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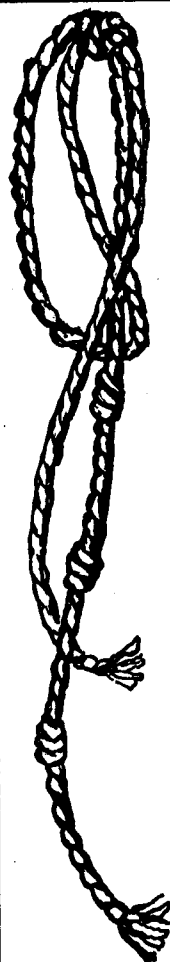
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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions

BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo

CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun

EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony

EpCler: Letter to Clerics¹

EpCust: Letter to Superiors¹

EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹

EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo

EpMin: Letter to a Minister

EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order

EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People

ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God

ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father

FormViv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221

LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God

LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours

OffPass: Office of the Passion

OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix

RegB: Rule of 1223

RegNB: Rule of 1221

RegEr: Rule for Hermits

SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady

SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues

Test: Testament of St. Francis

UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare

VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

¹I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis

2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis

3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles

CL: Legend of Saint Clare

CP: Process of Saint Clare

Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis

LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC: Sacrum commercium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

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

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

REFLECTION:

LIKE AN EAGLE SOARING

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

In the canonization process there is one place where mention is made of Clare's ability to listen to and enjoy a rather technical, theological sermon and the comment is that she was probably like an eagle soaring in her own personal theology. I wonder how many persons have ever really watched an eagle when it soars high above looking with its piercing eyes to see if anything of interest is moving below. If there is, it will suddenly drop as if shot from the sky, swoop upon its prey and soar high again to return to its nest with its catch. It is an awesome scene as well as a fearsome one.

What Clare had done by leaving home, family and friends, was also awesome and fearsome. Awesome that a young girl would have the courage and the conviction to serve the Lord and enable her to break all ties in such a dramatic way; fearsome in that she was so young that many of her well meaning family and friends may well have thought that she would become discouraged after a while and then pine away behind the walls of the monastery in which she had confined herself.

Clare was certainly soaring high in order to attain the love of the divinity and fearless in all that it might entail for her personally. Having been ravished by the Almighty within her heart and learning through her discernment with Francis, what was expected of those who followed in the Gospel way, Clare swooped down in great humility upon those things which would help her to soar higher than ever. Each day was a great adventure or a new opportunity to seek new ways to delight the Beloved, to accept new challenges and to dwell within his house.

By this I do not mean that Clare never had a day on which she would have liked to shut off the alarm (it was she who often awakened the others) or go out for a long walk in preference to what she was doing. If she had had a telephone she would probably have liked to give Francis a call once in a while or jump in the car and take a ride to the Portiuncula. Perhaps

St. Bonaventure

she even missed going into the shops in Assisi, if not to purchase something, then just to chat with a friendly shop keeper. Surely some of these desires were a part of her human nature, too, as a young eaglet just learning to fly goes only short distances and does not have the distinctly sharp vision of a more experienced eagle.

Clare had the advantage of having Francis as a spiritual guide and she learned very quickly. From 1212 when she was received by Francis until 1226 when he was called by the Lord, was a short period of time to learn all that she must know to continue to govern the Second Order, to give counsel and encouragement to the Third Order and even to support Francis' original vision for members of the First Order during that crucial period after his death. She appeared to all branches of the order as the closest possible link with their beloved father like a Mother Eagle who guards her nest from intruders and watches lovingly, piercingly and everlastingly over all entrusted to her care.

Clare seemed to be the one who would never die. She outlived Francis some twenty seven years even though Francis feared an early death for her shortly after she had moved to San Damiano because of her severe fasting and penance. She was a person who would always be there; we all know someone like that and when the person does die it just does not seem right. So when Clare did die it was more of a shock to the town than the death of Francis. It was an awesome and a fearsome thing! She was no longer there when they needed her wisdom, her counsel and her encouragement. How could this be? Many heads and thoughts must often have turned toward San Damiano in unbelief that she was not there. Her soaring had taken her at last to the heights that an eagle seeks. She had, at last, followed Francis to the end of their journey and they must have had a grand reunion discussing all the old days and the old companions. She probably had many messages for him from his faithful friends.

Her Sisters must have reminisced about some of the wonderful things she would tell them in her own quiet way, about the little miracles in her life. (Some of these have been recorded in the canonization process). As the eaglet grew she began to utilize powers given her by the Most High for his honor and glory. We all know of the most often quoted miracles such as: the crosses on the bread as she blessed it under obedience to higher authority, the driving away of the Saracens as she begged the Lord for protection for San Damiano and for Assisi, the miraculous sights and sounds she heard within her cell on a Christmas eve when she was too ill to go to the services, and the many cures which she effected by the use of the sign of the cross. Francis, himself, had recognized the thaumaturgical powers of his young and dear follower so that he sent persons to her to be healed. Just as an eagle is always an eagle and

continues to grow, to fly, to soar, to swoop, to catch its prey and to care for its own, Clare soared ever higher and higher in her ordinary life and in her extraordinary life. Both developed together to form the perfect balance in a spiritual life that would extend itself far beyond the monastic walls to enhance the lives of many followers all over the world without any personal contact.

Like the fully developed adult eagle, Clare's vision was keen, distinct and perfect in what it was she was about. Evidence of this is, of course, found in the document authorizing the Privilege of Highest Poverty and the acceptance of her own Rule. The eagle may circle many times, it may swoop lower and lower and then slowly rise again, but it never loses its course nor the sight of its prey. On her very death bed, Clare, whose vision had never been obscured by persuasive argumentation or threats, victoriously handed over to her Sisters their own Rule which would never again be questioned. An awesome and a fearsome eagle indeed, who had no other place to go except beyond the heights of the skies which she had already attained here.



Saint Clare: Paschal Woman

Sr. MARY BONAVENTURE, P.C.C.

Our Mother St. Clare is a shining exemplification of the woman called by Christ to withdraw from the world in order to steep herself in the Paschal Mystery of the supreme love of God for man and thereby necessarily to participate in the redemptive mission of Christ's passion (cf. *Venite Seorsum*, I). It is this sacred mystery, this divine momentum, which seized her, swept her up into Gospel living, and carried her out of the Egypt of this world to the Father. The very circumstances of her departure from her parental home dramatize this Paschal dimension of her life. Significantly, she chose to flee from her home on Palm Sunday night. No less significant was her choice to make her exodus through the "door of death," a prophetic choice which clearly shows her conscious decision to die with Christ in order to pass with Him to the Father.

Abandoning home, city and family, she hastened to St. Mary of the Portiuncula (CL 8). Like the Israelites who were told to leave the land of Egypt as though in flight, her whole life was propelled by this holy haste. Celano says, "... she ran after Christ unburdened by any possessions" (CL 13). And she verbalized her desire that her daughters, too, would move with this same swift pace, light step and un stumbling feet so that even their steps stir up no dust as they go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly on the path of prudent happiness, believing nothing which would dissuade them from their resolve or which would put a stumbling block on the way (cf. Letter II,; 12-14).

Like the Israelites, our Holy Mother was led into the desert. And like the Israelites, she had her Shekinah in which God revealed Himself to her under two modes: a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This dual manifestation of God's presence suggests that for Clare there was no

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dichotomy between the practical concerns of monastic life and the ultimate concerns of holy prayer. For her, the cloud was the Holy Spirit who went before her and moved her to be mother, nurse, seamstress, soldier, legislator, seeking in all these things only Him and His holy operation. At night — be it the night of suffering, the night of silence, the night of poverty, the night of illness — her Shekinah was perceived more as a pillar of fire. It was Christ she gazed upon, considered, contemplated and desired to follow (cf. Letter II, 19). It was in Him that she immersed herself, setting her soul in the brilliance of His glory, setting her heart in the figure of His divine substance, transforming her whole being into the image of the Godhead through contemplation (cf. Letter III, 12 - 13). And having been so immersed in Christ, having been born of the Passover of Jesus, her prayer then released Easter energy and Easter radiance to others. Did not her own sisters testify that when coming from prayer her face, like the face of Moses, was luminous and radiant (CP Witness IV, 4; Witness VI, 3)?

Again, like the Israelites, Clare was steeped in the solitude of her desert-enclosure for over forty years. To the ancient monastic tradition of enclosure Clare added her own freshness of understanding. Enclosed in body, Clare was liberated in soul (cf. Rule of St. Clare, Bull, 2) because she did not look upon enclosure merely as a fixed position or place where she localized herself but rather as a way, a dynamic way, in which she could continue to go forth outside herself. Christ was the way. He was the desert atmosphere in which she dissolved her attachments, her human supports, and rose up, disenchained from self, in a fragrant offering of praise. There was nothing static about her enclosure. The Shekinah that hovered over her was a moving grace which transported all immobility into spirit and life. Enclosure was both a vehicle that carried Clare, much as the fiery chariot carried Elias, and itself a way of ascending to God in a whirlwind of faith. It was empowered by seraphic love to lift her radically out of the thinkings of this world.

The parallel between Clare's experience of poverty and the Israelites' experience of poverty is striking. As God called the Israelites to trek for forty years a wilderness of material and human insecurity before they were sufficiently formed as a people of His own, so God required that Clare, too, linger for forty years in the desert of uncertainty and insecurity before crossing the Jordan of that papal confirmation which assured the birth and formation of the Second Order. Even in the effectuation of her desire to possess no human security, Clare had to experience insecurity because dependance on anything but God was equivalent to a denial of the sacred origins of her life. As the Church was formed from the pierced side of Christ, so the Second Order was formed only at the deathbed of

St. Clare. In each case new life flowed forth from the Paschal sacrifice which had been accepted.

As St. Clare was assumed so completely into Christ's sacrifice of Himself, so her life was a continual celebration of His Paschal feast. If her life was a desert of earthly fasting, it was only to increase her hunger for the bread of divine love. And God satisfied this hunger in marvelous ways. He multiplied loaves of bread for her when her earthly provisions failed; He made Himself the bread of deliverance for her when evil powers attacked her monastery. He let her taste the hidden manna of his sweetness in contemplative prayer (cf. Letter III, 14). In the interior eucharist of her heart she continually gave thanks and broke the bread of her life in prayer and service of others. Like Moses, she set her soul in the tenting place of His Eucharistic presence and entered the cloud of His glory until San Damiano became, as the meeting tent of the Israelites, a place "outside the camp" where the grace and mercy of God were sought and were poured forth for the entire community, for the entire world.

St. Clare concluded her earthly pilgrimage with the same spiritual grace with which she began it. "Go forth," she sang to her blessed soul. She who had so energetically followed Christ who had gone before her, now, through Him, was ready to enter into His glory. How fitting it was that Clare, who had sought Christ so ardently, who had pierced the cloud of His earthly sufferings by her loving gaze of faith, should now see the cloud of his sacred humanity lifted and behold Him in His luminous glory ready to transport her into heaven. "Do you see the King of Glory whom I see?" (CL 46), she repeated several times in her last days.

For Clare, as for the Hebrews, the Shekinah was just one stage of the journey:

"By his Shekinah, Yahweh comes down to Israel, He dwells in the tent with them in their earthly pilgrimage, He manifests Himself to them as far as possible for man still held by earth. On the Merkabah of the Cherubim, Yahweh, however, remains free of all earthly bonds: He soars above the highest heavens. But the final hope is that he may call to join Him, carried up to heaven by fiery horsemen, the man [or woman] whom He has condescended to allow, here below, to see something of Himself in the luminous cloud of His Shekinah."¹

Thus assumed into the cloud of His glory, consumed by the fire of His love, Clare triumphantly completed her transitus to the Father.

¹Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), p. 153.

Religious Experience in Poor Clare Tradition

SR. MARY FRANCIS HONE, O.S.C.

Methods conducive to religious experience have become something of a commodity these days. Techniques for the purpose of inducing altered states of consciousness are available — for a price. There are strategies for achieving a peaceful resting within oneself as preparation for Christian prayer, too. Yet discernment is needed. Our spiritual energies can become dissipated by formulas directed toward the excitement of new experience rather than toward the bonding of relationship with the living God.

Franciscan contemplative tradition offers directives for a carefully developed prayer-form that provides guidance toward communion with Christ and continued nourishment for a vibrant mystical life. It is a way of praying discovered in the lives of countless Christian saints and has been the particular characteristic of prayer among daughters of Saint Clare of Assisi. Throughout history Poor Clares have exercised a primary role in perpetuating this proven path to authentic religious experience. So much so, that the writings they left can be correctly interpreted and fully appreciated only in the light of Franciscan tradition.

At the time when people are searching for God in many directions, sons and daughters of Francis and Clare need to consider their heritage of prayer and review its special structure and its positive effects far surpassing popular techniques.

This study will certainly not be an exhaustive treatment of Franciscan contemplative tradition, but more precisely, a presentation of some aspects of religious experience as it appears in the teachings of our founders. Its development will be traced, first of all, in its origin, the prayer of Saint Francis; secondly, in its expression through Saint Clare's letters; thirdly,

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in the theology and structure of Saint Bonaventure; and fourthly, in the vehicle of its survival through the centuries — in Poor Clares' writings; and finally, in contemporary developments.

Saint Francis' Contemplation

The source of our contemplative tradition lies within the four elements that characterized Francis' prayer.

1. *Contemplation of the Historical Christ.*

Francis transformed religious sensibility in the direction of devotion to the humanity of Christ. The place he gave to Jesus in his prayer went further than the way opened by those who had preceded him.

Saint Bernard had fostered the idea of keeping the image of Jesus in mind and meditating upon him in the events of his life, but he couldn't conceive of the possibility of union with God through these means. Meditation about Jesus, though absolutely necessary, was seen by him as a carnal relationship; something inferior. The Incarnation was considered to have been the result of a transgression, something that was not supposed to have happened, and thus, something that could hardly contain means of divine union.

Francis didn't formulate any particular theory about prayer as Bernard had.¹ Rather, he was so convinced that we can know God only in and through the historical Christ that he attached himself above all else to contemplation of the Incarnate Word. What Francis did was to revive a distinct form of mystical consciousness by parting from existing norms of spirituality and restoring to the Church the kind of Christ-consciousness rooted in early Christianity.²

We read descriptions of Francis' prayer in the writings of Celano (1 Celano, 84), how he would "recall Christ's words through persistent meditation and would bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration." But Francis even went further than that; he would intuitively enter into Christ's life and experience the power of his presence.

Francis taught the people how to do this, too; the most widely known example is his creation of the Christmas scene at Greccio so that the people might actually experience in some manner the birth of the Christ-child. He had live animals brought into the scene to set the atmosphere, but he didn't employ actual persons to take the places of the Holy Family; it seems he left that to their imaginations. We are told that Francis spoke of the child Jesus as if he were truly lying there in the manger he had prepared, so vivid was the re-enactment of the event. Some people claim they saw Francis take a child into his arms.

The humility of God manifested in the mystery of the Incarnation so occupied Francis' memory that he hardly wanted to think of anything else but this and the love displayed in the passion of Jesus. (1 Celano, 84) He would enter into the sufferings of Christ with moans and tears day and night, and he prayed that he might even feel those pains interiorly and physically. His whole being reached out to Jesus, Celano tells us; his whole being thirsted after him.

This kind of mysticism represented a different current than the tradition recognized by the Church at that time. With Francis came the beginning of Christ-Mysticism, a tendency that was to become the characteristic form of Western religions.³

2. *Francis' imitation of Jesus*

Besides entering into Christ's life and being with him, Francis also sought in prayer to become like him. Jesus was his "moulding form" as he strove for deeper union with the Father. He focused upon concrete details of Christ's public life and tried to emulate his virtue in every situation so that he might learn to acquire his spirit. In prayer he kept his eyes on him in order to embody his values and be more able to live them out. Everything was done with this in mind. In this prayer he learned all that he passed on to us: that we have to descend into poverty as God descended into our human condition.

3. *Francis and the Christ of Prophecy*

A third characteristic of Francis' prayer was that the Jesus he focused upon was not purely an object of his imagination but also of his faith in divine revelation. Jesus was the One proclaimed by the prophets and "the Lord Most High" extolled by the psalmist. In this affirmation of Christ's dual nature Francis was not limited to carnal relationship, for his Christ was divine.

The all-accompassing symbol of Francis' relationship with Jesus is probably his vision on La Verna. The six wings of the Seraph that appeared to him is an image derived from the Prophet Isaiah 6:1-13, but it was perceived by Francis with the image of the Crucified.⁴ He contemplated the Triune God in the Crucified Christ and this remains the apex of Franciscan contemplation; this was the Christ who embodied the unseen, uncreated Divinity.

4. *Francis' Desire for God*

Fourthly, the impetus behind Francis' prayer was his longing for God, and his love for this God he could not see was nurtured by habitual

consideration of the mystery of the Cross; the mystery of the kind of love that gives itself as Jesus gave himself. His prayer was the movement of the whole person towards something to which he was drawn with the kind of desire that cannot be satisfied until it becomes one thing with the Object of its love. The presence of this depth of desire is an important element in Francis' prayer because it is an assurance against the danger of seeking the thrill of prayerful experience instead of God himself.

There is an early informal theology that faithfully adheres to the example and teachings of Francis and presents these four main elements of Francis' prayer from another perspective. This is found in the letters of Saint Clare to Blessed Agnes of Prague.

Clare and Franciscan Contemplation

Clare's writings reflect the mysticism of Francis as found in his particular form of prayer, and they do this in the more detailed manner that writing exacts. Her correspondence with Agnes contains guidance for the life of prayer she expected of her sisters, and thus provides a setting for enlargement upon Francis' doctrine.

1. Saint Clare's Contemplation of Jesus

If we read Clare's letters alongside the four characteristics found in Francis' prayer, we see, first of all, that although she may not have created an outdoor display as Francis had, Clare had taught her sisters how to make contact with Jesus in prayer.

In the letter Clare wrote to Agnes of Prague in 1235, she prescribed the use of imagination by expressions such as: "As a poor virgin *embrace* the poor Christ," thereby telling Agnes to make Jesus as real as if she were holding him in her arms. "See and follow the One made worthless for you." Clare continued: ". . . *Observe* him carefully. . . . *see him* knocked about. . . *fix your gaze* upon him. . . *see him* whipped many times on his whole body . . . *see him* dying in terrible agony."

The Latin word Clare used for "see" was *intuere* which means to see in an intuitive manner. The use of imagination is implied, the gaze of the spirit and affections towards the object loved until both are one, as in the condition of contemplation. Clare's use of the word "contemplation" also implied both that initial loving gaze and the unitive experience in which it culminates.⁵ Clare was telling Agnes to gaze interiorly upon the Crucified until she forgot herself entirely and experienced his love for her.

There is further example of this in the letter of 1238 where Clare wrote: "Place your eyes before the mirror of eternity . . ." The eyes signify

imagination, the eyes of the spirit, and the mirror of eternity is Christ who teaches us to see the deeper meaning beyond the surfaces of life by the light of his Spirit within us. Clare continues: "Place your spirit in the splendor of glory." Christ is the splendor of glory (Her meaning is spelled out clearly in her last letter). And finally: "Place your heart in the figure of the Divine Substance, (Turn all your affections towards Christ) and by means of contemplation transform yourself totally in to the image of his Divinity. Then you will also experience what is reserved to his friends alone, and you will taste the secret sweetness which God himself has reserved from the beginning to those who love him." (3rd letter)

So then, Clare taught that union with God is assured to one who centers all faculties upon Jesus: the imagination, memory, intellect, will, and affections. In mystical literature, to taste implies the feelings; Clare used every part of herself in her relationship with God.

2. Clare's Imitation of Christ

The imitation of Christ traced in Francis' prayer is more carefully spelled out by Clare as a safeguard when applying imagination in prayer. Clare told Agnes that by gazing at the mirror, Christ, every day, and studying herself in comparison with him she would clothe herself in the garments of all his virtues, (4th letter) and she also told her that this is how she would become like the Father. We are to center our energies upon Jesus, then, in order to behave as he did in the practical details of everyday life. This is the condition that determines our capacity for religious experience and transformation: not solely an intuitive looking upon Jesus in prayer but doing so that we might acquire his spirit and live by it.

In the form of contemplation the earnest effort to become more Christlike through prayer is the moral element that guards against our settling into the imagination as an escape into sentimentality. The use of imagination is not an easier way — not as Clare taught it — for she stressed the continual striving necessary if one is ever to experienced the "fruits of love."

3. Clare and the Christ of the Prophets

Clare based her concepts of Christ on sound sources. Throughout her writings there is an artful weaving of the human and divine natures. Notwithstanding the scarcity of her writings, there still remain sufficient references to scriptural sources to demonstrate a contemplation of Jesus established in divine revelation. Just months preceding her death, Clare pointed to the Christ who is Wisdom, and she drew from Wisdom 7:25-26.

She described Him as "the brilliance of everlasting light, and the mirror without spot," citing the mirror image also found in the Book of Wisdom. This is followed by terms taken from 7:18 denoting the times of Wisdom: beginning, end and middle. Clare wrote:

Look at the beginning of this Mirror, the poverty of the One placed in the manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes... The King of Angels, the Lord of heaven and earth is laid in a manger!

... and now, in the middle of the Mirror consider the humility, the countless labors and burdens he endured... and in the end of the same Mirror, contemplate the unspeakable charity with which he willed to suffer on the tree of the Cross, and to die thereon the most shameful kind of death. (Brady, 4th letter)

Among other scriptural references in the same letter, Clare quoted the Book of Lamentations 1:12, adding: This Mirror himself, nailed to the wood of the Cross, called passers-by to reflect carefully on these things, (for he said): All you who pass by, look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow."

Christ is God, and what he said, and what he was, especially on the cross, is the most perfect image of God we will ever have. Was it this realization that prompted Clare's concern that the friars' teaching remain accessible to her sisters? In Clare's sound spirituality we have the healthy reminder that contemplative living is doomed without frequent exposure to divine revelation.

4. Clare and the desire for God

Clare's prayer was more than devotion, it was communion with her God. Thus, when she wrote of contemplating Jesus hanging on the cross, something that happened centuries previously, she was speaking as one really present to him, just as if it was taking place in her own lifetime. She was with a dying man she loved with real emotion. This was so much more than meditating upon something that no longer existed.

To do all that Clare proposed, to be with Jesus, to feel his pain, to suffer with him and cry with him though we do not see him with bodily eyes, requires the use of intuition in a manner possible only if we are drawn to him by love. There has to be present in all of this the honest caring that nourishes deeper relationship; even on a simply human level. There must have been some dimension of longing on Clare's part to know the man Jesus so that she might grow increasingly more able to know him in his divine nature. This is the kind of desire that can urge us on also, to see in Jesus the path to the "Kingdom of Heaven" Clare tried to describe for us, and the way to "eternal life."

The Child Francis embraced and Clare contemplated in awe was the same Lord they brought to life once again by their own lives. Entrance into the events of Christ's life was meant to arouse energy for the life-giving happenings of every day reality. Clare called us to this when she reiterated Francis' admonition to become Christ's mothers, sisters and spouses through the spirit-filled actions that witness to our absorption of his compassion, patience and suffering-love through contact with him in prayer. It is in this sense that Christ is the Way to oneness with himself and transcendent union with the Father.

These four elements of Francis' prayer are beautifully summarized in four consecutive paragraphs of Clare's last letter to Agnes. First, Clare instructs her concerning imitation of Jesus, then she recalls events in his life. Next, Clare refers to prophecies about Jesus, and finally, encourages Agnes to desire union with God with all her heart. All of these are framed, furthermore, within reference to Christ as Mirror of Wisdom. Could the mind of Bonaventure improve upon Clare's understanding of Franciscan contemplation?

Bonaventure's analysis of Francis' Prayer

Six years after Clare passed into the embrace of the "King of Glory," Saint Bonaventure set down his perception of Francis' mysticism according to theological principles, prayerfully studying the journey that had brought him to intimate union with God. He shaped his finding into a method meant to lead a disciple to God as Francis had been led. This form of prayer proved to be effective and has been used and taught by the most advanced spiritual masters and most intellectual of saints and mystics.

Bonaventure prescribed no hard and fast rules but, because the imagination can stimulate sentimentality in regard to Christ's humanness if left unchecked, he specified certain qualifications for prayer as he had observed them in Francis himself. In the scholastic language of Bonaventure, the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ must include, as it had for Francis, literal, moral, analogical and anagogical dimensions. This meant the one praying was to recall the historical event, draw out some moral quality to be learned from it, be mindful of divine revelation of Christ as God, and be prompted by desire for God.⁶

Bonaventure wrote two works that expressly teach this form of contemplation: *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, and *Lignum vitae*. In the first, *The Soul's Journey Into God*, he treats of all the forms by which God may be contemplated, ultimately taking the reader to Christ as the highest "door" to mystic union. In the seventh chapter he wrote:

Christ is the way and the door,
 Christ is the ladder and the vehicle,
 Like the mercy seat placed above the arc of God
 and the mystery hidden from eternity.
 Whoever turns his face fully to the mercy Seat
 and with faith, hope and love,
 devotion, admiration, exultation,
 appreciation, praise and joy,
 beholds him hanging upon the cross,
 such a one makes the Pasch, that is, the passover,
 with Christ.
 By the staff of the cross
 he passes over the Red Sea,
 where he will taste the hidden manna;
 and with Christ he rests in the tomb,
 as if dead to the world,
 but experiencing
 as far as it is possible in this wayfarer's state,
 what was said on the cross
 to the thief who adhered to Christ;
 Today you shall be with me in Paradise.⁷

After using all created things, and after explaining all the accepted paths to contemplation, Bonaventure takes us ultimately to Christ, the form of the divinity, as the highest concept through which we are let into Divine Darkness. Christ is seen in relation to the prophecies concerning the Messiah and the manner in which he fulfilled them perfectly. Here also, desire for God is shown to be the disposition that empowers us to leave everything else and turn all our affections toward him.

The careful manner in which he did this placed Francis' mysticism within the context of the traditional negative forms of mysticism. Bonaventure agreed with all these that from here on in we can let go of everything, but at the same time he pointed clearly to the necessity of using all material things to bring us to a deeper relationship to the One who made them, and is the Lord of Creation.

This is demonstrated in *The Major Life of Saint Francis*, where Bonaventure showed how all things had led Francis to mystical union, even though the God with whom he enjoyed this union was seen by him as far above all that had led him to it.

Later on, Bonaventure wrote an entire work on the contemplation of Christ: *Lignum Vitae*. He called it *The Tree of Life* because Christ is the Tree of life. In this book Bonaventure goes into greater detail on the literal and moral dimensions of contemplation, instructing the reader to paint in his mind a scene from the Gospel so that some truth about Christ

*The use of imagination is implied, the gaze
 of the spirit and affections towards the ob-
 ject loved until both are one.*

might be grasped more effectively and thus be brought into the practical dimension of daily life. He focused upon concrete details and then invited the reader to become an actor in the event. For example, in summarizing the scene of Christ's birth in Bonaventure's *Tree of Life*, we find:

1. The historical situation is described. It is the reign of Caesar Augustus at the time of the census. Joseph was taking Mary with him to Bethlehem.
2. The moral lesson is that Christ who was rich became poor as an example for us.
3. The analogical sense is briefly mentioned. The King of Peace like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber (cf. 1 Par. 22:9; Ps. 18:6) came forth from the virginal womb.
4. We are called to take our place with the shepherds and embrace the Child with all the love of our heart.

Bonaventure bids us enter the scene, take the child into our arms as Francis did, kiss his little feet, and sing with the angels: Glory to God in the highest! We are brought to the realization that this is God. We are summoned to look beyond the surface of the historical event to the redemption taking place. All other scenes in Christ's life are approached in this way. By entering into the event and allowing our feelings to emerge the lesson to be learned is more easily impressed upon our memory and we are more likely to put it into effect in our lives.

With the passing of Francis something had been started which was to strongly influence the development of prayer in the church. Clare lived and taught this new mysticism, Bonaventure refined and explained it, numberless are those who have come to know God because of it.

Poor Clares and Franciscan Prayer Tradition

Toward the end of thirteenth century an unknown Franciscan Friar of Tuscany wrote a book entitled: *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. Authorship had been attributed to Saint Bonaventure because of the similarity of its contents to his writings, especially those on the passion. There is little

doubt that much in the manuscript had been copied from his work. More recently Ubertino de Casale is considered to have been its author. In some of his proven works he mentioned Sister Cecilia, a Poor Clare of Tuscany, who taught him about the heights of contemplation. This work may well have been composed under her inspiration for it is dedicated to Saint Cecilia and was evidently written for Poor Clares. Saint Clare is mentioned and the entire contents are directed toward the life of a community of nuns living in poverty and humility.

These meditations are held to be the genuine fruit of authentic Franciscan sources and are a sound reflection of the spirituality of Saint Francis and the subsequent teachings of Saints Clare and Bonaventure. They draw the reader to make vivid contact with Jesus, re-create his life, imitate him, and desire to love him with ever increasing ardor.

Material has been borrowed quite freely from them. Rudolf of Saxony used sections when he wrote: *The Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, a book that radically altered the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola as he lay recuperating from an injury received in battle. Its influence may be seen in the *Spiritual Exercises* he composed, although early followers explained them as intellectual exercises rather than what Ignatius intended them to be: an experience of Jesus in the Franciscan tradition.

Little else is known about this large volume of anonymous meditations except that it served to sustain the tradition of contemplation handed down to us. Even now it offers insights into the employment of imagination in the prayer of early Friars and Clares. Publication has not ceased since its first extravagantly illuminated manuscript. There are about two hundred varieties of these in existence with ancient printed copies as well as contemporary editions available in various languages.

Far less widely known are the pages, and volumes even, written by Poor Clares in the form of journals, spiritual diaries, or instructions to their communities. These contain evidence of loving relationship with Jesus, evidence that they had indeed tasted and experienced what "God has kept from the beginning for those who love him." (3rd letter) In their statements implying that they had seen Jesus or heard him speak, we can recognize something of the extent of their concentration upon him, their desire for union with the Godhead, and the particular form their religious experience assumed, the women who wrote offer testimony of a spiritual life that grew stronger while they strove to be with Jesus, especially in his sufferings and death on the cross.

The earlier sources of Poor Clare spirituality are, of course, the letters, Rule, and Testament of Saint Clare.⁸ Apart from these there is only the letter to Clare from her sister Agnes, and the work of Agnes of Harcourt

on Isabella of France. There appears to be little more from the thirteenth century, and in the fourteenth there are actually none that we know of. But the "Springtime of the Franciscan Order" saw a blossoming of writers in the order of Saint Clare, for there were a number of them in the fifteenth century. Foremost among them were Saint Catherine of Bologna, Blessed Eustochia Calafato, and Blessed Battista Varano.

Catherine wrote long conferences for her sisters and many songs and poems. Her contemplation of Christ filled her with an amazement that moved her to exclaim: "Ah, let us contemplate this folly of God."⁹ Another of the outstanding phrases emphasizing the centrality of Christ in her prayer was that "the greatest happiness is — above all — to be with Christ."¹⁰

In her longer works, like *The Seven Arms of the Spiritual Combat*, Catherine advises her readers to adhere to Christ, telling them, in the fourth chapter, that they should always set before the eyes of their understanding the presence of the humanity of Jesus, especially in his sufferings, adding that without this everything else we might do is of little help in the spiritual life.

Blessed Eustochia wrote a book on contemplation of the passion of Christ, among other works. In Blessed Battista we find moving passages by one who was present to the interior agony of Jesus more than to his physical sufferings. She takes us more deeply into Christ and is considered a forerunner of devotion to the Sacred Heart. She wrote: "How sweet and delightful are thy works in the soul which affectionately reposes in the heart of thy crucified humanity, where the fullness of thy Godhead corporally dwells."¹¹ And in another place:

I passed the whole time of my prayer in meditating on the passion of Christ and did not wish to think or meditate on anything else: and I used the whole endeavor of my mind to enter into the most bitter sea of the mental suffering of the heart of Jesus . . .¹²

Battista assures us that embracing the Crucified is the surest and shortest way and the one requiring the least effort for growing in union with God.

Blessed Julia of Milan, in the sixteenth century, used a literary tool in her writings; expressing her thoughts as if they were Mary's thoughts about Jesus. Mother Charitas Pirkheimer, also in the sixteenth century wrote, among her other works, a book of prayers addressed to Christ.

There were eight writers in the Order of Saint Clare in the seventeenth century, but here the mention of Venerable Clare Isabella Fornari who penned numerous poetry on the contemplation of Christ, will suffice.

Saint Veronica Giuliani leads the Clare-writers of the eighteenth century with her volumes on contemplation of Christ, particularly on immersion in his sufferings. In his presence she wrote: "He, with that arm which he removed from the cross, put his arm around my neck, and he brought my mouth to his pierced side... while he imparted to me knowledge of his infinite love..."¹³ There is a section on her interior castle among her fourteen books; an example of the richness that has yet to be appreciated in the English language.

Blessed Mary Magdalen Martinengo expressed her meditations on the mysteries of Christ. Her conciseness would appeal to us today, for she summed up a lengthy conference delivered to her sisters by saying: "This is the point, sisters: Look and imitate."¹⁴

The nineteenth century overflows with Clares who left some form of writings. Sister Agnes Sorazu offers an explanation of why Franciscans center upon Jesus in his human condition.

After they have followed him in the course of their mortal life, for a relatively long period, and have succeeded in assimilating his virtues... Jesus will lead them into the palace of contemplation of his divine nature, to associate them with his glorious life, and have them graze in the savoury and ineffable pastures of the divine perfections...¹⁵

All of these brief excerpts bring us to one most pertinent to the topic of religious experience as it is addressed in this paper: that we can be diverted to practices and techniques that are secondary or worse, and deprive ourselves of the help we could have had from the prayer of communion with Christ in his mysteries and risen presence. This "theocentricity in Christ" is the most exact definition of the spirituality of the Order of Saint Clare.¹⁶

Contemporary Developments

The benefits reaped from imaginative prayer are not relegated to the Middle Ages. Francis' concentration upon Christ and contemplation of the events of his earthly life have been the subject of special study on the part of Ewert H. Cousins, Professor of Fordham University, who sees in it the "mysticism of the historical event," wherein one recalls an event from the past and enters into it in order to draw out its spiritual energy.¹⁷

The balance afforded by this method is recognized today by the Jesuits who are stressing the place of imagination in the *Spiritual Exercises* composed by their founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola.¹⁸ Contemporary techniques are being used along with Ignatian contemplation as aids to

prayer. In all of this, Bonaventure is duly cited as its source and reference is made to the book that bore his tradition, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. Recent articles still quote from its prologue:

If you wish to gain fruit from this book, you need to let yourself witness the Lord's words and deeds just as if you heard them with your ears and saw them with your eyes... putting aside any concern or trouble.¹⁹

"Kything" is being revived today, too, a prayer in which one tries to be with another person in a prayerful manner so as to draw energy from their strengths. This person might be Christ, or another holy person, living or deceased, to whom we are attracted, or someone who influenced us, or in whom we see a quality we ourselves are in need of. Imagination is used to make these persons accessible to us.²⁰

Similarly, psychologists employ this imaginative approach to advantage by utilizing it to arouse the latent inner energies of their clients so that the world can become for them something they can take hold of. For these professional people it is a technique that brings the unseen realities of life to consciousness; for Christians it can be nourishment for the life of the spirit.

Conclusion

The Eucharistic sacrifice is a model for the contemplation considered in this study. Two thousand years after Jesus shared a final meal with his apostles, we arrange a table with bread and wine and enter into this historical event again and again. We recall the scriptures foretelling the divinity of Jesus. Having entered into this act of remembering and reliving his final expression of love we are energized to imitate his loving sacrifice more than if we merely called it to mind.

Our founders lived this kind of relationship with Jesus, and have invited us into this same prayerfulness that is the beginning and end of all religious experience.

We transcend our humanness not by setting aside our faculties but by re-directing them toward an experience of the presence, the strengths, and the love of Jesus, so that we might assume something of the proportions of his spirit. The spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of God. As we know the first more fully, we will, in that same measure, be prepared to transcend it for a new kind of knowledge of a Reality whose presence, strengths, and love can never be imagined.

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- ⁴Ibid., p. 172-173.
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- ⁹Ms. Devozione Lodi et altre diverse cose spirituali, bk. 3, n.l., f. 47 r., in Lainati, II, pp. 927 - 929.
- ¹⁰Specchio di illuminazione, in Lainati, Intro., p. 21.
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St. Francis and St. Clare, and the Custody of the Eucharist

FR. DAVID TEMPLE. O.F.M.

St. Francis in his Testament and in his Letters frequently expressed concern over the places in which the Eucharist is kept and over the manner in which the body and blood of the Lord is reserved.

The strong feeling and the devotion of St. Clare are described in Celano's Legend of St. Clare. In that biography in n. 28 Celano recalls the long illness of St. Clare and he relates that during this she was often confined to bed where she had herself propped up so that she could spin flaxen thread which she wove into cloth so that she might make more than fifty pairs of corporals for the churches about Assisi.

Francis and Clare were dealing with conditions and they were operating in times when the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament was not yet so firmly regulated as would later be provided by the Council of Trent. The Fourth Lateran Council was issuing some canons which would bring about an improvement in the care of the Eucharist. Among these canons the requirement that the hosts always be kept in a well constructed receptacle and under lock and key was most important.

In order to appreciate properly the urgent pleadings of St. Francis and the painstaking work of St. Clare, it is necessary to recall the quite different conditions of the times with regard to the altar, some of the appurtenances of the altar like the antependium, the place or places where the Eucharist was reserved, and the sacred vessels.

The Altar. Altars were well established in the early Middle Ages. The most common form was the so-called block altar. This was set on a firm foundation to which it was connected with massive blocks. St. Francis generally chose as his places of solitude a site where a small church was clearly established, as at the Speco S'Urbano. At La Verna and at the

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Carcedi St. Francis and his brothers built small churches with firm altars. Francis at one hermitage made a frontal for the altar.

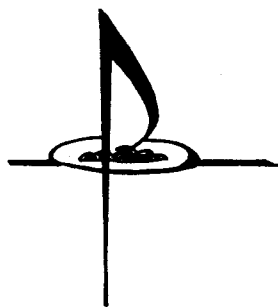
Antependium or Frontal. Fr. Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., in his classic work on the writing of St. Francis includes as an authentic work the Exhortation to the praise of God which was on the frontal of the altar at the hermitage of Cesi. Marianus of Florence said that he saw the text and that he copied it and this version passed on to Wadding. Essentially the same text is given in the 15th Century Manuscript of Cod. VI, p. 33, of the National Library of Naples. This manuscript states: "These praises were on a kind of tablet or panel of the altar in the chapel of St. Francis in the small chapel of the hermitage (of Cesi)... and St. Francis is said to have placed them there with his own hand." Since there were also flowers and birds depicted on the panel (tabula), there is a problem in making out how St. Francis accomplished this production. If it were done on masonry, the difficulty would seem, to be even greater. But during the early Middle Ages it became customary to cover the front of altars with antependia or frontals of metal, wood or stone sculpted with Christian symbols. We can more easily understand how Francis could have done a wooden panel. While we are quite sure of the words of praise done by St. Francis, we would be further delighted if there has also come down to us the flowers and the birds which he carved or painted.

Sacred Vessels. Both St. Francis and St. Clare were concerned about the sacred vessels. Of this we see some indication in the chalice preserved at Santa Chiara. Francis used this chalice at a Solemn High Mass at which he was deacon. Until the eighth century chalices were made of metal, glass, wood or even horn, but gradually they came to be made exclusively of precious metal. This caused no difficulty for St. Francis or St. Clare from the point of poverty because the chalice was destined for divine service. Just at the time of Francis chalices which had been ovoid in shape became much more elongated.

The objects used to hold the sacred hosts had in the previous history of the church been called *sacellum* (little bag), or *capsa* (box), or *arca* (chest). All these were somewhat different from the *ciborium* which made its appearance in the later Middle Ages. The receptacles in use before the appearance of the ciborium were made of precious or base metals, wood, ivory, and even cork. In shape they were sometimes boxes or round containers and sometimes they were shaped like doves. St. Clare bore such a receptacle when she faced the Saracens in 1240. Clearly on that occasion St. Clare did not carry a monstrance, because the monstrance did not appear until the later Middle Ages. It was a result of the growth of eucharistic piety in the thirteenth century and its inception was in

some manner inspired by the elevation of the host in the canon of the Mass. The establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi was also a contributing factor. It appears that in the beginning of the development of the monstrance reliquaries were fitted with a lunette to hold the host. By the later Middle Ages, monstrances had developed into several distinctive types in the forms of crosses discs and towers. But St. Clare bore one of the box-like receptacles which antedated the ciborium or the monstrance. It is not possible to indicate its exact shape because there were various types some of which were also round.

The Place. St. Francis and St. Clare were concerned about the place where the sacred hosts were kept. In early Christian times the consecrated bread was sometimes kept by the faithful in their homes. Later, reservation was in the sacristy or in some other place, but this was not always well chosen. Francis in his Testament desired that the sacred species be kept in a precious place. Clare reserved the Eucharist at San Damiano in the chapel of Sancta Maria which she developed and which, at her urgent request, was consecrated by seven bishops. She preserved the Eucharist in the wall cabinet which still remains at San Damiano. Lateran IV would be quite precise about the place where the Eucharist should be kept. Much later the Council of Trent would establish very definite and strict norms. But in the early Middle Ages St. Francis and St. Clare were making provisions as the need of the times required and they became forerunners in respect and reverence for the Eucharist and in great care for the proper reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.



Scented Kerchiefs

A lady's breast is empty,
her kerchief on another lance
and no second chance
will be offered you. The ready
armoured charger stands
proud fourteen hands.

Cradled in the bread palm
of the Umbrian plain the stones
of Damiano are your armour;
with unmailed hands
you build as horns are blown

to sound the maelstrom of battle
calling youth to rattle
their implements of war and death
garlanded with scented kerchiefs
as promises of faithful honour.

Swords bite into the horse's armour,
as clashing steel sings in the clamour
of fiercely wasted breath:
you place another stone
with the sure mortar of belief
that the real battle is not won

until the lances and swords
remain unstained, and kerchiefs
garland the beautiful breast
not the instruments of war and death.

Séamus Mulholland, O.F.M.

Two Aspects of Franciscan Celibacy

SR. RITA MARIE HICKEY, O.S.C.,

I. Is there a Franciscan viewpoint on the vow of chastity?

Everybody knows that we Franciscans are especially concerned with the vow of poverty and historically associated with it. So too, the Jesuits are noted for their emphasis on the vow of obedience. But for many years we have thought of the vow of chastity as something all religious "did" and thought of in much the same way. When it came to chastity most religious, regardless of community, resorted to the same manuals on the vows, catechisms and texts on moral theology for instruction during formation. It was pretty much the same for everybody. Then, when on-going formation became more common, instruction and information on chastity often became a matter simply of biology and/or psychology. In reaction to an untheological and sentimental "Bride of Christ" image the vow sometimes became detached from our spirituality and community charism and became a functional value, often much in need of explanation and defense in the sexual climate of our world. And aside from the fact that it "freed one for the kingdom" its meaning as witness was often questioned.

But for most religious the vow of chastity, intuitively at least, remained central to both their original call and the living out of their vocation. The uniqueness of the relationship it established with Christ was the core of their life-style. In spite of the fact that they rejected the flowery language and restrictive climate of the past, in spite of the fact that they were uncomfortable with the idea of the "higher life" metaphor and the impli-

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cation that the rest of the world wasn't chaste, at the deepest heart of hearts it remained the anchor of their religious lives.

In this spirit and in the spirit in which the Church asks us to examine our present ministry and spirituality in light of our roots, we can ask the question: Is there a Franciscan viewpoint on the vow of chastity? One will find that this leads to other questions. In the Franciscan family there are married and single people as well as clerics and religious. Aren't they all called to chastity? Isn't it a witness they are all called to live? If fraternity and poverty are characteristic Franciscan virtues, how does chastity "fit in" with this? Also, Franciscans today feel a special call to peace and justice, to liberation, and they feel that this call is faithful to their unique charism and heritage. Is there any connection between this call and chastity? And lastly, but very importantly, can we find in the lives and writings of Francis and Clare a real Franciscan spirituality of chastity as a positive and formative value?

The first problem in this quest may be the word *chastity* itself. May we opt in favor of the expression "vowed celibacy"? (Sometimes publically vowed celibacy even seems more appropriate.) After all, all Christians are called to lives of chastity, in fact to a life-long commitment to chastity. Obviously there are a variety of ways in which this commitment can and should be lived out. Married life and single life are no less chaste than religious life or priestly life. Neither Francis nor Clare ever hesitated to use the call to a spousal relationship with Christ as the vocation of all Christians, (and therefore all Franciscans) married, single celibate, male or female, religious or cleric or lay.

The witness of each state in life is unique and necessary for the People of God on earth. But in eternity all souls will find their fulfillment in the realization of their individual union with Christ, the spouse, their goal. It is meaningless to talk of higher callings, Christ calls everyone to completeness. There is no state of life which is merely tolerated in the Church. They are all essential in the true sense of the word. The married Christian witnesses to the reality of the union of Christ with his Church. This is an ancient, scriptural teaching, but one that seems to be lost in the rhetoric about chastity. Almost as old and venerable is the teaching that celibacy for the sake of the kingdom is akin to martyrdom because it witnesses to the fact that the fulfillment of this union comes only in eternity, that we have not here a lasting city. And today, when the forces of evil seem to be massed against the value of the individual, the personal worth of each man and woman, aside from their functional value to society, we are seeing a new theology of the single life beginning to evolve.

And so we must return to our question and rephrase it. Is there a

Franciscan viewpoint on the special witness of the life of vowed celibacy and in what sense is it viable and positive today?

To begin at the beginning . . . Is there any way to understand Saint Francis or Saint Clare except as people who were in love with the Son of God made man? Is there any way to understand their lives except as the living out of that love? Especially in Clare, but in Francis also, this love is satisfied only with the image of the soul as spouse. As united in love with the beloved. And it would be a mistake to limit this relationship as appropriate only to Clare because she is a woman. That was the mistake made by so much of the sentimental bridal imagery of the recent past which is now being rejected. All human beings possess both masculine and feminine characteristics, and in a balanced and mature person these elements are in perfect harmony. Modern psychology calls this type of personality androgynous. The characteristics which we call masculine and feminine are necessary to both men and women in living their lives fully. A personality in which one set of characteristics overrides and stunts the other is not a healthy personality.

In their spousal relationship with Jesus this balance is evident in both Clare and Francis. Francis, like St. John of the Cross who specifically cites Francis as an example, speaks of his relationship with Christ in feminine terms. But this gentleness, sensitivity, service is in no way unmanly. It is a sign of freedom and completeness, of maturity. Neither is Clare unwomanly when she characterizes her relationship in more masculine terms of seizing and laying hold of the beloved, when she emphasizes the freedom with which the beloved is chosen. Both achieve in their spousal union with Christ the development of the human personality which should happen in a good marriage. Francis sees himself mirrored in the loved one in the complementary feminine image, while Clare feels the strength of the masculine potential of her completely developed self called forth. Each is the more true masculine or feminine self in the union.

But the spousal union is not just or primarily one of receiving. It is first one of complete self-gift. And so the celibate, self-gift of Francis and Clare is the perfect example of Franciscan poverty. Nothing is retained, sought or appropriated for self. Nothing is looked for outside the Beloved. It is the ultimate poverty, not even to seek to possess one's self, except in the Beloved. Except as one is returned to one's self in love. One learns to take only what the Beloved gives and to give whatever and however the Beloved asks. What is necessary in life becomes very simple. There is little or nothing to threaten or to defend. Such poverty, born of the security of love, springs into true freedom and liberation. From such

vulnerability comes the ability to risk all, to be at peace with all the brothers and sisters.

Out of the poverty of celibate consecration to Christ comes the "perfect love that casts out all fear." With nothing to lose, protect or defend, with complete security in the acceptance of the Beloved there comes the freedom and the courage to face our contemporary "Sultans" and "Saracens." And not only to confront them, but to challenge them and to love them.

It would seem, in fact, that the special spousal union which is the reason for vowed celibacy was for Francis and Clare the root of all that we have come to look upon as Franciscan spirituality. Their union with Christ in love was the first, formative principle of the poverty and fraternity which calls us today to take stand for liberation, for peace and justice. For this union which makes us Christ's and Christ ours is the source of our natural and supernatural fulfillment, the reason for our life-style, the motive of our personal and corporate witness.

And so we can say yes to the question we posed for ourselves. Yes, there is a Franciscan viewpoint on the special witness of a life of vowed celibacy and it is viable and positive today. As people following the Gospel Way of Francis and Clare in celibate witness we find our fulfillment in Christ and in Him we find the challenge and the strength to seek only His Kingdom, in time and in eternity.

2. Franciscan community (fraternity), vowed celibacy and human fulfillment

For obvious reasons I am inclined to use the term Franciscan community or Franciscan companionship instead of fraternity. But whatever the term, what I mean is that free union of brothers and sisters who are drawn together and held together by the love of God. A special love. The love that in this world and in time brings us into a spousal relationship with Christ that is to be fulfilled only in eternity.

But in forgoing marriage and a spousal union with another human being the celibate loses neither the need or the right of fulfillment as a sexed person nor the need for human companionship. God who said that it was not good for us to be alone does not, could not, ask for the gift of a stunted human development. As the Fathers said, "The glory of God is man fully alive." In celibacy we accept Christ's invitation to find our fulfillment in the spousal gift of ourselves to Him and in His gift of Himself to us in spousal love.

Francis and Clare saw clearly that this was a union with the INCARNATE Son of God. And they both used the spousal image to explain it.

Very much realists, neither would have been satisfied with the piety of later times that spoke of this life-style as angelic. Angels cannot be united to spouses as can incarnate beings. Francis and Clare never tried to deny their nature or to deny the implications of the incarnation in their own lives.

"As a poor virgin embrace the poor Christ," Clare counseled her disciple and friend Agnes of Prague. Angels cannot embrace nor be embraced, nor do they have any need of embraces. Human beings, incarnate beings do. Why did Francis embrace the leper? He was repelled by him, by his leprosy. What was it that drew Francis into that embrace? It was the leper's humanity, the humanity which he shared with the incarnate Christ whom Francis longed to embrace. For Francis and Clare the Incarnation was not abstract theology to which the mind was called to assent. The Incarnation was the reality which challenged them constantly in humanity.

In considering Franciscan community and the celibate life-style looking at Mary, "the virgin made Church," as Francis called her, can be very helpful. Mary is the distilled essence of salvation history, of God's plan for us. If Mary had been an angel she would have been of no use in God's plan. It is in herself as a human being, body and soul that she can respond to God. And he does not ask her to be less human, but to surrender her humanity to Him so that he can fulfill it.

He comes to Mary in respectful acceptance of the freedom which He had given her, which was essential to her nature. God asks her to allow Him to embrace her, to take her for His own and to make her fruitful. And when Mary returns God's embrace the Incarnation takes place. God initiates the call, and when Mary freely responds she is fulfilled, body and soul, in that union. "He who would lose his life would save it." This is the first reason for which Francis calls her "Church." She is Church because she is both one with God and the means by which God dwells with His people. In Mary, God is present and active and at one with His people, not only in sign, but in reality. The "virgin who was made Church" is like the Church, both the sign of the reality and the reality itself.

For Francis and Clare such self-gift as Mary was able to make, as they made, was itself a gift. It could only be made in freedom and in response to the freely given gift of God's love. And this brings us to the second reason that Francis had for seeing Mary as "Church." The first effect of this gifted union was fulfillment, both of God's desire to be united to His people and of Mary's need to be fulfilled as a human being. This is another thing that always happens when such a union is established between God and humanity.

It happened to Mary; it happened to Francis and Clare. We will find that it also happens to us. What was the first thing that Mary did after

Christ was conceived? Did she retreat into solitude? Not at all! She was immediately concerned about the needs of others, served them, and drew them into her own song of praise and love. Did not union with their beloved Jesus have the same effect on Francis and Clare? The celibate, filled with Christ, finds himself or herself at the heart of God's people. The first effect of fruitful celibacy is community.

This is the second reason why Francis saw Mary as Church. In her union with Christ she was united with all people who are in Christ. Mary is the sign and reality of the Church as the action of God uniting all the people he wishes to save and fulfill. So too are Francis and Clare who found themselves surrounded with brothers and sisters. So too with us.

The Franciscan life-style, characterized as it is by a commitment to community, grows out of a fruitful spousal union with Christ. We can easily picture Francis and Clare saying to us with Jesus, "Behold your Mother," and counselling us to be like her, virgins that are made Church. Calling us by our celibate commitment, lived out in community, to be both the sign and the reality of God's Incarnate love of all the people to each other and to the world.

Book Review

Clare Among Her Sisters. By Rene Charles Dhont, O.F.M. Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, New York, 1987. Pp. xi - 174. Paper, \$9.00 plus postage.

Reviewed by Sr. Frances Ann Thom, O.S.F., Parish Minister — St. Mary's Church, Baldwinville, NY 13207.

Clare's life as written by Rene Dhont follows so closely the life of Francis that Francis' name could be substituted almost everywhere for Clare's. But, the author makes fine distinctions when Clare acts totally as a feminine counterpart wherein she must interpret for her community and for herself that which Francis can freely do with his brothers outside of cloistered walls. Her inven-

tiveness and creativity in imbibing Francis' spirit of freedom, poverty and joy within cloistered walls makes her life and the lives of her sisters such an exciting adventure. All the elements of growth, of impressionism, of idealism and of hero-worship of an eighteen year old girl are manifested in the author's treatment of Clare in her endeavors to become the faithful disciple of Francis, but the human love, the normal attraction is elevated beyond the human wherein the magnetism of both Francis and Clare draws vast numbers of other disciples. Francis, himself was awed and comforted by the knowledge that the Poor ladies would guard his Gospel message among the people of God. Each of them knew the pitfalls of life and it was just this knowledge which

strengthened them in their holy vocations. Dhont makes us more aware that Francis and Clare knew Christ as a real person and this experience of Christ was gleaned from many hours of mental prayer for which there were no prescribed times since Clare knew that this type of prayer was an affair of the heart and she wished her sisters to be always in communion with Christ. There was no attachment to any particular form of prayer, however; Clare saw to it that her sisters received an adequate amount of spiritual food by scheduling good preachers.

The author stresses Clare's Trinitarian devotion, including the Eucharist, the passion, Christ-centeredness and praise of the Father. She taught mainly by her own example, not in a pietistic and showy manner, but in her extreme simplicity and sincerity. Likewise, Clare's oneness with the church is portrayed by her unusual devotion to the Eucharist during a time in the Church when the Pope was encouraging a Eucharistic crusade. As she was made aware of the advance of the Saracens

on the monastery and the town, Clare's immediate response is to have recourse to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The key, however, to the life of Clare and her sisters is found on p. 30:

Clare did not want to see her Sisters bound by the fetters of law. Observances are without value unless they are motivated by attachment to Jesus Christ. Their lives were to develop entirely in the dynamism of love, far from legalism, formalism and pharisaism. Their lives were to be a great adventure of love.

Rene Dhont concludes this very fine piece of writing with four appendices; one explains the problem of Rules which were given to the Poor Ladies; second, is an explanation of Clare's attitude toward suffering; third, the type of chant used in the Liturgy of the Hours and fourth, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is an unusually precise, concise and well-written study of Clare and her sisters as they journeyed together in the shadow of Francis.



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