as people to be pleased or feared. This in turn inhibits the growth of honesty and bonds of trust among the

members and leaders and among the members themselves.

The great danger which is often the result of this kind of exercise of authority and obedience is that the charism is obscured and the approach to life becomes legalistic. The members adopt a legalistic mentality because it is the only way to survive. Members concern themselves with what is allowed by the constitution or statutes or what is not. The charism is not given the attention due to it because it does not fit into legal categories.

Clare was clearly not a paternalistic leader. In chapter four of her Rule she instructs those who will serve the community as leaders to govern more by example than word of command so that they call forth an obedience of love from the sisters. Clare used her gifts of healing so that people could lead wholesome lives, teaching so that others could grow in maturity, serving so that others could experience God's love through her very person. Nowhere in the testimonies of the witnesses do we find any indication that she sought to make others grateful or indebted to her. She was about the work of liberation. She enabled people to be all they could be and were meant to be in Christ.

Clare saw herself as helped and enriched by her interaction with others. Mutuality was a vital part of her concept of authority and obedience. It is for this reason that she instructed future leaders in her community to be sure and consult the sisters about matters that have to do with their life together. The Abbess was not to act in isolation from the community in matters that affected all of the members. It was her firm conviction that the Spirit of God worked in every person and therefore consultation with others was a necessary outcome of this belief.⁵

It is clear that Clare's leadership brought out the best in others and called them beyond themselves.

Among the sisters at San Damiano there was no need of competition nor was there fear of Clare and the authority which she exercised. All the sisters used their gifts for the good of the community. They were partners in creating the life they shared. This was not a question of equality in community, but a matter of respect for the different gifts active in each member. They were each responsible for promoting the common good. In such a community the leader's function was to help the community discern how their gifts could best be used in light of God's and their charism.

Clare knew that her authority was not something to be used in isolation from the rest of the community; nor was it to be used to gain privileges for herself. She simply let the grace of God, the power of Jesus work within her so that she could be of service to others. She had no need to hide her weaknesses or pretend that she was self-sufficient because the community was not openly her responsibility, but that of each member. She saw herself in relationship to the community not as a leader sitting on a pedestal above the rest, but one called to use her gifts for the

up-building of the community while calling the members to do likewise. From the testimonies for her canonization process it is clear that Clare's leadership brought out the best in others and called them beyond them-

Lady Bona de Guelfuccio of Assisi who lived with Clare and accompanied

her when she went to visit Francis testified that:

The sanctity of Clare was so great that her heart was full of many things for which she could never find words because all that Clare ever did and said was a lesson to others.6

Lady Bona is describing, in a medieval way, what we today would call

enabling leadership.

Clare made a radical departure from the paternalistic model of leadership that was characteristic of medieval times. Hers was an authority of service, one that she had learned from Jesus and one which she saw practiced by Francis. This example of service enabled others to respond to the light of Christ living within them. Clare never sought to stand in the spotlight by drawing attention to herself, but bore witness to the light of the Spirit in each of her sisters and in those whom she met at San Damiano so that together they might be co-workers for the Gospel.

As we seek a more biblical model for leadership within our communities we can benefit from Clare's example. Her style of leadership as witnessed to in the testimonies of her canonization process has three main qualities

which would be helpful to us. It was

1) visionary — open to the Spirit of God at work in every person and calling upon each one to take greater steps in faith for the good of the Church and the world;

2) relational — exercised within the context of relationships which had

been founded on bonds of trust;

3) accountable — was able to be questioned in the light of the Gospel

and the charism of the community.

All of these qualities along with a heart filled with compassion made Clare an enabling rather than an authoritarian leader. She governed in such a way that the members of the community grew in freedom, responsibility and creativity. These gifts enabled them to spend themselves for the good of their brothers and sisters and to build the Kingdom of God. These gifts were used to renew the Church of the Middle Ages and are just as necessary for the renewal of religious life and of the whole Church today.

Notes

The English text entitled "The Cause for Canonization" can be found in Appendix 4 in St. Clare of Assisi by Nesta de Robeck, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1980) 179-230.

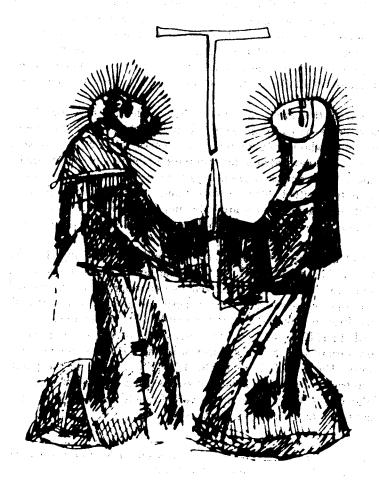
² Ibid., 203.

³Whitehead, Evelyn and James D., Seasons of Strength, (New York: Image Books, 1986) 174.

⁴Ibid., 174.

⁵Rule of St. Clare, Chapter IV. The text can be found in Francis and Clare by Regis J. Armstrong, OFM. Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, OFM. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 216.

⁶Ibid., de Robeck, 227.



How Radical Was St. Clare?

SR. FRANCES ANN THOM, O.S.C.

I PUT St. Clare at the head of the list as being a radical for her time and I think St. Francis would agree with me. What he did was surely radical enough... following Christ even to the reception of the stigmata! But, Clare, a woman, wanting to follow Francis in his radical form of life was certainly the most absurd thing! It also follows that if she followed the radical, Francis, who followed the radical, Christ, she must certainly be a radical!

We know from the very beginning of religious life that there have been those who have been mainly attracted to living as solitaries and then there have been those who have gone into active works, following the Gospel example. But none have so literally attempted to follow Christ as Francis. And, women, in particular, were always held suspect if they desired to become deeply spiritual. Many women braved this criticism and loved the Lord intensely and were rewarded by him, but these were considered the exceptions... and it was usually only after death that this was recognized.

Christ had given the excample of a two-fold way of living; Francis studied Christ' life and decided this was what he was to do. Once when he himself was in doubt he consulted two contemplatives, Clare and Sylvester to find out if he should just choose one or the other, but both agreed that Francis should continue the two-fold life style on his journey to the Lord. In 1217 Francis put this ideal synthesis into writing, which shows how seriously he took this form of life as the model for him and his followers. This RULE FOR HERMITAGES is short, to the point, flexible and freely adaptable. Though it seems it has been written for the friars of the First Order, since these were Francis' first followers, it is freely used today by Franciscan religious.

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That Francis would commit such a rule to writing is evidence of the value it held for him and if it held value for him it must also have had the same value for Clare, his closest follower. However, it was much easier for Francis and his followers to implement this form of life than it was for Clare and her sisters. Francis considered the world his cloister; Clare had a very small world to wander in. Francis and his brothers could establish themselves in caves, live the RULE FOR HERMITAGES with the roles of mothers and sons without any difficulty since the mothers could go into the town and get food or do some preaching as the providers for others. Clare and her sisters had to depend upon the generosity of the friars or noble persons to bring them their sustenance. Later Clare does have sisters who do go outside to the city to procure things for the others, but it is not the same freedom enjoyed by the friars. Francis and Clare both had the spirit of dependency upon the nobility of others as God's providence for them and in this they were indeed following the example of Christ.

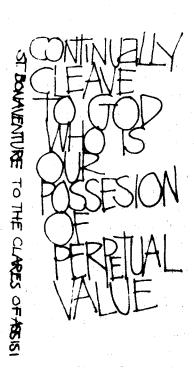
Even though Clare and her sisters did not enjoy the freedom of movement, this did not deter Clare from formulating a similar life style within the walls of the cloister. The two-fold aspect of action and contemplation was essential for her, with the emphasis on contemplation. Just as Francis' life evidences a pattern of a series of periods of deep contemplation and intense action, so, Clare, daily, held commune with Christ through activity and contemplation. While Francis and his followers could go off to a mountain or an island to be alone and pray, after Christ's example, Clare had to find a way to do this within her monastery. We are told that she did have a secret place where she prayed.

Francis' RULE FOR HERMITAGES limits the number of members to three or four as a safeguard for poverty and for community. The fewer persons, the fewer opinions and less time needed for discussion, the more smoothly the life style could function. Clare did not keep the number of persons to a few, but accepted those who came as a gift from God; however, her rule, which was not written and accepted until just before her death, presents the monastery as a place of deep prayer and a place of efficacious work. Clare admonishes her sisters to respect and utilize both aspects.

In the RULE FOR HERMITAGES the friars are all equal and from time to time they reverse roles. In the monastery Clare held equality in a high place emphasizing in her own way that no one had priority over the spirit and each opinion should be heard. She gave the example by praying and working alongside any of her sisters. While her role was mainly that of mother, there were the sisters appointed to do outside tasks who must have constituted the mother role for the sake of the praying community. Since we do not have any real information regarding these

outside sisters except that Clare washed their feet when they returned, it is possible that this was an assigned task and a rotating role for all.

Clare had to do in one area, in a rather large community what Francis and his brothers could do in a large area with a small community. She had to accomplish a synthesis of action and contemplation within the limits of an enclosure while Francis and his brothers had the whole world to utilize for this synthesis. Did Clare accomplish this? Was she radical enough to believe that she had? Francis seemed to think so. It is evident from the fact that Francis began to stay away from San Damiano that he knew Clare was completely capable of handling her own affairs and from the evidence of Francis' followers that others went to her after Francis' death since she was his closest replica, that she must have captured the spirit and the life!



The Knight

You had all the qualities to enter knighthood, to sit at the Round Table, grace the pages of a fable in De Troyes romances; it would have been easy for you to bow to ladies and behave gracefully.

You might have been Lancelot, Percival or a Kay seated on a horse in splendid armour arrayed for famed deeds of knightly valour.

But no need for you to be named in any search for honour, quest for a Grail, possess a magic sword or handsome face:

Courtly love and all its grace was always with you, as any enamoured knight, you loved properly with higher chivalry in the Court of the Lady Poverty.

William Hart McNichols, S.J., S.F.O.

St. Clare

STRATFORD CALDECOTT

The town of Assisi has two centers: one on the Western side, one on the Eastern. (You might say, one on the masculine, one on the feminine.) The first is the Basilica of St. Francis; the second that of St. Clare. In each of them the physical body of their patron saint is present as an object of reverence and pilgrimage. But the church of Santa Chiara may give you a somewhat neglected impression — especially if you go there immediately after seeing the interior of San Francesco, every square inch of which seems to be decorated with briliant frescoes. The walls of Santa Chiara are much barer, the altar enclosed and almost private. St. Clare, in death as in life, has had a knack of diverting attention from herself, while St. Francis has always attracted it. You can see St. Clare's blackened body downstairs in the crypt, and in a separate case her masses of curley golden hair; but although more of her is visible than of Francis, much less is known of her life. Francis turned outwards to the world, always in motion (though around a still centre), his life a series of spontaneously dramatic gestures. Meanwhile, Clare turned inward, to stillness, invisibility, and the privacy of her relationship with God.

Her religious life started, though, with a dramatic gesture. When the beautiful Clare ran away from home to join Francis' ragged band of followers, it caused as much of a scandal as when Francis had thrown off his clothes in the public square, some years before. Perhaps more of a scandal, because she was from one of the noblest families in town. (The kind of family Francis' father would have wanted him to marry into.) Clare escaped in the middle of the night, pursued by her brothers on horseback. By the time they found her, she had been welcomed by Francis in the woods by candlelight, her hair had been shorn, and she too was wearing rags. There would be no going back. Eventually, even her brothers realized that.

The author, a resident of Cambridge, Ma., has published an article on St. Francis in the English periodical Resurgence.

Lady Poverty

The relationship between Francis and Clare is a strange one, and very instructive. Obviously they loved each other, and if they had been less religious souls, that love would have found a more conventional expression. Francis was a romantic: chivalrous and charming, a troubadour, a questing knight. He must have felt drawn to her even more by the fact that she, like him, was on a Quest. Luckily, they were on the same Quest, and they knew it would eventually unite them more closely than a mere marriage in defiance of destiny. They lived in the higher reaches of Eros, as high above the loves of this world as the Himalayas are above the Cotswolds. Legend describes an occasion, much later in both their lives, when they shared an evening meal together. Farmers came running to put out a forest fire they had seen in the distance, to find only the two saints sitting in prayer, shrouded in light.

There is a less well-substantiated story in which we see the two of them parting in the snows of midwinter. Francis is about to go off on one of his long journeys after a brief visit with the Ladies of San Damiano. Clare, standing outside the walls of her convent, begs him to stay a while longer, but can only extract from him a promise that he will return. "When will that be?" she asks. "Oh, by the time those bare bushes are blossoming again." He starts to walk away, when suddenly he hears her call his name. She is standing in the snow with the bushes bursting into flower all around her.

Francis must have seen in Clare virtually the incarnation of "Lady Poverty." She was, in her own way, the purest and most perfect of his followers — or rather of those who joined him in following that paradoxical ideal. She was always fierce in defense of it, even when everyone else wanted to compromise. Her great victory came long after Francis' death, when she herself lay dying, and the final papal approval of the strict Rule

she had written for her Ladies was delivered into her hand. A previous Pope had not wanted to approve it, thinking it too harsh. But when Gregory IX had advised her to modify the strictures against personal possessions, she had only replied, acidly: "Holy Father, release me from my sins, but not from the vow to follow our Lord Jesus Christ."

Obedience was, of course, an essential element in the spirituality of both Francis and Clare. They understood the Gospel principle of overturning hierarchies by valuing the lowest, most submissive place over all. And they both recognized humility as a vital aspect of the detachment to be found in inner poverty. But obedience must always be given to God before it is given to God's designated representatives: in this case the Pope had overstepped his limits, as he later may have come to recognize.

The more normal relationship between Pope and Saint is illustrated by the following story. Clare's reputation for sanctity was so great that the Pope often visited her when he could. On one occasion, the tables had been set with loaves of bread, which Clare hoped the Holy Father would bless. But he asked her to perform the blessing in his place. She thought this very improper and declined, but he then commanded her to do it "under holy obedience," in order to overcome her modesty. When she made the sign of the Cross over the bread, "all of a sudden a very beautiful and clearly marked cross appeared on all the loaves." Obviously, this constituted a rather direct divine endorsement of holy obedience. Some of the loaves were reverently eaten, "and some were set aside as evidence of the miracle for the future." The Pope, seeing the miraculous crosses, gave thanks to God, blessed St. Clare, "took some of the bread and left."

Nature and Sacrament

The "enclosure" of San Damiano, although not luxurious, was hardly closed off from the beauty of the world. There was a pretty walled garden, and there were fields all around, and even the homely buildings were beautiful in a way that formica and concrete can never be. Clare made sure that her Ladies were well aware of the wonders of nature all around them, and that they gave thanks to God for trees and flowers, caring for them as best they could.

She tended Francis there when he grew ill and began to go blind, and it may have been in her walled garden that he composed his Song of Brother Sun, praising the creatures of nature, "summarized" under the four Alchemical elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water. The song — the first recorded poem in vernacular Italian — is about God revealed and expressed by nature. It is about nature in God. It is Clare's vision as much as that of Francis, for it was drawn out of him by the power of eros

in the space between them, a space created by their celibate love. Some writers have traced the Renaissance to its source in that moment, a re-imagining of the world that would be taken further by those other followers of Francis, from Giotto and Dante to Christopher Columbus.

St. Clare stands with Francis at the crest of the Middle Ages. Before long, the civilisation of Christendom would begin to founder, unable to sustain its unifying faith. But the founders of Franciscanism still viewed the world through the eyes of faith, and no advancing darkness could stand against them. The statue of St. Clare outside San Damiano today shows her holding up what looks like a lamp. That would not be very surprising, since her name means "clarity" or "light". But what she is in fact holding is a "monstrance," designed to contain and display what Catholics call the Blessed Sacrament.

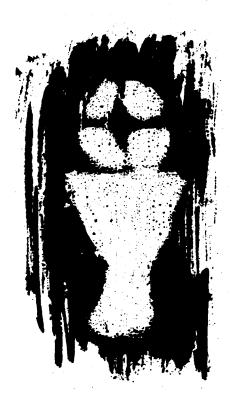
The origin of the image is an occasion when the Saracens were invading Italy, and advancing against the walls of Assisi. Clare led her Ladies out of their cloister, and stood unarmed between the invading army and the town. They held up the Sacrament, confident that the Body of Christ would protect them much more effectively than force of arms. Sure enough, whether from a sense of chivalry, or a fear of mad women, or the pressure of divine grace (or all three), the Saracens turned aside and spared the town.

It is a story of non-violent resistance. It also indicates the strengtth of Clare's faith in the Sacrament. And in this apparent superstition lies the clue to the Franciscan vision of wind and stars, forests and mountains, fire and snow, brought together in unity by the love of god. The dream of a universal Christendom, purged of the narrow ignorance and cruelty of the Middle Ages, lies dormant in the hearts of Catholics, like the dream of Camelot. What keeps the dream alive is the ineradicable persistence of the same faith, expressed in dogmas that unfold like leaves from a tree, or petals from a rose, generation after generation.

What Catholics believe today about the Sacrament is essentially what Clare believed about it: that when a priest completes the words of consecration over a piece of bread and a cup of wine (as Christ did at the Last Supper), symbolic truth turns into literal truth, by the power of God. With the words, "this is my body...", the bread which symbolically represents the body of Christ becomes present on the altar, using the sensory appearances of bread as a kind of disguise — the world's least obtrusive miracle. Communion would, in reality, be a form of cannibalism, except for two things. When we eat the body of Christ, it is not divided: like a hologram, the whole is present in each fragment, no matter how tiny. Second, in the process of receiving Communion, it is not we who digest

Christ, but he who digests us. It is we who are assimilated: into the sacramental body, which is also the Church.

The real presence of Christ in the Sacrament is, of course, a mystery of faith which dogma can only state, without trying to explain. Perhaps it can only be believed with divine help. It was a stumbling block when Christ taught it (see John 6), and it has remained one ever since. But it is the centre of a sacramental system that gives Christianity its cosmic dimension. Without it, there would have been no Song of Brother Sun. Echoing St. Paul's first letter to the Colossians, Francis writes: Bring all the reverence and all the respect you ever can to bear on the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom whatever there is in heaven and on earth is appeased and reconciled to God almighty." St. Clare did so. She saw with the eyes of faith, God revealed in the poverty of the Blessed Sacrament, and reflected from there throughout creation. In a special way, she became for us the saint of the eucharist.



The Swallow and the Lark

Assisi heard the voice of Francis raised in joyful song; the sound of festive revelry echoed down the darkened streets and nightly beat the walls of Offreduccio's residence.

Clare, perhaps,
her maiden sleep disturbed,
wondered what it might portend
when, peering through her shuttered windows,
she felt an urge to add
her soft soprano to
his lilting tenor voice.

His change to gospel living,
his preaching
and suggesting —
then Palm Sunday saw
the urge become reality;
and Clare, the gentle swallow,
flew with the Lark of Umbria
to sing the praise of God most High,
before the Sun of Love divine.

Wondrous are the ways of God
that brought two different worlds
together
in spiritual counterpoint:
the brash and forward
merchant's son,
the maid demure and modest;
the one that led
and showed the way,
the other that followed
and lighted up his way.

Luke M. Ciampi, O.F.M.

St. Clare of Assisi and a Look at Contemplative Motherhood

Barbara Ann Campbell, S.F.O. Gertrude Ann Heiser, S.F.O.

It's so easy to think of Clare of Assisi as a woman of her own time—the thirteenth century—and not look beyond to recognize that she is also a woman for today. For Franciscan women she will always be held in the highest esteem especially among religious women who sought to follow her in the Second order (of Poor Clares), as well as among the Third order religious in the active apostolates of Franciscanism. In this article, I should like to show that her relevance and her feminine theology can also speak to women who are mothers.

Clare wanted to follow her teacher and spiritual companion, Francis, in a way that was brand new in the history of developing religious orders of women. The fact that she was "enclosed," in order to be truly recognized as an authentic religious, in no way prevented her from becoming a shining light for Francis and the brothers, as well as her own Poor Ladies at San Damiano. Rather, it focused her on the full development of her order and on recognizing their life, as women followers of Francis. Though she followed Francis' spirit, indeed she and her sisters became the energizing principle of the early Franciscan movement, not only a light as a beacon, but a light on the path of sanctity for Francis and the friars by her fidelity to prayer and her fidelity to love.

Clare heard the clarion call to poverty and recognized poverty as a way of being in the Church. She translated poverty into a total manner of being as a woman, and in her grasp of the meaning of poverty, her faithfulness in seeking to discover and reveal the depths of the virtues of poverty, she uncovered the richness of Christ's Words in the Beatitudes, and in living the full Gospel message. Poverty as a "way of being," allows

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one to let go of so many self-orientations that are life's acquired baggage — possessions that are both temporal as well as spiritual. In that letting go, that surrender, one gradually becomes able to receive the fullness of Christ's goodness and holiness. Poverty as a way of being allows us to become free of the obstacles to receiving God's love. The more we are able to be empty of self, the more we are able to be filled with the power of the Spirit which is love. It is this love which is truly the energizing reality that nourishes, sustains and nurtures growth and development. Love expresses itself in thought, word, action, prayer and presence, according to the need. Love speaks to the heart of availability and hospitality; of generous listening, of compassion, mercy and forgiveness; of joy and gentleness. All of these are traits of motherhood.

When Clare spoke of Motherhood to her sisters, she spoke of a spiritual reality wherein her companions were to receive the Word of God (the Sperma) into their hearts, where the Spirit would facilitate the Word to become impregnated and germinate, so as to bring the Lord to birth into the lives of others. They were to be Mothers of the Lord for others. Clare's entire way of perceiving her call to follow Francis is fully feminine and always maternal. She patterned her call after Mary, whose motherhood was human and divine, who encompasses the meaning of disciple in the fullest manner, the prototype of the Church itself, and the example for indvidual men and women to emulate. Mary as mother, became the Essence of Poverty at the foot of the Cross; her hopes and dreams dashed — Her innocent Son a condemned criminal.

Clare knew that the call to radical poverty was Jesus' invitation to her to be espoused to Him Who had emptied Himself of everything (of divine glory) to lovingly embrace humanity in its brokenness, in order to cherish mankind and breath new life into the world once again. She wanted to reflect the poor Christ, her Bridegroom, to be a mirror of the redeeming love of God, and in so doing, be enabled to receive Him into her deepest being to become mother of the Lord.

If Clare taught and acted in the capacity of mother and showed her companions how to develop their lives as Mothers spiritually, it is really not hard to recognize that we as natural Mothers have a call that is graced by the Sacrament of marriage. Clare saw poverty as a way of being and we can also say that her way of being is truly our poverty of motherhood.

If we are truly to be mother, bringing a child to birth is only the first phase. Mothering grows and develops from pregnancy, through delivery and is usually a serious commitment for the next 20 years.

How does this relate to the poverty of Clare as a way of being? From the very beginning, from the moment of decision to have a child, the process of self-emptying begins, and will continue throughout one's life as mother, if we accept the invitation God offers us as mothers. As a pregnant mother, little by little the "fullness of life" is more and more in evidence as is the life of another. Our attention is focused on the other still within. Pregnant with God's gift of life, we rejoice in new ways deep within our being. Self-emptying occurs dramatically at the birth of the other.

Life with a new infant is in the enclosure of the home where the opportunity of becoming a contemplative mother first presents itself.

Life with a new infant is in the enclosure of the home where the opportunity of becoming a contemplative mother first presents itself. The gift of a child is received spiritually when we are poor in spirit — simple, open, gracious, thankful and loving. Our total life as mother, which is not only a natural function but a Sacramental order, is a call to be always in motion towards God by the being of Mother. (This is likewise true for the father but I am primarily concerned with the vocation of motherhood.) In every vocation we are called by God to holiness, and in the Sacrament of marriage and family this call is so evident if we but look at the daily and endless varieties of opportunity built into the very fabric of daily family life. Opportunities to grow out of self-centeredness towards othercenteredness, and ultimately to The Other who is God.

The "poverty of motherhood" begins when we let go of our first self-centered image as a young woman and graciously become a person whose primary focus is now outside of her own self. We learn to let go of little things that heretofore were not even noticed, like sleeping through the night, and the new demands of a small creature totally dependent upon our goodness and caring. His/her own schedule of needs for nourishment, drink, dryness, and cleanliness, or just the physical warmth of a close body, are all things that spell love. Do we not, in the physical and natural order, allow self-emptying for a greater purpose? That of bringing to birth and nurturing for growth and development, is that which is now born of us. Do we not experience the responsibility and joy becoming a woman for others as truly the development of our maternal heart?

The call to motherhood is an invitation to embrace the Cross of Jesus, where little by little our ego is crucified with Christ through the little crucifixions of life's experiences, and where we can become poor or empty as the Crucified Christ and thereby be flooded with Himself. Clare responded to this invitation after the manner of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary responded to the invitation to motherhood and started on a long journey of fatih. The Scripture tells us that after the confounding news at the Angel's announcement to Mary that she was to bear a son, and she consented by her "Fiat," "the angel left her." What began in illumination was lived out in the darkness of faith — poverty indeed. And in the end. her journey of faith led her to the road to Calvary and the foot of the Cross, where she not only embraced the poverty of motherhood but poverty was her very being. Surely she could look on her Son in confusion as well as faith, and say what he had said the night before - "This is my body which is given for you, and this is my blood which is shed for you.' A Mother's experience indeed!

Clare also saw motherhood and priesthood as united intimately for her sisters. And if we see our own motherhood as a privilege in the order of grace through the Sacrament of Marriage, we too can recognize our call to holiness is also to share intimately in the sacrificial nature of the priesthood as intercessor. Parents grow into the vulnerability of loving, of giving of themselves daily for the benefit of their children, and gradually, from the home, to embrace all of God's people. It is really very difficult for a mother to remain in what could be a prison of her own little ego-centricity, for she is called to relinquish self-oriented things to become an other-oriented person. To love as mother is to share the Cross of Jesus in his priesthood.

This, however, puts no stamp of approval on mothering that squashes the real physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of a woman, or her need and right to recreation, mental stimulation and pursuit of what will make her the most whole person, therefore a whole woman, wife and mother. Self-made mother-martyrs who are at the demanding whims of one's family is nonsense, and using one's head in the service of the heart, will readily distinguish the difference between whim and legitimate need. (A mother may allow herself to be manipulated at times just to test a situation, but she should know when manipulative measures are being used, and respond in whatever way she intuits to be best in that situation.) Motherhood and increasing intuition are hand in glove companions. The great gift of intuition is one that needs to be regarded more seriously by both men and women. It seems to be more fully developed in women and seems also that in the vocation of contemplative Mother-

hood, it might have a broader base than we yet understand. I believe that long before the words contemplative mother was ever heard, the reality not only existed in many mothers lives, but was already blooming. Contemplative and mother are not mutually exclusive, but rather a call to recognize and integrate what may already have been kindled in the heart by the Spirit. By its nature motherhood tends towards what is contemplative.

Clare of Assisi herself was an insightful woman ahead of her times in many ways, not only in her concept of wanting to live as Francis did, but also in her psychological comprehension of each person, each one's unique dignity and personal freedom, which was emphasized in her Rule and her letters. I believe it is she today who is interceding for mothers of our age to look into the gift of motherhood on a new and deeper level, and see that we too, in our very ordinary life as mothers in a home, are likewise called to a holiness reflective of Clare who was called "the footprint of Mary." We live in the midst of the secular world, but many can rightfully call home a true place of enclosure — a place where the contemplative dimension of life can be developed, whether we are tripping over blocks and trucks, dolls, and teddy bears, or later, sports equipment, musical instruments, books, sneakers, and sweats. "Home" is truly the spiritual "house of self-knowledge" where we live in the absolute poverty of being before our selves and our families, and if, per chance we have overlooked a fault, weakness or outright sin, we can be absolutely guaranteed, it will be reflected in one of the children in living color. Self-deception is practically impossible unless we wear dark glasses all the time. This is truly the growing "poverty of motherhood!".

And isn't the painful process of self-knowledge, one of God's great gifts, that we can come to see, ever so clearly, the obstacles, the barriers to poverty of spirit and therefore the barriers to keeping back the flood of God's great love into our hearts?

Clare, of course, wanted the privilege of poverty in every way, even choosing dependence on God through the goodness and generosity of the friars for daily sustenence. I must say, even as a Franciscan mother, I did not enthusiastically seek the privilege of poverty (and at times the "privilege" part eludes me!) yet a family of active youngsters who eat like it's imminently going out of style, wear jeans designed for long wear and sneakers designed for short wear, make actual poverty a very tangible reality. Our children don't know anything about fasting. I've hoped they'd be down to 7 or 8 meals a day for years, and even though they've grown into people (i. e. post-adolescence) any number of them will still have "toast on a stick" as an appetizer, filler, or a post-dessert (if we have it)

conclusion. Working to support these habits is our "privilege of poverty" and our dependence on God who so generously provides the things He knows we need. Poverty is not destitution, nor should it be, but indeed it is a privileged way of living so as to have the sleep brushed from our eyes, that we may become consciously aware of the poor and our oneness with them. It can move us to become aware of the social ills of our day and do what is in our power to do, and to create a climate of concern in our homes and among our children, and take part in actively trying to establish justice for the voiceless poor of our society, the unborn, elderly, disenfranchised politically and all marginalized groups — all of whom are our brothers and sisters. From poverty as a way of being can come a great energizing capacity for compassion and care and service. From poverty as a way of being for mothers can come the enlargement of the maternal heart that eventually becomes a grace of universal motherhood. The great poverty of motherhood is God's gift to a woman, for it speaks of real truths as we make our spiritual journey with God, and energizes us to embrace God's people everywhere in love and mercy, reflective of the Motherhood of God.

The spiritual journey is for every man or woman and is tailor-made to their vocation. This is not the age to think that holiness is for the few. It is a universal call to be lived in the secular sphere, and we who are mothers are given ways unique to our vocations in the world. As Franciscan mothers, it is a joy to recognize in Clare, who fully acknowledged her call as a woman, that we have an eminent model to behold in our very ordinary lives as mothers within the enclosure of the home. We are offered a radical poverty of motherhood as our own way of being in the Church, which the Lord should then be able to use as an energizing power of love within the family and in the marketplace. We can be encouraged to re-create our homes to reflect this self-emptying poverty and motherhood by making them as inns of prayer and charity, simple and gracious, open to those whom God puts before us, consciously orienting the family towards seeing the Poor Christ in the poor and in all men and women. It may not be our vocation to imitate Clare's way of life, but to become Franciscan women and mothers as faithful as she was to God's unique call to us in our motherhood.

May we walk in the way of the Gospel as did Francis and Clare and like them, follow in the footprints of Christ and His Most Holy Mother. Let us recall the words of Clare, the most perfect disciple of Francis, and like our poor mother embrace the "Poor Christ."

What a vocation we share!

Our Mother Clare :

Fr. LUKE M. CIAMPI, O.F.M.

In RECITING our Franciscan Crown, it is customary to round off the seven decades of our Lady's Joys by adding two Hail Marys to the seventy already prayed. This practice commemorates and honors the seventy-two years the Mother of God is believed to have lived on earth before being assumed into heaven. For our purpose we need not go into the historicity behind the belief.

What we do know with certainty is that Mary lived on for several years after the death of Jesus, that she dwelt for a time apparently in Ephesus and that she was cared for by the Beloved Disciple, to whom her dying Son on the Cross had entrusted her and in whose person she had been assigned the care of all humanity. The other Apostles also cherished her and must have gone to her periodically for encouragement and direction. Who, after all, better than Mary was qualified to reflect on and understand what had been started by her Son, the Christ God gave to the world through her faithful and obedient co-operation?

In other words, like a mother hen, she took His infant Church under her maternal wing and became, indeed, its guiding "Star of the Sea" and "Beacon in distress" along the Christian way (from Evening Prayer Hymn, Feast of the Annunciation). The words of Isaiah (66:10-14), spoken of the heavenly Jerusalem, can well apply to Mary: "Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort... nurse with delight at her abundant breas!... (be) carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her son..."

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With that thought before us, may we not suggest a parallel for us in that daughter of Faverone di Offreduccio and his wife Ortolana, Clare of Assisi, who was born in 1194, some thirteen years after Francis, and lived on for several years after his death? Mary did necreate Christianity, but she assisted in its promotion. Clare did not give birth to the Franciscan dream and message, but she nurtured it. When the Scraphic Family tended to stray occasionally from the thinking of its Founder, she was the one who held fast to his initial ideals, both for herself and her sisters and for the brothers who looked to her for help. Just as Francis had bidden his friars to hold Clare and the Poor ladies of San Damiano in high esteem and fraternal care, so Clare asked her daughters to remain always attached to the sons of St. Francis. If Francis merited the designation "Alter Christus" for us, surely Clare deserves to be called our own Franciscan "Altera Mater."

How much advice and direction the friars of her day may have sought from Clare, we do not know, but we do know how Francis leaned on her for counsel on at least one important occasion. It was early in his "public life", after he had gathered his first companions about him and had established the Poor ladies in their own monastery. Torn by doubt as to whether he should give himself up entirely to the spiritual delights of solitude and contemplation or go forth to preach, Francis wished to do what would best please the Lord. Both activities appealed to him, the first perhaps more than the second.

He asked Brother Masseo to go to sister Clare and "tell her on my behalf to pray devoutly to God with one of her purer and more spiritual companions, that He may deign to show me what is best: either that I preach sometimes or that I devote myself only to prayer" ("Little Flowers", 16, in St. Francis of Assisi, Omnibus of Sources, p. 1334).

As bidden by Francis, Masseo went first to Brother Sylvester, and then to Sister Clare. Sylvester received God's answer in prayer, and Clare confirmed that both she and her companion had gotten the same answer: "The Lord says you are to tell Brother Francis this: that God has not called him to this state only on his own account, but that he may reap a harvest of souls and that many may be saved through him." Clare's advice to Francis, in effect, was that he should take the fruits of his contemplative prayer life out into the marketplaces and there witness Christ for the benefit of all his brothers and sisters in the Lord; while she and her companions would, in their retreat of solitude and contemplation, furnish the vital launching pad from which he and his brothers could derive additional thrust for their endeavors in the fields ripened for harvest.

In his last will for the Poor Clares, written not long before his death.

Francis stated: "I, little Brother Francis, want to live according to the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother... And I beg you, my Ladies, and I exhort you to love always this most holy life and poverty. Keep close watch over yourselves so that you never abandon it through the teaching or advice of anyone". This was Francis' injunction to Clare that the initial dream should never fade from their midst.

In her own Testament, Clare makes constant references to what she and her daughters owe Francis and the devotion they should have to keeping his ideals always alive. She begins her Testament with recalling that among the many benefits they have received from God the Father of mercies is their vocation, which Francis was instrumental in pointing out and leading them to. She mentions the solitude and care he had for them from the beginning and how he had obligated himself and his followers to take as diligent care of them as of their own friars.

Francis' dedication to poverty became Clare's obsession, one that prompted her stubbornly to refuse any pontifical approval of her Rule until two days before her death on August 11, 1253, when Pope Innocent IV finally capitulated to her demand that theirs be an absolute poverty which excluded even communal possession of property. It was perhaps the single most important Franciscan ideal she commanded her daughters to keep untarnished until the end of time.

She wrote: "Just as the Lord gave us our most holy father Francis to be our founder, sower and support in the service of Christ and in those things we promised to God and to that same father of ours, and just as long as he lived was (he) concerned with cultivating and making us grow into his "little plant," by word and deed; so I entrust my sisters, present and future, to the successor of our holy father Francis and to the friars of his order, that they may be of help in our making progress in goodness, in the service of God and, above all, in the better observance of most holy poverty."

Her Testament, more than any of her other writings, with the possible exception of Chapter VI of her Rule, shows her bond with Francis and his friars. Moreover, we read in the "Little Flowers" (15, *Omnibus*, p. 1332) that Francis often visited Clare and consoled her with "holy advice." We can be sure that the advice was reciprocated in the two-way communication of those occasions.

We are told, also, that Clare desired greatly to share a meal with Francis, a desire he appeared loath to satisfy, until his fellow friars strongly urged him to grant that favor "to your little spiritual plant." The two, with their companions, sat down together for the repast and engaged in

such heavenly conversation that all were enraptured — to such an extent that it seemed to the people of the vicinity "the Church of St. Mary of the Angels and the whole Place and the forest which was at that time around the Place were all aflame." The fire was not material and did not consume the place and its surroundings, but symbolized "the fire of divine love which was burning in the souls of those holy friars and nuns" (Op. cit., loc. cit.).

From the beginning, Clare was attracted to Francis by his preaching. Whether or not they had other contacts is neither clear nor important. Francis, however, did have occasion to urge her to break with the wordly life for which she was destined and devote herself to the cloistered life of complete dedication to Christ. On Palm Sunday, 1212, clad in all her finery, Clare attended the Liturgy in the cathedral of San Ruffino in Assisi. That night she slipped out of her family home and stole to the Portiuncula Chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, where Francis received her into her chosen life of poverty.

Here, certainly, are the makings of a love story! Was the attraction between Clare and Francis a romantic one? Well, yes, in a sense, but not with the biological overtones Zeffirelli appears to have implied in his "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" film. It was the love of one soul for another, mutually experienced, the love of a soul fired by Divine Love for another fired by the same Love. Clare came to Francis to requite that love in its fullest spiritual sense. Francis turned to Clare for refueling and keeping that love alive.

For that reason, whenever in Francis' time there was a move to depart from the base on which this love rested, it was Clare who held the line with her sisters and with the brothers who listened to her. We need only read her letters to her sisters and theirs to her to see her not as a love-struck teenager, swooning before the magnetism of Francis as contemporary teenagers often melt before a Bruce Springsteen. Rather, she was a strong-minded, rock-steady woman who loved and embraced his ideals of poverty, simplicity and fraternity and never permitted those ideals to lose their luster in her eyes.

Clare flourished in the shade of her spiritual idol, as Mary had flourished in the shade of her Divine Son. She called herself his "little plant," or "pianticella." As we can discern from her writings, her spiritual life, like his, was seeded in two extremes — absolute poverty and the richness of God's kingdom, a complete emptying of self and a complete possession by God. Those two extremes of absolute poverty and sublime wealth merged into one, with poverty always the underlying and cementing factor. Everything in her life, as in that of Francis, became for her a response to the Spirit, a wedding of kenosis and metanoia.

The whole spiritual experience of Francis was relived by Clare and her sisters to an ultimate degree in highest poverty. Clare was indeed a "Poor Lady" swallowed up in the secret that is God. The essence of her poverty was her naked, unfettered faith, her divesting herself of everything and of self before the Father. Passive always under the action of her Divine Spouse, her soul achieved the blessedness of being completely possessed by the God whose very essence is Love. The love infused into her being by the Spirit gave expression to the spirit of interpersonal love that made her a mother to her daughters and sisters as well as to her spiritual brothers, the friars. Yet, like Francis, she held herself to be the least among the little ones of Christ.

The whole spiritual experience of Francis was relived by Clare and her sisters to an ultimate degree in highest poverty.

Her model in so many ways, Francis was likewise her inspiration in other matters, such as devotion to priests, ministers of the Gospel and of the "most holy Body and Blood" of the most high Son of God, which they bring down to earth for others ("Testament of St. Francis," *Omnibus*, p. 67). The Eucharist and its adoration played a prominent role in her life, as it did in that of Francis and does today, still, in all her spiritual brothers and sisters. A favorite image of St. Clare is the one of her holding up the Sacred Host in its monstrance to repulse a hostile horde seeking to assail the Poor Clares' monastery.

Francis, we know, in addition to being greatly attached to the passion of Christ, was also especially devoted to the Birth of the Savior, as witness his emotional visit to Bethlehem and his re-enactment of the Nativity scene at Greccio on Christmas of 1223. No surprise, then, that Clare, too, was devoted to the Feast of the Nativity. One Christmas, we read in the "Little Flowers" (35, Omnibus, p. 1383), she lay abed sick deploring her inability to join her sisters in reciting Matins and receiving Communion during the Mass in the Church of San Damiano. She revealed to her sisters later, though, that she had been miraculously transported in spirit to the Church of St. Francis, where she participated in Matins, the Mass, Communion and the whole celebration of the Feast by the friars.

Clare's attachment to Francis, as we can judge from all of the above, lay at the root of her concern for and devotion to her own spiritual daughters and sisters. That concern and devotion, by extension, reached out in her life and activities to all the other units of the growing Franciscan Family. Today, while the friars of the First Order and the brothers and sisters of the Third Order, in both regular and secular fraternities, carry out their apostolic ministries in the various marketplaces of the world "according to places, times and climates," after the manner of Francis of Assisi, her concern for his Seraphic Family lives on in her present-day daughters and sisters.

Through the cloistered life of contemplative prayer led by the Poor Ladies, St. Clare, Mother Hen of the Franciscan Family, continues to witness, nurture and bolster all the sons and daughters of St. Francis, giving increase to their living the Gospel in obedience, without property and in chastity and to their vocation of spreading the message and love of Christ to the ends of the earth.



Saint Bonaventure

Bona-ventura! Good journey to you! So you're a Franciscan! Me, too!

We travel well together, you and I, and strengthened by the telling of our own journeys, and the breaking of Bread, our baggage grows lighter.

Sandal-shod, we journey on, wiser for these graced moments, knowing the Lord has been with us on this road.

Chistine Diensberg, O.S.F.

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