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JULY - AUGUST, 1989

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

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis	LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis
2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis	LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis
3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles	LP: Legend of Perugia
CL: Legend of Saint Clare	L3S: Legend of the Three Companions
CP: Process of Saint Clare	SC: Sacrum commercium
Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis	SP: Mirror of Perfection
Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).	
AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).	

Letter of St. Bonaventure to the Poor Clares of Assisi (1259)*

In Christ Jesus to the beloved daughters, the Abbess of the Poor Ladies of Assisi of the Monastery of St. Clare, and to all the Sisters of the Monastery, Friar Bonaventure, the Minister General and servant of the Order of Friars Minor, health and the grace to follow the Lamb wherever He goes with the most joyful virgins who are prepared for the wedding of the Lamb!

Beloved daughters in the Lord, I have recently come to understand through our very dear Brother Leo, who was the companion of the holy father during his life, how as spouses of the eternal King you strive to serve in all purity the poor Christ crucified. This has given me a very great dedication and I wish to urge you that you follow in the footprints of your most blessed Mother, who was taught by the Holy Spirit through the medium of the little poor man St. Francis. Thus you will follow with great care in the way of all her virtues and you will desire "to have nothing else under heaven" except what this Mother taught. It was the point of all her teaching that you desire Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). When you go forth in pursuit of the fragrance of His blood, dear daughters, as your Mother went forth, you will lay hold of the mirror of poverty with great valor. You will grasp the example of humility, the shield of patience and the title of obedience. In this manner, afire with divine love, you will give your heart entirely to Him who on the cross offered His heart to God the Father. You will be clothed with the light of the example of your Mother and you will, with all sweetness, be set aflame with everlasting desires, spreading the fragrance of all virtues. So may you be for

This letter is found in the Opera Omnia of St. Bonaventure, Volume 8, 473b-474. It is presented here in translation from the Latin by David Temple, O.F.M., member of the Editorial Board of THE CORD

Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the spouse of prudent virgins, a true fragrance for those who are being saved and for those who are not (II Cor. 2:15)!

So, with dispositions that endure, be on the alert! Stand bright with the spirit of devotion, so that, when the shout goes up that the bridegroom has come, you may go forth in all fidelity to meet Him! The lamps of your souls will be filled with the oil of charity and joy so that, when the foolish virgins are shut out, you may enter with Him to the nuptials of eternal joy. There Christ invites His spouses to recline at table with the angels and the elect. And He will pass in and out to serve them the bread of life and the flesh of the Lamb that has been slain and the fish that has been roasted on the cross, prepared with the fire of love with which He has loved you so ardently. And He will give you to drink of this wine, and those who are most dear to Him are inebriated with a marvelous sobriety. There are times when they enjoy great but hidden measure of sweetness which is reserved for those who fear Him. Without ceasing they look upon Him who is fairer in beauty, not only beyond all the sons of man, but also for surpassing the thousands of angels. Indeed, the angels desire to look upon Him who is the brightness of eternal light and the splendor of the glory of paradise.

It is to Him, dearest daughters, that you cling always and forever as to our highest good. And, when you see fit, I beg you to commend me, a sinner, to His clemency, which is so great that we cannot fully say what it is. I ask you to beg insistently that, by his mercy, I may so direct the course of my steps, for the glory and honor of His wondrous name and for the salvation of the little flock of Christ which has been committed to me. □



Pilgrims in the World, Close to God's People, Inspired by Clare

FR. DARIO PILI, O.F.M.

The aim of this outline of a reflection is to consider how nuns dedicated to contemplation as followers of our Mother Saint Clare, the little plant of Saint Francis, can share in the lives, the hopes and the sufferings of mankind.

These comments are born out of the conviction that, in the very choice of a life as distinctive as the contemplative life, the followers of Saint Francis must, like him, experience a deep and positive love for God's people. They, too, must take up the "cross" of humanity.

The Decree "Perfectae caritatis" n. 7, which deals with institutes totally dedicated to contemplation, states that "the members of these institutes are concerned with God alone."

Whatever can it mean to be concerned with God alone?

So that this "concern with God alone" may not be used as an excuse for any kind of laziness, mental or otherwise, the expression and its purport need to be rightly understood.

It means to be concerned with God as contemplatives, as persons alive to his mystery, and therefore "following him in his movement." The great "movement" of God was and is Christ — so that in contemplating Christ, looking at him, listening to him, we contemplate God. But the "movement" of God is also history — this happening, this humanity, this person!

This article, translated from the Italian by Sister Agnes van Baer, O.S.C., first appeared in Forma Sororum Volume 24, 1987, 16 - 29. The author, Fr. Dario Pili, O.F.M., is stationed at the General House of the Order of Friars Minor. He serves as secretary for matters dealing with Poor Clare Nuns.

And so, what is the "screen" on which we can contemplate (be concerned with) God? Surely it is the word of God, the Bible.

The Bible is the "communication" of God to man. To comprehend it we must listen to it from the beginning, follow it closely, even through its most difficult passages, right to the very end: from the first word of the book of Genesis to the last word of the Apocalypse. Only through a close familiarity with Sacred Scripture can we come to know God. Studying the Old Testament in the light of the New, we can pick out the footprints of God.

A good preparation is necessary in order to take in all its meaning; but even the most simple person can read the whole Bible in such a way as to make it her own. To devote time to reading the Bible, to study it and meditate on it is the delightful activity of the person totally dedicated to contemplation.

But is the Bible the only source of the word of God? Yes, if by other sources we mean alternative or rival ones. But if, on the other hand, we refer to intermediary sources or those that flow from that one Source, then we can say that the "movements" of God which help us to know him are to be recognized also in that true word of God which is history in its day-by-day unfolding.

So, just as we pose the question of a "spiritual" reading of the Bible, we pose the same question of a "spiritual" reading of history and of each single day: the reading of a contemplative, contemplative reading directed towards knowledge (and adoration) of God, not "recreational" reading.

This leads to the question of the relationship between *contemplation and information*. Should information within the monastery (understood as a positive and prudent use of the means of social communication) be seen simply as a concession to "relaxation," as a concern not to appear completely out of touch, or would it be seen rather as a real sharing in the mystery of God and the mystery of humanity in so far as the latter is the "movement" through which God makes himself known?

Precisely from a desire to be concerned with God alone, the contemplative will surely be compelled by love to be seriously concerned about people: in order to learn to contemplate God alone, but on the wide screen (audio and visual) of his revelation, and in order to make sure that the fruit of this activity of contemplation (i. e., wisdom, a sense of God and a sense of history, present and future) is *firmly grounded in reality*.

The same n. 7 of "Perfectae caritatis" which unreservedly acclaims the choice of Institutes totally dedicated to contemplation also states quite forcefully that their way of life should be revised in accordance with the aforesaid principles and criteria of up-to-date renewal, without detri-

ment to their withdrawal from the world and the essential practices of the contemplative life.

Obviously then, there are some fixed points (the sign of "separation from the world and the safeguarding of *the essential practices of the contemplative life*"); but the perspectives of renewal can be wide open.

In the service of contemplation

This dedicated concern with God alone is to be lived out within certain conditions which are widely known and which "Perfectae caritatis" specifies as solitude, constant prayer, and willing (Latin "alacer") penance. These are "condition," "environment," even "instruments"; but they are not contemplation.."

a. What can be the nature of this "solitude" which, on the face of it, can hardly be a real value? For God said: "It is not good that man should be alone!" And besides, even within monasteries no one may go her own way apart from the community!

Therefore, a cult of solitude or a spirituality of solitude arising from or favouring a certain tendency to introversion, or fostering a dubious preference for individualism, could not be a genuine monastic spirituality nor a genuine contemplative spirituality. A contemplative living in community who has chosen to share her life with her sisters does not have the option of being introverted, individualistic or anti-social.

This solitude (again, an instrument and environment for contemplation) is something much deeper. It is a returning to one's own heart, to one's own conscience where God is always waiting. Oneself and God; and that is enough. This solitude can also be called Desert. Indeed, it is just this solitude that we sometimes do refer to as Desert, not without a certain ambiguity. It does, however, afford us the opportunity of taking stock of ourselves, of examining our daily lives in relation to God and in his presence.

But what actually is a desert? It is a vast and lonely expanse, fascinating to behold, but inhospitable and risky to enter. Because in the desert there are no tracks and even our footsteps disappear if a gust of wind comes up, we are made aware of our littleness, of our inability to help ourselves. It is only God who saves us.

Certainly from this experience of solitude stems the need for a "set of norms" to coordinate the life of a monastery. The monastery will never be the village square at the time when people go walking. But neither

will solitude ever be reduced to a fixed set of norms regulating a so-called "well ordered" monastery.

b. Another "condition" for a life of contemplation is *silence*. And silence would certainly be one of the moments of this desert-solitude. It is the moment of listening: What is God saying? What is he saying to me? How does God see this problem? One's being becomes absorbed in thought and in listening—and this beyond ordinary human mediation. For contemplation goes beyond study, beyond exegesis, even beyond what we call "spiritual reading." Silence—for the purpose of listening—is that moment in which God has "led you into the desert," and "speaks to your heart"; and he will not necessarily say to you what he has said to the author of your favorite book.

Just as in the case of solitude, the demands of silence call for an appropriate set of norms. But we also need to keep in mind that a monastery in which solitude and silence were only norms, or principally norms and hardly contemplation (or desert-listening) would run the risk of creating a cold and alienating atmosphere. No hour of the day or night has the right to do violence to the spirit by damaging the psyche. Contemplation is *concerned with God*; therefore, it means *attention* to him, and should not become a dangerous *vacuum*.

c. Should "*constant prayer*" also be considered as a condition, a setting and instrument for contemplation? More accurately, it can and should be a *guida* to contemplation and a moment of contemplation. As we have seen, "*Perfectae caritatis*," referring to institutes totally dedicated to contemplation, speaks explicitly of constant prayer as one of the essential characteristics that demand fidelity. This constant prayer certainly includes specific acts of prayer—Eucharistic liturgy and liturgy of the Hours—which set the rhythm of the day. But these acts or actions do not of themselves define or constitute or express a contemplative life. They do if they actually *do*; they express it if they actually *express* it.

Contemplation will always be "desert-listening." Prayer is continually being deepened and validated by its relation to contemplation if we really want rightly to be called *contemplatives*. That does not in any way mean that "the desert" is incompatible with praying, or that listening is incompatible with the singing or speaking of "the word." But the common mistake of seeing a value in a great accumulation of "prayers," without any inner reality of contemplation, should be avoided.

The obligation highlighted by this consideration is obvious, and concerns the way of praying, of chanting the psalms, of singing. It concerns instruction in how to read the Bible; familiarity with and assimilation of the psalms; the right use of time; overall, in a proper ordering of commitments

in terms of priority in deference to the contemplative dimension of the life of the monastery. Such an evaluation could perhaps lead to interesting, even surprising conclusions: a monastery unreservedly open to the life of contemplation would inevitably also be a monastery rich in material poverty. For clearly there is no contemplation without poverty.

d. The final condition for a truly contemplative journey is "*willing penance*." The spirit and the forms of penance are clearly enunciated in the apostolic constitution "*Paenitemini*" (Paul VI; 17.11.1966). What is implied is an all-inclusive asceticism which involves an effective sharing in the life and the sufferings of Christ, and at the same time brings about a steady growth to maturity measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ. Also implied is a physical asceticism that fills the self for its journey; and this, of course, includes external facts of penance.

But it can happen that penance becomes isolated from real life; that is, one can become so caught up in acts of penance as to evade the real challenges of life: life is in its daily unfolding, life as relationship, as diligence, as work. Life according to the spirit is not an accumulation of good works; it is a continual conversion.

It can also happen that penance becomes isolated from the very contemplation towards which it should be oriented. True penance gives to the individual that equilibrium and spiritual agility which are prerequisites for contemplation; it enhances the capacity to "be concerned with God alone."

It is this abiding presence of God which keeps us constantly aware of the purpose of the things we "do." Without this awareness, our life becomes weighed down with "things." But our forward thrust comes from a clear perspective on life. Without knowing where to go, we would be continually going around in circles.

Enclosure: value and limitations of a symbol

Enclosure could appear to be a considerable hindrance, if not a total barrier, to a discussion on dialogue and communication between contemplatives and the world. It could limit the concern of contemplatives to prayer for the world or interest in it "from a safe distance." But at this point we could usefully reflect on the formative purpose—formative for "the main concern" which is with God—of enclosure. Our conclusions, in which we must be consistent, should not become unfriendly or indifferent to people. But neither would they be purely sentimental.

The enclosure, whether it is regarded under the aspect of doors closed or not closed, or as an area within which the life of a monastery evolves,

is meant to serve as a symbol. This is time not just in an "aesthetical" sense but also in a "sacramental" one—as a symbol which not only signifies but also brings about the reality it signifies, and which therefore becomes both an ascetical instrument and a desirable goal. (There is an enlightening comparison to be made with the seven Sacraments.) Symbol and reality are intimately bound together; the question is, to what point can they be bound together, and how much room is there for divergence between them?

a. When we begin to analyze the sign, we are at once struck by an extremely interesting phenomenon: *the door of the enclosure which is opened only from the inside*. This recalls another story-symbol, that of Noah's Ark, which was closed from the outside. It would have been impossible for anyone suffering from claustrophobia to go outside the Ark for a change of air. Outside were the high waters of the flood, and therefore great danger.

In the enclosure the door opens from the inside; it is possible to go out. So the person inside is not there because she is surrounded by dangers, but because she has good reasons for being there and for not wanting to go out.

Thus the enclosure already stands out as a sign of freedom, of a choice of life freely made and freely lived. (If, on the other hand, an enclosure encouraged a lack of freedom or failed to promote freedom, as though once the door was closed the key had been thrown out the window, its symbolic function would be inauthentic; and the world would be justified in no longer understanding it.)

Art. 49, I 3 of the new Constitution says: "Let the Sisters bear well in mind the lesson of history: a decline in the religious life in the Order of Saint Clare has nearly always begun with a neglect of the laws of enclosure, with which is associated a break-down of religious values." The next statement, that "the observance of enclosure is in some way the measure and the paradigm of contemplative religious life," is somewhat startling. "Measure" and "paradigm" it may well be; but in what sense? The laws of enclosure are neglected when something vital has already broken down within the life of the individual sister or of the community. And when is it actually neglected? When a sure spark of intelligence suggests an appropriate flexibility, possible for all even though is pleasing to a few, or when the norms are distorted beyond their precise and legitimate scope?

The norm is just a guide to the reality; but the reality is much more challenging than the norm, because it is based on the true point of reference: the person's complete freedom for *contemplation*, which is the real value expressed by the symbol.

Another sign of the enclosure is that it does not so much restrain a person within her "cell" as *outline a space*, large enough and diversified enough for a whole community: church, bedrooms, workrooms, garden, fields — *for a living and moving community*. It marks the boundaries of a "city," an autonomous city which contains within itself its own means of subsistence, according to the expression of Paul VI (quoted also in "Venite seorsum", V): "a small ideal society in which at last prevail love, obedience, innocence, freedom from material things and the gift of using them wisely, the primacy of the spirit and the peace of the Gospel."



This picture of Paul VI, with its very meaningful idealism, symbolizes the whole functioning of the monastic city, straining forward towards Utopia. The reality is no more than what it actually is; but the forward tension is undoubtedly a great moral, intellectual and spiritual force. I believe that the enclosure is paradigmatic in precisely this way: through its indication of the threshold of a Promised Land towards which one hastens without turning back. More than any other city, it is the city of no return; yet not a dead end which cuts short the journey, but a wide open area — for running on.

If the reference to Noah's Ark may be considered in reverse, as it were, the journey of the People of God towards the Promised Land is being actualized by "the space of the enclosure" rightly understood: as a decisive forward journey sustained by faith in the promise of the Lord. There is

no reason for turning back because we are celebrating the march towards the land of promise. Therefore I would not see the enclosure as a symbol of Gethsemane, the enclosed garden of Christ's agony (even though the journey of the People of God is also marked by times of suffering that lead back to Gethsemane and by "serpents" which point to the cross on which Christ was crucified), but rather as a changing season taking on a new appearance from day to day.

c. If it is understandable why there is no reason for leaving the enclosure, it may be more difficult to see why there are no keys for entering it. Art. 52 of the new Constitutions states: "The law of enclosure also forbids anyone of whatever condition, sex, or age to enter the enclosed area of the monastery, except in cases provided for by law." The right understanding of this prohibition has to be found in the logic of the sign. And the sign indicates that there should be no compromise, no confusion between Utopia and pseudo-Utopia, between running on and giving up through weariness, between going forward and turning back, between taking on a commitment and going back on a commitment, between the zeal of love and indifference. It is the world that is confused about these issues.

Enclosure expresses only the sign of entering and remaining. It does not recognize as a positive sign that of entering and leaving; it recognizes what is enduring, not what is intermittent. Eternal life and the Kingdom belong to those who, having put their hands to the plough, do not turn back. Substantially, then, the sign of enclosure is a positive sign, a clear statement of values—and this especially in the new legislation.

d. But the fact that the signs are predominantly signs does not mean that they do not really affect the life and the spiritual orientation of the nuns. On the contrary, their prophetic value (and what value could they have if it were not prophetic?) resides in the capacity of the nuns to give substance to the signs by their lives. Keys, doors and grilles should be signs—in the old language if you like—of a journey towards that interior freedom of one's whole being, towards that alertness and joy of living integrated by the love and praise of God, which are of the essence of a monastic and contemplative life.

The enclosure, then, is assuredly a form of asceticism, whose meaning must be well understood, lest we run the risk of seeing it as an outmoded symbol and come to despise it. This understanding generates asceticism; and asceticism frees the heart for contemplation.

However, the signs must be purged of any negative aspects (relics of a culture that has had its day):

- "heavy" grilles that suggest a joyless penance;
- a "hiding instinct" coming from an aversion to or a fear of being seen;

- the creation of an air of mystery: a *nün* in half-light;
 - a pseudo-mysticism: the falling of the smile.
- Why refuse the genuine witness of an open smile? Why will an impenetrable "turn" will witness just as well?

e. All of this is especially important because the signs, which certainly remain valid in the new legislation, which express and emphasize communion with the world, a state of being "incommunicado." It is a question of the signs, doors, fixed partitions etc. are arranged, of course, in the traditions of the individual institutes," but also in the varied circumstances of time and place" "Venite seorsim."

And here we touch upon an "ascetical" aspect which concerns the entire community of the monastery, which sharpen our critical faculties to read traditions with discernment. Are we meant to "read" them or just "swallow" them? Here is the question of "sensitivity" to the "voice" of the place. A person whose ears are full of history will have a different sense of the time and the place.

It is basically a matter of spiritual freedom—freedom from "what has always been done"—the humble yet courageous freedom, in our littleness, in the supreme freedom of Christ. We have heard that it was said to them of old: "Do not be like the Phariseism came to grief on that "it was said;" Christ said "but I say to you."

f. But where the sign-system of enclosure or, rather, the culture of the enclosure, adjusts its focus and its relation to the world but also to the interior, and new forms of asceticism which are available within itself, as in the area of contracts between the individual and various purposes, such as continuing formation. Of course, the cultural advancement that can come from the various initiatives affecting the lifestyles of the monasteries. If these cultural stimuli can become a reality, they will be new initiatives affecting the lifestyles of the monasteries.

But before speaking about specific possible initiatives, the acceptance of Federations (in plain words), belonging to the monasteries is a criterion for testing the validity of the effects of the signs and practice of enclosure:

- Does the attitude that sees membership as an option denote an authentic concept of freedom? Does it denote slavery to the past and nothing more? Will it be an authentic sign of maturity to welcome the intention of the world?

no reason for turning back because we are celebrating the march towards the land of promise. Therefore I would not see the enclosure as a symbol of Gethsemane, the enclosed garden of Christ's agony (even though the journey of the People of God is also marked by times of suffering that lead back to Gethsemane and by "serpents" which point to the cross on which Christ was crucified), but rather as a changing season taking on a new appearance from day to day.

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Why refuse the genuine witness of an open smile and presume that an impenetrable "turn" will witness just as well?

e. All of this is especially important because the signs of enclosure, which certainly remain valid in the new legislation, all seem to be *signs* which express and emphasize communion with the world rather than a state of being "incommunicado." It is a question of ensuring that grilles, doors, fixed partitions etc. are arranged, of course in keeping with the traditions of the individual institutes, but also with attention to "the varied circumstances of time and place" "Venite seorsum," VII, 4).

And here we touch upon an "ascetical" aspect of the question which concerns the entire community of the monastery, an asceticism that will sharpen our critical faculties to read traditions with real discernment. Are we meant to "read" them or just "swallow" them? Because also involved here is the question of "sensitivity" to the "voice" of time and place. A person whose ears are full of history will have difficulty in listening to the time and the place.

It is basically a matter of spiritual freedom—freedom from custom, from "what has always been done"—the humble yet courageous effort to share, in our littleness, in the supreme freedom of Christ, who exhorts us: "you have heard that it was said to them of old; but I say to you...." Pharisaism came to grief on that "it was said;" Christianity flourished on "but I say to you."

f. But where the sign-system of enclosure or, more broadly speaking the culture of the enclosure, adjusts its focus and therefore its perspective is not only in its relation to the world but also in the new possibilities and new forms of asceticism which are available within the monastic world itself, as in the area of contracts between the individual monasteries for various purposes, such as continuing formation. One thinks, for example, of the cultural advancement that can come from the forming of Federations. If these cultural stimuli can become a reality, there will undoubtedly be new initiatives affecting the lifestyles of the member monasteries.

But before speaking about specific possible initiatives, the full acceptance of Federations (in plain words), belonging or half-belonging to them) is a criterion for testing the validity of the effects of a certain attitude to and practice of enclosure:

— Does the attitude that sees membership of a Federation merely as an option denote an authentic concept of freedom of spirit? Or does it denote slavery to the past and nothing more? Would it not be a more authentic sign of maturity to welcome the intentions of the Church which

urges communities to federate? (PC, 22). What is the deep-seated reason behind wanting to see one's own monastery as a "continent" rather than as one of the islands of a national group? Is it spiritual self-sufficiency rather than openness to communion with others? Could the real reason possibly be some form of frustration or mental laziness?

— Is a community which considers egress from the monastery for the purpose of attending courses of permanent formation as the cause of or occasion for dissipation perhaps making an indirect statement about its own limitations: a lack of understanding of the mind and intentions of the Church? Immaturity of the sisters? In which case, if the pedagogy of the cloister does not promote maturity, what positive value can it have? What awareness of the Church does it have if in practice, albeit unintentionally, it distrusts the Church? What concept of freedom does it have if it uses it simply as the freedom not to act? These are all questions of asceticism. Could they perhaps help to check the spiritual health of a community?

Contemplation: "non-interference" and "interference" by the world

Up to this point our reading of the enclosure has dwelt mainly on the "negative" aspect of the external signs which express it. But more important is the positive aspect dealing with its purpose, that is, with the *contemplation* it is meant to foster: in the cloister as contemplatives, in the cloister for contemplation.

a. The "world" can interfere in a negative way with the contemplative orientation of the monastery; and so it is right to ensure appropriate "withdrawal" and "solitude," that regular "going apart alone into the mountain" of Jesus when he wanted to speak with the Father, or listen to him, or think of him. It will be this same desire to meet the Father that will guarantee our fidelity to enclosure with its appropriate signs. But the real *raison d'être* of enclosure is contemplation. We could well recall the words of St. Benedict to the monk who chained himself to the wall of his hermitage in order to safeguard his fidelity to the Lord; "Let Christ be the chain which binds you." If Christ holds you "captive" you will need no chain to bind you. Perhaps it is even more pertinent to recall the words of Blessed Camilla Battista da Varano to a vicarress:

Happy is the servant and spouse of Christ who chooses his loving heart for her perpetual cloister, because within it is the burning furnace of divine love, where whoever is willing may be burned and consumed and reduced to ashes through asceticism of the heart and seared under the all-powerful hand of God. Thus will the sincere person find peace of mind and that constant spiritual joy which binds her in love to her most dear spouse, Jesus Christ crucified.

Within this divine crucified heart is the vast sea, without beginning or end, of the divinity, where she may bathe, wash, be cleansed and baptized to her heart's content, because this divine water will wash away all the impurity and filth of sin and grant her such a sweetness and fragrance of seraphic love that the most blessed Trinity will take great delight in her.

This loving, burning divine heart is the school of divine wisdom which teaches silently the ways of righteousness—to flee the evil of sin and choose the gifts of grace.

There is no doubt that this yearning for the purest mental prayer should be protected against human encumbrances. So we sincerely believe that nothing should be allowed to interfere or put a blinding veil between us and the mystery of God. And this is the basic reason for some of the detailed norms like those concerning the use of radio, television and certain types of newspapers (VSS VII, 10-11).

The norms signify not so much a warning against impending danger as the necessity of an appropriate recollection of mind and, even more, a refusal to let extraneous opinions, interpretations or images supplant our contemplative "eye" or, worse still, supplant the object of our contemplation. These are realistic and comprehensive norms, yet our grasp of them is in direct proportion to the degree of maturity of the community and its members.

On the other hand, that some charity which leads us to contemplate God with the attentiveness of wholehearted love should also draw us closer to human beings ... then history ... then problems, etc. Their searching, their need for communication. Humanity today is also an history instrument of the revelation of the mystery of God. The contemplative is "mindful" of others not only in order to bring them comfort but also because she sees in others the image of God, a witness to the wisdom of God: attentiveness to others as part of the search for God, and therefore true contemplation.

b. And so on this score the "interference" of others in the life of the contemplative is entirely positive. But how does this human interference occur? It occurs through the means of social communication, in the need to talk to someone, to question the prophets, in the need to experience something of the life of a prophet, in the need to be welcomed. *It means good news, hope and light for others if the contemplative shares new insights about God, for they will then understand God better, think about him and adore him more, love him more.*

From such a need for communication and from such an aptitude for communicating and being informed, which are "signs of our times," what revision could occur in the monastery's channels of communication?

- What will hospitality entail in the light of this?
- What form will the guest area take?
- And the parlour?
- What possibilities suggest themselves for unused sections of monasteries?
- Or for monasteries which are of a merely devotional interest?
- How to become good news for today? Language of today? These are important and urgent questions.

In this way the enclosure becomes—apart from its valid literal meanings, but in full harmony with its contemplative thrust which takes into consideration the signs of the times — not a dividing wall nor a great barricade, but rather a “Welcome” sign between the world and the desert where a person can meet the contemplative, where the contemplative who is intimate with God can speak to this person, with words of comfort, motivation, encouragement, salvation. In this way the contemplative reaches that *perfection of charity* which is the greatest charism and which gives its value to contemplation.

Cf. Paul, 1 Cor. 13:P

“If I speak in the tongues of men and angels

if I have prophetic powers

if I understand all mysteries

if I have all faith” □

For Clare

in clear wonder
watch silent summer dew
still my bower wall

Bernard Kennedy, O.F.M.

Clare

Hidden in the shadows
of San Damiano,
spent her jars of
precious nard
witnessing to the
Passion.
Daily she recited what
Francis carried
after worm met seraph
in the cocoon of La Verna,
and was given
bloody wings,
to flutter and spatter
forgiveness
for two more years.
But she lived on
and on
and on,
bereft
of the comfort
of communion
with her twin flame.
Did she long to
set the world afire
with her preaching?

This was not given.
Did she ache to part
with the convent garden
and bear the Child
and Master Healer
into the world?
This was not given.
Hers was the “better part,”
(Francis would have consoled
her again and again).
She was to sit
at the Lord’s feet,
at the foot of His cross,
drinking in every
word and sigh.
She was the
enduring oil lamp,
now eternal flame.
She was the seed
fallen to the ground
of the cloister garden,
blooming sturdily
and now
evergreen.

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

Saint Clare of Assisi: Parish Ministry and the Grieving Church

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

The church and monastery of San Damiano stands slightly below the hill town of Assisi in Italy in the shadow of the Umbrian hills. Those very hills where Francis and Clare romped, picked flowers and laughed the free laugh of childhood. Today we revere this area for nourishing the lives of these two great saints but we often mistakenly think that they were quite different from us. In this age of so-called new ministries in the church, we think we have come some giant steps from our founders and foundresses in our labors for the Lord. However, if we look closely at their works we find that even in their thirteenth century milieu they, too, were serving as ministers; they, too, aided the sorrowing and the grief-stricken. More importantly, however, they too, received ministry and grieved.

It is a bit more simple to see these ministerial aspects in the life of Francis since he was free to roam about, enter into the homes and lives of other persons, whereas Clare is always seen as shut away from the evils of the world living in a cocoon-like state as if this were the only way for a woman to acquire sanctity. While the church required this enclosure of her and all women of her day, we know that Clare adapted her life style to serve as a twin counterpart to what Francis and his followers were doing. She, it is true, longed to walk among the poor and the lonely and expressed her desire to be a missionary and to suffer martyrdom. As Clare learned during her rather expansive lifetime, martyrdom comes in different forms and hers seemed to be that she would remain behind after Francis had departed from this life; that she would watch as the friars

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struggled through many changes and many splits in the Order; that she would be called the true follower of Francis and many of the friars would seek her counsel.

Clare's life of ministry in the church was actually very simple. That was her lifestyle — to remain as quiet and simple as possible in the midst of an agitated society; to be a type of beacon for others to see. Even though the sisters were not visibly present except for the externs who went into town for provisions, the town knew they were there. So, instead of Clare going into the town to answer distress signals as a parish minister might do today, the persons who were in distress would come to her. We understand that Clare was a good listener and also gave some very sound advice. Her deep life of prayer and contemplation opened up the avenues of wisdom, peace, etc., which are gifts of the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest contributions to parish ministry, however, was the reflection of this ministry within her own community.

Clare's monastery has been referred to as a church within the church. Inside those very austere-looking walls lived women whose whole lives were dedicated to the service of each other as well as the service to the outside world. They knew that they had to perfect their lives of charity, generosity, service, dedication and even obedience to each other in order for their prayers for the world to be effective. The whole process, a lifetime process, of loving oneself and loving the other in the same manner was intensely practiced within San Damiano. There were actually three dimensions to this process in the monastery: the development of loving oneself, the same development of loving the other sisters (neighbors) and the development of the type of all-encompassing prayer to show love for those all over the world. By this lifestyle the sisters were able to touch some hearts and minds with grace, and for those who were not touched they were able to make up what was lacking in them. In return for this labor of love, the townspeople ministered to the sisters at San Damiano by supplementing their meager produce from the garden and giving donations to the extern sisters and the friar questor who came into town. If Clare and her sisters received more than was actually needed, it was immediately sent out to be given to the poor.

Clare's ministry to others is rather unique. Along with her patient listening to visitors, consoling them and encouraging them, we must recall that there were two attempts at besieging the city where the timely prayers of Clare and her sisters are recognized as being the saving grace for the town. The most spectacular of these two is the one in 1240 when the barbarians were coming to besiege the monastery. At that time Clare was very ill and was confined to her section of the dormitory, but she asked two of the sisters to support her and take her down to the refectory

door. She also requested the small box or pyx with the Blessed Eucharist to be brought down and placed before the door. There she prostrated herself and asked her sisters to join her in prayer for themselves and for the town which would next fall prey to the Saracens. We know the miraculous results of her great devotion and faith — both San Damiano and the town were spared.

Clare's ministry did not end there. Many miracles of eyes, throats and minds are attributed to her prayers and the making of the sign of the cross. She also seemed to continue to minister with weather since the time when God answered her prayers to have roses on the bushes in mid-winter. Perhaps the most startling of her achievements in prayer is the vision of mass at Christmas in 1254 when she was ill and unable to attend. It was then that God pitied her and showed his great love for her by allowing her a complete visual and audio presentation of midnight mass. It was from such great devotion that her ministry to others flowed.

The work of the Poor Ladies was basically for the churches in the immediate area. The Pope had begun the Eucharistic Crusade and this included cleaning up some of the churches which were not too well cared for. The Eucharist, too, had not been receiving the reverence it required, so Francis and his followers went into the area churches and literally helped to sweep them. This was not always appreciated by the local pastor, but Francis' adherence to the Pope's directives was unswerving. Clare and her sisters aided in this crusade by making new linens for the churches in the area. Their role in the actual making of altar breads is not certain although the majority of Poor Clares today either make or distribute them in remembrance of Clare's devotion to the Blessed sacrament and for a part of their livelihood.

Francis' prophecy about holy women coming to live at San Damiano had come true and he himself had spent time with them not only as spiritual director, but learning from them and wondering at the grace of God in their lives. Francis had humbly asked Clare's advice on matters concerning himself and often sent friars to seek her counsel. The Bishop of Assisi and two of the Popes visited her to discuss matters concerning the spiritual life. During the canonization process Clare was referred to as a candlestick of holiness burning before the altar of the Lord.

Following Clare's death we do not have any real details of how the other sisters felt. We can presume that Clare was very much missed by them and that they had to go through a grieving process much as we do today. They, at least, had each other to lean on, to talk about their loss and we know they did not remain very long at San Damiano but moved into the protection of the city walls. No doubt she was their strong support just as Francis had been to his friars. Following the death of Francis we

can recall that beautiful letter written by Bro. Elias re: the loss of their father, who was their protector and guide. He speaks of them as being orphaned and I imagine that the Poor Ladies had the same feeling about the loss of Clare.

But what of the feelings of Clare and the Poor Ladies on the death of Francis. Francis had been at San Damiano shortly before his death where he had become seriously ill and had written that beautiful Cantic of Creatures. Although San Damiano had been the place of his first encounter with the Crucified, he longed to die at the Portiuncula where his Order had its origins. His wish was to be granted, but he promised Clare and her sisters that they would see him again.

On the upper floor, or the upper church in the basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, there is a fresco by the school of Giotto which portrays Francis' body on a stretcher outside the church of San Damiano. Surrounding his precious body are various dignitaries from the town, armed soldiers, and many townspeople. The whole scene is a depiction of Christ at various points in his life. There is a Zacchaeus figure in a tree, the soldiers are carrying torches, and Francis lies on the stretcher bearing the marks of the sacred wounds. From the doors and even windows of the pictured monastery, the Poor Ladies are coming forth to look at their spiritual father for the last time. The one prominent Poor Lady who depicts Clare is standing over the body and has placed her hand in the wound in his side, representative of the small plant which she named herself. As unrealistic as the portrayal is in the light of monastic enclosure, the real spirit of love and devotion comes through very strongly. The question is, how did they handle the grief of the loss of one they so loved. Clare, in particular, must have gone through all the normal feelings of grief. She who was able to console others must have needed human consolation too. I like to think that Clare's mother, Ortolana, who had entered the Monastery, was still living and would have been a great source of comfort to her as well as her sister Agnes.

The ministries which we label today as specific areas of work for the church have always existed and have especially existed in the lives of the saints. The ministries may not have been as obvious as they are today but wherever there is suffering, wherever there are persons in need, there will be those among us who will sacrifice, will console, will bind up the wounds and among these heroes and heroines I am happy to say that even an enclosed religious person may be such a caregiver. In fact, it seems to be an integral part of Franciscan living to go forth to minister to the needs of society in its present form; possibly even the very heart of the charism left us by Francis and Clare.

In the Square

In the square
I imagined her there
girlishly giggling,
surreptitiously peeking

from behind the crowd.
I turned my eyes seeking
a glimpse of you in the Umbrian
plain like she did that long

night when her shorn hair became
a declaration of intent.
Uneasily I know what she meant
for each shor-shock of hair

was a fine thread of love.
In the paved square
I clasp an imaginary hair
in my hand knowing where

so much of love's intent began.

Seámus Mullholland, O.F.M.

Prayer in the Letters of Saint Clare

SISTER FRANCES TERESA, O.S.C.

While this is now fairly widely accepted that Clare, in her own way, was a great a mystic as Francis, it still remains quite hard to come at her actual teaching on prayer or the spiritual life. Yet to read her letters with this in mind is to touch the edge of a garment of powerful experiences upon which the letters both reflect and comment. To a notable degree her life and thought seem to be immersed in the vision granted to Francis, and yet, at the same time, wholly her own. The simple, basic insight which she and Francis shared was the centrality of the Incarnation. This was the goal, the context, the reason and the explanation of everything. Within this ambience of totality, they saw our spiritual thrust as having, so to speak, three colours through which we might pass one at a time, or, like three coloured spotlights, all at once. These colours can be gathered under the headings of Conversion, contrition and Communion. Without digressing into how these headings may relate to other, more familiar ones, it can be tentatively suggested that they hang together in this way:

Conversion	or the Purgative Way	marked by vocal prayer
Contrition	or the Illuminative Way	marked by meditation
Communion	or the Unitive Way	marked by contemplation

That is the ground plan. In order to come at Clare's teaching, I have quarried in her wrings and in Scripture as she uses it. Most of the passages from Scripture are passages which Clare herself quotes.

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Conversion

'In the beginning of my conversion' is a phrase used by both Francis and Clare.

At the beginning of her conversion, she (Clare) together with her sisters, promised obedience to the blessed Francis.

she says in her Rule (1,4). This conversion consisted in a marked change in their way of life, literally a turning around, a change of direction, and one to be maintained even under duress and struggle.

Who would not dread the treacheries of the enemy of mankind who through arrogance of momentary and deceptive glories, attempts to reduce to nothing that which is greater than heaven itself. (3 LAq 20)

Because of this treacherous enemy, whom we all carry within us, conversion is marked by discipline, asceticism, and even austerity, which are partly directed at freeing us from the magnetic tug of false gods, and partly directed at enabling us to become autonomous, self-governing in the right way, so that we are able to say: This I will do, and to implement our choice. Asceticism enables us to enter and to remain upon the way of purgation. It is the ongoing process of subduing ourselves in order to reach the chosen goal, a slow re-focusing of our lives:

by humility, the virtue of faith and the strong arms of poverty, you have taken hold of that incomparable treasure hidden in the field of the world, and in the hearts of men, (Mt 13,44) with which you have purchased that field of Him by whom all things have been made from nothing. (3 LAq 7)

It is also marked and encouraged by the promise of the first part in the phrases:

when you have loved Him ... then you shall be chaste
when you have touched Him ... then you shall be pure
when you have accepted Him ... then you shall be a virgin (1 LAq 8)

Just as these phrases of Clare are characterized by a very tough honesty about the realities of human love, so our prayer at this stage is confrontation every bit as searching and intimate. Through our personal interaction with Christ, she is saying, we become capable of the union to which we have been called. We are confronted by the truth in dialogue with God made man, Jesus who

for the sake of us all, took upon Himself the Passion of the Cross and delivered us from the power of the Prince of Darkness to whom we were enslaved because of the disobedience of our first parents

says Clare, (1 LAq 14) rather freely quoting Hebrews. That same verse begins with the classic longing of the converted person: Let us not lose sight of Jesus. At this relatively early stage in the spiritual journey, Clare was aware of the possibility that we can lose sight of Jesus, that our choices have to be ratified again and again until they penetrate our whole being.

When you have loved him ...
when you have touched him ...
when you have accepted him ... (1 LAq 8)

The burden of this thought is not a denial of human love but a delight in the great paradoxes of God's love for us and its immense creativity. It suggests that Clare had explored the whole mystery of sexuality very fearlessly and that her own experience of denial and self-discipline had led her to that point where her love for Christ transcended her own sexuality, so that she really understood and lived the fruitfulness of celibacy. The touch of Christ which she speaks about does not make us pure as if in contrast with the 'impurity' of human love-making, but rather to touch Christ is to be purified — and the purified person is the pure person. Similarly, his love chastens us in our unlovingness, and this leads us to the freedom of disciplined loving which is properly called chaste; and the complete acceptance of him makes us virgins, just as innocence is not so much a condition of our lost childhood as the goal ahead of us to which we all must come, drawn by him who said

Behold, I make all things new. (Rev. 21, 5)

Our contribution is to offer our innate chaos to be ready to let go of all that served us before, since that knowledge is now no longer of any service, for

She who loves temporal things, loses the fruit of love (1 LAq 25)

not because there is anything wrong with temporal things — Francis and Clare were no Manicheans — but simply because temporal things and the fruit of this love are in two wholly different lanes of reference.

Therefore, be strengthened in his service and make progress from good to better. (1 LAq 31, 32)

This stage in our prayer journey is characterized by vocal prayer, by

dialogue, by what Ignatius 300 years later was to call colloquies, speaking with Jesus. In this dialogue we begin to speak the truth about our poverty, we start to shed the roles and personae, the masks and defenses which we have learned to interpose between us and reality or between us and ourselves. Into this painful experience of loss, poverty and negation the Spirit begins to pour his gifts

so that people who were in utter poverty and want and in absolute need of heavenly nourishment, might become rich in him by possessing the kingdom of heaven. (1 LAq 20)

Although the language is feudal, I believe the thought is contained in Genesis Ch. 1, God creating out of nothing, and our need to move willingly into that condition of our nothingness with all its paradoxes. We are so imprisoned in illusion that we have difficulty even in moving into being nothing, even though that is all we are. At this stage in our conversion, our thinking is so off-beam that even though we can, and do, may and must, rejoice in being children of God and dear to Him, yet we almost wholly misunderstand what this might mean; we are trapped — enslaved is Clare's word — by all our illusions and posturings and escapes and follies.

Thus we begin, after our conversion has started, to see how unconverted we are and how much we need Jesus to

deliver us from the power of the Prince of Darkness to whom we were enslaved. (1 LAq 14)

The truth will set you free, said Paul, and this profound psychological law begins to operate in us through the grace of conversion. This leads us to acceptance of ourselves as sinful and yet as loved by God. This is the beginning of the long, slow, process of identification with Christ to which we are all called. God shared our humanity, says one of the oldest prayers of the Mass, in order that we might share in his divinity. Clare expresses it in this way:

O blessed poverty
who bestows eternal riches on those
who love and embrace her. (1 LAq 15)

Be filled with a remarkable happiness
and spiritual joy. (1 ALq 21)

Contrition

As I understand her, Clare sees each of these three stages — Conversion, Contrition and Communion — as going on all at once, or rather, conversion

keeps on deepening in us and so we mature into a more and more penetrating contrition and are led further into communion. Even in the deepest — or highest — union, conversion and contrition must have their place, and in fact, it seems, they become stronger and more apparent, even as our joy deepens:

like another Rachel, always remember our resolution and be conscious of how you began. What you hold, may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never abandon. (2 LAq 11)

Go forward, securely, joyfully and swiftly,
on the path of prudent hapiness,
believing nothing,
agreeing with nothing
which would dissuade you from this resolution
or which would place a stumbling block
for you on the way. (2 LAq 13, 14)

To keep the eyes fixed on Christ was, for Clare, the one, sure way. She remarks rather dramatically (3 LAq 27, 28):

How many kings and queens of this world let themselves be deceived! For even though their pride may reach the skies and their heads through the clouds, in the end they are as forgotten as a dunheap!

Contrition, said St. John Climacus in the 3rd century, is a wounding of the heart for the purposes of self-conquest. Conversion leads to asceticism and sorrow for sin, in order to lead us to freedom. As we learn to love God, we learn too, to understand that he himself is

eternal glory — blessed life, (1 LAq 18)

but we also, in this phase of our contrition, begin to realize that identification with Christ means fellowship with his sufferings; even more, we slowly begin to realize that his sufferings are deeply to do with us, in that they are because of us and that they are for us to share. This is our calling, as it was Christ's:

He became contemptible for you — despised, struck, scourged and then died. (2 LAq 19, 20).

Out of meditation on the passion of Jesus and out of a long, silent staying with Mary at the foot of the Cross, we learn to mourn the ungodliness within us. It is in this bitter, painful place that we

feel what his friends feel
as they taste the hidden sweetness
which God has reserved
from the beginning
for those who love him. (3 LAq 14)

You have held fast to the footprints of him
to whom you have merited to be joined. (LAq 7)

Staying with the pain of the Cross, and the pain of ourselves, our prayer quietens and deepens, has fewer words and more presence. Gradually the centre of our contrition shifts, from our badness to God's goodness, from our pain to the pain of the world, from our bitter need to our God-given poverty, to which, Clare says

God promised the kingdom (1 ALq 18),

not because, capriciously or sadistically, he only gives prizes when we are sufficiently humiliated but because the cosmic dislocation which we call the Fall, has left all our values out of tune. The road of return to truth is signposted by humility and poverty, and when we recognize the truth of ourselves, then we have a foundation upon which to base our recognition of the truth of God; we can enter the kingdom, we can begin to learn more about the third state, contemplation, the unitive way, communion.

What a great and laudable exchange! To leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven for the goods of the earth, to receive a hundred-fold in place of one, and to possess a blessed and eternal life. (1 LAq 30)

Communion

Everything, for Clare, is focussed on union with Christ:

I will run and not tire,
until you bring me into the wine cellar,
until your left hand is under my head
and your right hand will embrace me happily,
and you will kiss me with the kiss of your mouth. (4 LAq 31, 32)

The essence of communion is to be drawn into the life of the Trinity, to become the silence into which the Father speaks the Word. This Word is the incarnate Word; and the identification with Christ means that he becomes incarnate in our lives.

Transform your whole being into the image
of the Godhead itself,
through contemplation (3 LAq 13)

and particularly through the contemplation of, and in union with, Christ, the mirror. Like Teresa, Clare insists that no matter how 'high,' how mystical, how unitive our prayer becomes, at no time can we enter into prayer except through Christ, the mirror without blemish.

Look upon that mirror each day,
and continually study your face within it,
so that you may adorn yourself within and without. (4 ALq 14)

Strive to become, she is saying, what God wants you to be, and for this Christ is both the mirror in which we see ourselves (and thus are helped to look honestly at the blemishes) and he is also the example of the perfect mirror, one which reflects no blemishes.

In these writings of Clare we do not find any instruction about the nuts and bolts of prayer — no hints for the distracted, no guidance about the use of the mantra, no information about non-discursive meditation. What we do find is an overwhelmed awareness of the presence of Christ, apprehended — even comprehended — by her whole self.

You will hold him by whom all things are held together. (3 LAq 26).

Across these letters, spanning 15 years, from when she was 41 until just before her death at 56, we can see and map a developing ardour and intensity, as Clare herself matured in the spiritual life. To read the first letter (1234) and then to read the fourth, written 15 years later, is to experience a definite shift from the edges of an overwhelming love to its incandescent heart. The whole tone and mood of the fourth letter is that of someone immersed in love, wholly unafraid of love and completely committed to love. She herself is our instruction on communion.

This vision is the splendour of eternal glory (4 LAq 14)

and like Teresa after her, Clare insists that at no time can we enter into this glory except through Christ. At the surface of the mirror without blemish (Wisd. 7.26) she tells us to look at, look into, the human life of Jesus, while

in the depths of the same mirror, contemplate the ineffable charity
(4 LAq 23)

that is, the love which burns within the Godhead. For Clare, we are all called — like Francis — to love and imitate Christ, the Way, so that we too learn to see the world, not from the foot of the Cross but from the Cross itself. We see what Christ sees. This is the approach to the beginning of union. Prayer is the summons to fellowship with Christ's sufferings because it is a summons to glory. Christ humbled himself to share our humanity so that we might be made sharers of his divinity. □



Book Reviews

Christ Encounters. By Gloria Hutchinson. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN. 1988, pp. 126. \$6.95.

Reviewed by Sr. Marie Francis Gallagher, O.S.F. Sister works at Assisi House, 600 Red Hill Road, Aston, PA.

A Journal Retreat, *Christ Encounters*, welcomes you to enter into a 30-day retreat. The book is divided into three parts: Seeking Guidance, Seeking Growth and Seeking Glory. The format for each day is similar. A Scripture consideration is presented for the retreatant to ponder. Questions on the reading follow, and the final step challenges one to write how the reflection will be lived that day. Sufficient space is provided for writing. As I studied the readings, I noted that they move from an encouraging Christ to a persistent Christ to a crucified and glorified Christ.

Part I starts with the practical question: "What do you want?" (Jn. 1:35-40) Part II ends with "Do you suppose I am here to bring peace on earth?" (Lk 12:49-53) Part III ends with "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into His glory?" (Lk. 24:26)

For the sincere beginner, the process may take longer than the author suggests. Since it is difficult to find a director, the journal based on the Gospel is an excellent substitute. I recommend that you stay with the process, even if it takes more than 30 days. I am

sure that your staying with the discipline of being faithful will lead you from your head to the heart of Christ.

Part II, *Seeking Growth*, points to a path where guidance is to be tested. No longer a tenderfoot, now is the time for action. Test yourself and ask, "What have I done for my enemies lately?" Jesus never gives up. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians urges: "On each of us God's favor has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it. These gifts are to be used to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ until we all form the perfect Man fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself. Then we shall no longer be children, we shall grow completely into Christ." (Eph. 4:7, 12-15)

Guided and grown, Part III, *Seeking Glory*, is the epitome of a life of prayer. The price is high: Renunciation of persons, places, and self. "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me." (Lk. 9:23) The total price is suffering.

Chapters 21 - 30 bring you face to face with Christ asking you: "Do you want to be well again?" "Can you drink the cup that I must drink?" "What shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour.'" "Had you not the strength to stay awake one hour?" There are no easy answers to these questions. They have been heeded by many followers of Christ, and today, it is your turn to answer Him. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in

a poem found on page 84... "Wonders how his suffering could be any worse if Christ were his bosom enemy instead of his beloved friend."

Life to be fully lived is found in a personal encounter with Christ. While we realize that Jesus is always present with us, it is well to remember that each one must move ourselves in His direction. Recall how the woman suffering for many years, took the initiative to touch Jesus' garment. Power went out from Him in answer to the woman's faith. Christ expects us to use our gifts to make decisions. In Luke 12:57, Jesus asked the crowd, "Why not judge for yourselves what is upright?"

To reach the Glory is the desire of every person. The way to the Father is Jesus. He beckons, encourages and generously gives the needed strength. St. Paul's word is a faith journey to the glory we seek. "Be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ. Be imitators of God as his dear children. Follow the way of love, even as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance." (Eph. 4:32-5:2).

Christ Encounters invites you to come apart with the Rabbi from Nazareth and risk the consequences. "The entire meaning and content of the Bible is to be found, say the Apostles, not in the message about Christ, but in an encounter with Christ." (*Opening the Bible*, Thomas Merton). For those who are seeking Christ, this book is worthwhile. Buy it and spread The Good News.

St. Francis of Assisi and Nature. By Roger Sorrell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, Cloth. n.p.

Reviewed by Daniel Havel, Honors

Undergraduate, St. Bonaventure University.

The most prevalent conception of St. Francis of Assisi is that of the humble, brown-robed lover of birds. Of course, every once in a while, an artist portraying Francis might venture beyond this image and add a few non-feathered friends next to the same endearing friar, but the association is nonetheless the same: Francis is intimately linked with nature.

Yet the question needs to be addressed as to what is the historical basis for understanding the relationship Francis had with the created world. Roger Sorrell's book, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, provides a well developed analysis of this very question.

Sorrell insists that Francis must be seen as a man of his times. He was a medieval man through and through and one must refrain from projecting 20th century ideals onto him. As such, Sorrell portrays Francis in the context of the various medieval traditions out of which he arose: ascetic, eremitic, chivalric, and biblical, to name a few.

Sorrell points out that Francis' originality springs from his literal interpretation and implementation of various medieval traditions. He maintains that the Sermon to the Birds marks a pivotal point in the saint's relationship with the rest of creation. For Francis preached to the birds out of a literal regard for the evangelic and ascetic thaumaturgic traditions and by the birds' reaction he was made aware of the special, God-given relationship between himself and the created world which reflected the restoration of primal in-

nocence. Francis had, as it were, stepped back into Eden before the fall.

According to Sorrell, the Cantic of Creatures is the synthesis of Francis' insights and experiences as regards the interrelationship between humanity and the rest of creation. From the fact that it was written in the vernacular, Sorrell concludes that the cantic was meant to propagate Francis' idea of humanity's reconciliation with both Creator and creation.

Sorrell's book is an excellent source of information for both scholars and non-specialists alike who have an interest in St. Francis and

nature. It is well-referenced with tables and annotated notes and contains an ample bibliography useful for more detailed study. The text itself is clearly written and is filled with interesting and helpful extended quotations. I recommend this book for all those who are forever intrigued by the Poor Man of Assisi and the non-human friends he called his brothers and sisters. Those interested and involved in ecology will find it especially valuable. In sum, this is an important book for laying to rest the many misconceptions currently held concerning Francis' social relationship to nature.

Shorter Notices

Julian Davies, O.F.M.,
Associate Editor

I Am With You Always. Reflections on the Church Year. By Fr. Berard Doerger, O.F.M. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1988. Pp. 144. Paper, \$5.95.

This helpful book is divided into eight chapters. The first introduces the Church Liturgical Year, explaining its rationale and the connecting parts, as well as the restoration brought about by Vatican II. Subsequent chapters give the background to the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Sundays of Ordinary Time. The concluding chapter is devoted to the Liturgy of the Hours, and explains, using the Instruction to the Liturgy, the purpose of that prayer in general, and in regard to each of the hours.

The author is not just a reporter of historical facts, but a spiritual guide. He writes in a clear and succinct style. All religious and priests, all Christians

profit from this book, which is inexpensive enough to be generally available and given as a gift.

Francis of Assisi. By Liwayway A. Arceo. Quenzon City, Phillippines, Claretian Publication, 1989.

This brief novel about Francis was an award winning book in the Phillippines where it was first published in 1987. It doesn't read like a novel to me, but rather a series of vignettes highlighting Francis' vocation, the start of the Order, the vocation of Clare, the Missions, the Third Order, the Stigmata and Death of Francis. The text is enhanced with some drawings. The author has a remarkable fidelity to history and capturing what is essential in only a few words. *Francis of Assisi* won't make anything written obsolete, but it can be a useful starter for aspiring Franciscans, or refresher for veterans.

Clare and Francis

PAUL SABATIER

To her his appeals were like a revelation. It seemed as if Francis was speaking for her, that he divined her secret sorrows, her most personal anxieties, and all that was ardent and enthusiastic in the heart of this young girl rushed like a torrent that suddenly finds an outlet into the channel indicated by him. For saints as for heroes the supreme stimulus is woman's admiration.

But here, more than ever, we must put away the vulgar judgment which can understand no union between man and woman where the sexual instinct has no part. That which makes the union of the sexes something almost divine is that it is the prefiguration, the symbol, of the union of souls. Physical love is an ephemeral spark, designed to kindle in human hearts the flame of a more lasting love; it is the outer court of the temple, but not the most holy place; its inestimable value is precisely that it leaves us abruptly at the door of the holiest of all as if to invite us to step over the threshold.

The mysterious sigh of nature goes out for the union of souls. This is the unknown God to whom debauchees, those pagans of love, offer their sacrifices, and this sacred imprint, even though effaced, though soiled by all pollutions, often saves the man of the world from inspiring as much disgust as the drunkard and the criminal.

But sometimes — more often than we think — there are souls so pure, so little earthly, that on their first meeting they enter the most holy place, and once there the thought of any other union would be not merely a descent, but an impossibility. Such was the love of St. Francis and St. Clare.

But these are exceptions. There is something mysterious in this supreme purity: it is so high that in holding it up to men one risks speaking to them in an unknown tongue, or even worse.

This page from Paul Sabatier's Life of Saint Francis translated by Louise Seymour Houghton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, p. 148) is described by the late scholar Raoul Manselli as one of the most beautiful and delicate of that controversial biography. He feels that besides offering a moving insight into the relationship between Francis and Clare, it reveals Sabatier's deep and humble respect before a reality of exceptional quality. The CORD is grateful to the Macmillan Publishing Company of New York for generously granting permission to reprint this inspiring passage.

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