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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony EpCler: Letter to Clerics 1 EpCust: Letter to Superiors 1 EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful 1 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 Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare

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.

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

ICel: 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).

Meeting Clare

KIERAN M. KAY, O.F.M.Conv.

Clare, I don't really know how to begin to say what needs to be said. I've not met you before in so personal a way. Years ago, way back in 1975, I met you in the way that I needed to meet you at that time. You know better than I the full impact of our first meeting — how hungry I was to know you at the time. You recall, I needed at age 46 to come into a fuller experience of what my Franciscan call meant. All during that period I felt I was coming into a deeper knowledge of Francis, a deeper walk with him, his way of seeing Jesus, and I was thrilled by it all. But there was something lacking in my full appreciation of my Franciscan walk — and I knew that gap was you. I knew a bit about you, but I didn't really know you. Then that fateful day arrived — August 11, 1975 — and when I awakened in the morning, the sunlight flooded my bedroom. But I knew there was more than sunlight in that room. There was a light flooding me that came from inside me. I knew immediately that it was you, Clare. And in that moment my Franciscan call became infinitely bigger and more significant. I not only had the unmistakable knowledge of Francis walking with me, but now of you walking hand in hand with Francis and me. Again, I thank you for that profound visit. The fruits of that have continued to this day; the impact of that still reverberates deep within me. And, praise God, you continue to grow within me, gentling me and letting me see that the feminine part of me is beautiful and good, and that its continued integration into my Franciscan personhood is necessary for the full flowering of what God asks and wants of me.

And now this present grace of spending a weekend getting to know you further and deeper. I've been delighted by what you've shown me the real person that you are, the loving and vibrant woman of faith, the faithful companion of Francis and all those early friars, the woman who must be with us men if we are to realize the full potential of who we are

Fr. Kieran is chaplain to the Poor Clares, Sancta Clara Monastery, Canton, Ohio.

meant to be in a patriarchal society that is disintegrating from honest questioning. Thank you for showing me yourself in a new and deeper way. Give me, Clare, the strength that you showed in your day, to stand firm in your desire that men and women walk hand in hand as brothers and sisters, complementing and completing each other in reforming a church that has shamefully ignored, degraded, and debased women. As you and Francis model for us how we are to walk, may our hearts, like yours, be touched and tendered by Jesus. May our eyes always be upon Jesus so that we will know always what we are to say and do in all the circumstances of life. May Jesus' Spirit of Truth guide us into all truth and give us the courage to lay down our armor and be open to the pain that is always a preface to truth. Let our joy be that we are truly the children of a loving Father, content to be poor and little so that all the glory can rightfully come to him. Lead us to the cross and help us to see that beyond its shadow is the glorious light that you walked in with Francis at your side. Lead us into Jesus. Amen.



Sr. M. Raphael, O.S.F.

Life according to the Perfection of the Holy Gospel *

ENGELBERT GRAU, OFM

The two should be mentioned in one breath, Saint Francis who still, or better, more than ever continues to attract the attention of the widest circles and stirs the heart, and Saint Clare, who over the centuries has lingered in his shadow and is only now and then brought into her own light. We must name them in one breath, for they are the twofold expression of the one and the same reality, which God's providence more than 750 years ago desired to awaken into a new and dynamic presence: Life according to the Holy Gospel, according to the Good News of Christ, our Lord and Brother, and of God, whom we are invited to call: Abba, Father!

The Gospel which Francis not only heard, not only knew so well, but which he lived and perfectly retraced into its ultimate possibilities, both internally and externally — this gospel finds in Clare its ultimate feminine presentation and expression. Herein lies the inspiring and exemplary power for christians of our day, especially for women, and above all for those who profess to follow Francis and Clare. This also necessarily includes those who live as Secular Franciscans.

Already at an early date Francis had written of this to Clare and her sisters. Clare herself informs us of this in her Rule:

When the Blessed Father saw that we had no fear of poverty, hard work, suffering, shame, or the contempt of the world, but that, instead, we regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion

^{*} We present here a translation of the first part of a work by the Franciscan scholar Engelbert Grau, O.F.M. entitled Clare of Assisi and Her Sisters. The CORD is grateful to the Dietrich Coelde Verlag (Germany) for the opportunity to publish this portion of the work in English. Fr. Joseph Doino, editor of this periodical, did the translation from the original German.

he wrote for us a form of life as follows: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special sollicitude for you as [I have] for them" (Rule, VI,2).

Clare was born into a noble household of Assisi in 1194. Already as a young girl she gave strong indication of a life of interiority. At the age of eighteen when her parents and relatives proposed that she marry, Clare already had encountered Francis, twelve years her senior, several times. She had heard him preach and had opened her burning heart to his appeals for the cause of Christ.

On Palm Sunday night in the year 1212 Clare forces open the door of her family home. It was not the main entrance of her paternal home but a secondary door blocked with wooden bars and heavy stone. She forces her way through this door and hastens to Francis who with his brothers waits for her in the poor chapel of the Porziuncola, in the valley below.

The next morning Clare's family and relatives go searching for her in great consternation. They find her in the cloister of the Benedictine nuns of Bastia, an hour's walk west of Assisi, where Francis had brought her and where she was to wait "until the Lord would provide for something else" (Life of Clare 8). Clare is besieged by her family with advice, promises, and flattery; finally they try to force her return with threats. Clare takes refuge at the altar, wraps herself in its linens and unveils her shorn locks. They depart with this bitter remembrance of her. Clare had forced open the door of her paternal house; very soon she will close another door behind which she had withdrawn and which she bolts tight for ever.

The walls of the little cloister of San Damiano near Assisi rise up between the future life within and all that stands outside. Thus in that special place the streaming rays of what seems an apparent contradiction of the gospel and of christianity begin to express themselves: that a woman loves far from all that we call "the world" and nevertheless with an astonishing spiritual power exercises an influence on this world; that a woman lives hidden away and yet is there as open as a light on a candelabra; that a woman lives in silence and yet calls out forcefully like a loud voice in the wilderness; that Clare though ill for twenty eight of her fifty nine years of life nevertheless expends all the possible energies of her life and fills it with all the grandeur of which it is possible; that a woman takes on a kind of renunciation that embraces all that makes up a normal life, a denial that for all appearances seems inhuman and deathly and which

nonetheless leads to a wondrous dimension of humanity and femininity; that, as the Bull of Canonization says, "since in the austerity of her cloistered solitude, she broke the alabaster jar of her body with her severity, the whole Church was thoroughly imbued with the aroma of her sanctity" (Bull of Canonization 4).

Clare spent the remainder of her life in the cloister of San Damiano enclosed in the cold, demanding sobriety of its narrow spaces in which she prayed, worked and slept. She was buried in this baren masonry and yet at the same time shone for all as light in the midst of the darkened world, an unchanging image of kindness and a glowing source of warmth. In this special place of unsurpassable poverty she was far from being a broken, crippled or abnormal person. She kept in her heart an exquisite sense of beauty. The alb which she sewed for her father Francis is a most precious remnant of medieval embroidery.

In the very narrowness of the space to which she "banned" herself, Clare is a woman of stupendous liberality and in the broad expanses of her heart she brings together into a peaceful, inner harmony both an extraordinary austerity toward herself and a gentle sensitivity toward others. She possesses the transparency of a genuine compassion: she corrects others with a certain reluctance, is moderate in giving commands and prefers to recognize others than to be given recognition. Together with all of this, in a spirit of happiness and joy, she lives a life of extraordinary self-denial so that both Francis and the Bishop of Assisi had to explicitly advise her to allow herself to be cared for during an illness.

The noble heart of Clare is the source of an amiability that overwhelms others, and she causes astonishment through the firmness with which she pursues her goal — following in the footsteps of the poor and humble Christ. Thus we read in **The Legend of Saint Clare** (37):

Once when the Lord Pope Gregory forbade any brother to go to the monasteries of the ladies without permission, the pious mother, sorrowing that her sisters would more rarely have the food of sacred teaching, sighed: "Let him now take away from us all the brothers since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital." At once she sent back to the minister all the brothers, not wanting to have the questors who acquired corporal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread. When Pope Gregory heard this, he immediately mitigated that prohibition into the hands of the general minister.

Clare resisted the Pope when he tried to persuade her to accept possessions in order to provide for the daily needs of the cloister of San Damiano. "If you fear for your vows, We absolve you from it," the Pope reassured

her. Her reply was immediate: "Holy Father, I will never in any way wish to be absolved from the following of Christ" (Life 14).

Clare is an outstanding figure of her times for her unbreakable integrity both as a person and as a woman. She does indeed deny herself that life's fulfillment which nature offers to womanhood, but this is not at all because of a lack of inner spirit nor because her heart might have been ignorant of the meaning of love. Indeed, she does this precisely because she knew and understood the meaning of love so deeply, because through faith and inner enlightenment and the fire of her most committed heart she had personal knowledge of that love which is without measure and which seeks always to give itself away in love.

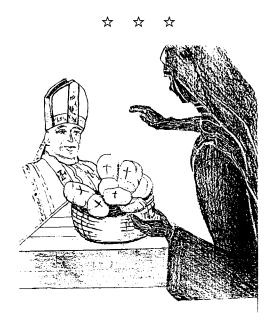
For this reason Clare is not also a woman. Her womanly being is magnified and elevated to exemplary heights. Her first biographer, the same Brother Thomas of Celano who gave us the first detailed life of Francis, is unafraid to say: She is "an image of the Mother of God, a new leader of women" (Life, Prologue).

Clare remains in the shadow of St. Francis not because she must remain there and not because it is only correct that she remain there. Clare desires to stay there: as a woman she desires to live out in the shadows what Francis as a man was called to bring into the open. She desires to be the recipient and to preciously guard in her hidden silence that which Francis gave voice to and made available to the public. She is as a vessel open to receive the fullness of Francis; and from this same vessel which bears the name of Clare, Francis repeatedly draws his own fullness. He too can find peace in her soul. He is at home in the intimacy and transparency of her heart although he seldom, indeed very seldom saw her and with the passing years even more seldom encountered her. This caused her pain. And in this too was she totally feminine and through her tears loved even more.

She is totally feminine in her sensitivity toward people, toward everything that moved her whether internally or externally. She encountered with deep reverence each and every thing which often in her hands in the face of her profound respect bent before her, almost miraculously. But before all she encounters with this deep reverence people in their individuality, their conscience, their weaknesses and their gifts. She is always congenial and possessed of a marvelous immediate warmth: "Dearly beloved, may you too always rejoice," she writes to Agnes of Prague, daughter of the King and abbess of the cloister in that city. "To the cry of her heartfelt and unique love," Clare offers her greeting; and toward the end of her letter she writes: "What more can I say? Let the tongue of the flesh be silent" (Fourth Letter).

Clare was canonized two years after her death. With the judgment of the church she receives the seal of God's approval of her grace-filled life. This she receives because already through all her years the authenticity of her life caught the attention of the world, that very world to which she seemed extinguished. She had taken refuge in solitude, had withdrawn from the world and it is as if she had taken this very world to herself.

Just as the errant moth is drawn to light, so the world feels itself drawn to her. People come to her with their needs, the cares of this world, their illnesses which she often heals through a mere sign of the cross. People seek her wisdom, her counsel, her advice. It seems as truly symbolic that when a barbarian army storms Assisi (1241) the troups are put to rout not by walls and arms, but through the faith, the grandeur of a defenseless woman, by a Clare who prays in solitude. Clare is a tower of peace, a fortress against which the waves of the ocean splash and are broken (Life, 21). \Box



Sr. M. Raphael, O.S.F.

THE DEATH OF ST. CLARE

It must have seemed at times as if the pearl of great price asked a price to heavy to pay. I would love to have been there on that endless August day when you waited with time to spare as your patient Sister Death chimed the rhythmic knell.

At times the toll seems to high: him shattered, broken, and naked; you battered by the struggle to maintain the integrity of all that had been revealed in love — his loved sealed the covenant and you gained the pearl of great price.

A picture forms in my mind, Clare: you waiting for that approval, it arriving at the very last and you clasping it to kiss as if it might revive your breathbut then at that moment Sister Death would not, could not wait another knell.

A picture forms in my mind, Clare: you lying at long last at peace, your once youthful face heavy with age the lines crow-feeting your eyes, the skin saggy on your slim hands circling the inked vellum page, and a light sheen of tears forming in slowly closing eyes.

Séamus Mulholland, O.F.M.

What is more Chaste than holy Charity? (Brother Giles)

IGNATIUS BRADY, O.F.M.

We have said much about Saint Francis and his way of looking at life and specifically, our life. We ought to turn likewise to his "little plant" and truest follower, our Mother and Sister Saint Clare, to learn how we should live not only in obedience, and without anything of our own, but also in chastity: vivendo in obedientia, sine proprio et in castitate.

Although her life was hidden from the world, "The news of her death (11 August 1253) spread like wildfire among the people of the town of Assisi. Men and women alike flocked to San Damiano, and all cried: 'A Saint! One dear to God!' The podestá came in haste with a troop of soldiers and armed men, to keep diligent watch lest they would suffer the loss of such a precious treasure" as her holy body. (Legenda, c.30). The Pope, Alexander IV had to be persuaded not to celebrate immediately the Office of Virgins in place of the Office of the Dead!

Seven hundred years later both Pius XII and the Minister General made special reference to the example, the lesson of her life which revealed the true appreciation of virginity and chastity and its positive character and value for the Church of God, even though it is so often misunderstood in our day. Clare herself had truly treasured to the full this most holy virtue, as she so clearly presents it in her Letters to Blessed Agnes of Prague over the space of some twenty years. They glow with praises of the holy virtue and above all reveal her delight in Christ her Spouse.

In this, assuredly, Clare demonstrated for us the approach, the attitude, we should have for the virtue and the vow of chastity. In her writings

The late Ignatius Brady wrote this piece some 10 years ago; its franciscan message, however, is timely and instructive. Among other things, the article reveals the simple and powerful spirituality of the great franciscan scholar.

there is little or no mention of the difficulties that may arise; indeed, her whole approach, her attitude, her emphasis, center on the positive qualities, the total YES to God implied in this vow.

This is certainly the Franciscan approach: to stress the charity of chastity, far more than the negative elements, far more than the renunciation involved. Suffice it to recall the discussion Blessed Brother Giles had with one of the friars. He was asked: "Do you not prize chastity as one of the greatest virtues?" Giles replied that he did hold it dearer than many other virtues. Then another brother asked, or objected: "But, Father, is not charity a greater virtue than chastity?" Giles, a man filled with the wisdom of God, answered a bit bluntly: "Brother, what is more chaste than holy charity?" (Cf. Ivo P. Sullivan, Golden Words: The Sayings of Brother Giles of Assisi [Chicago 1966, p.72]).

The Franciscan is to see in his or her chastity the expression of his charity. We might draw the same conclusion (for friars and Sisters) from The Salutation of the Virtues of Saint Francis, save that we must read between the lines, so to speak, since the Salutation does not so much as mention chastity! But a closer look at the text reveals that charity seems to do the work, so to speak, of chastity: Sancta caritas confundit omnes diabolicas et carnales tentationes et omnes carnales timores: "Holy charity puts to flight (or confounds) all temptations that come from the devil and the flesh and all fears that derive from our (poor) human nature."

Hence we need not hesitate to say that there is indeed a special bond between charity and chastity; and that charity in itself gives sense and meaning to our vow of chastity. We might even suggest that for Saint Clare charity is the support and goal of obedience also. She writes of the Abbess: "Let her strive to rule others more by her virtues and holy manners than by her office, that the Sisters, animated by her example, may obey out of love rather than out of fear" (Rule, IV, n.7).

Quite aptly indeed the older Constitutions of the Poor Clares, using the words of St. Francis, insisted that we must say No to creatures and Yes to God in all things if we would have an undivided heart filled with holy charity and totally centered on the Lord:

I beg all my Brothers in the holy charity which God is (John 4, 16), to do away with every care and worry, so that we may seek in the best possible way to serve, love, adore and honour the Lord God with clean heart and pure mind, which is what He desires above all else. (First Rule of St. Francis, c.22, n.26).

The reason for such an admonition is given slightly earlier, in n. 19 ff: "Let us beware of the malice and subtlety of Satan, who does not wish

This is certainly the Franciscan approach: to stress the charity of chastity, far more than the negative elements, far more than the renunciation involved.

that man give his mind and heart to God. And he goes about seeking under some pretext of reward or help, to snatch away the heart of man and choke out of his memory the word and the commandments of the Lord, and tries to blind the heart of man by worldly pursuits...and so take up his abode there..." — On our part, we must be conscious of our need of God's grace, and humbly ask for it.

Charity and Chastity in the Church

One final aspect, which Pope Pius XII of holy memory emphasized in his Encyclical on Holy Virginity (25 March 1954), is the fruitfulness of chastity for the Church. This Pope Alexander IV had specifically pointed out in praising Saint Clare in the Bull of Canonization. Clare herself had seen and understood the saving and sanctifying role of the virginal life of her daughters in the Church when she wrote to Blessed Agnes of Prague: "To use the words of the Apostle himself, I hold thee to be a co-worker of God Himself (I Cor. 3,9), and a support for the frail and failing members of His glorious Body" (The Third letter to Bl. Agnes,n.3; in The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi [trans. I Brady, OFM, St. Bonaventure, NY 1953, p. 93]).

We should not forget moreover the remarkable words of St. Francis which find application to the chaste friar and layman too (as well as the Sisters) in the Church. Speaking, in **The First Letter to the Faithful** of those who have the Spirit of the Lord, and thus addressing in reality all who are serious in the pursuit of perfection, he cries out:

O how happy and blessed are those (men and women) as they flee self-love...and bring forth worthy fruits of penance...because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make His abode in them. They are indeed children of the heavenly Father whose works they do; and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of Our Lord Jesus Christ. — We are spouses when the Holy Spirit joins the faithful soul to Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are His mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body by the love of God and a pure and sincere conscience. We bring Him forth (into the world) by the way we act,

which should be a light and an example to others. Oh how glorious...to have such a Father in heaven. How holy and peaceful to have such a Spouse! such a Brother and such a Son: Our Lord Jesus Christ!...

One might say that it is especially through obedience that we become His mothers (Our Lady's **Be it done unto me**... is the model implied here). Or indeed through poverty of spirit which has emptied our hearts of all else, that they may be His dwelling-place by love and by a pure and untarnished conscience. Only thus can we bring Him forth by our holy life and actions which must shine as an example to others. — Chastity then is but another aspect of our Christ-likeness; and as such must and will lead to a fruitful apostolate for souls.

As someone has said (who escapes me): "If the life of chastity were embraced primarily or exclusively as a means of self-sanctification, it would soon become purely self-centered and ultimately sterile and unproductive. Instead, it must be transformed into a spiritual marriage with Christ and thereby changed into spiritual motherhood which shares in the fruitfulness of the life which Christ lives in His Church." — How well the first Franciscans understood this sublime task and the ultimate meaning of the life of chastity, is revealed in a phrase of Blessed Brother Giles: "Carry tenderly the Virgin's Son!"

Brethren, let us begin for until now we have done little or nothing!

A religious institute remains strong and flourishing as long as the full spirit of the founder persists and breathes in its discipline and activities and in the lives of its members...That is not a renewal...which does not accord with the nature of the Order, or which in any way departs from the mind of its Founder —

(Paul VI).

Duns Scotus Seminary Southfield, Michigan, 29 July 1982 17:15

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Life in Holy Unity According to Saint Francis and Saint Clare

FR. OPTATUS VAN ASSELDONK, O.F.M. CAP.

For some time, I have been struck by an expression in the Prologue * of the Rule of St. Clare. Pope Innocent VI, speaking of the petition by Clare and the Sisters of San Damiano for approval of their form of life, says: "According to which you should live a life in common in unity of spirit and in the bond of most high poverty which was given to you by the blessed Francis and was freely taken up by you."

The execution of this pontifical approval was entrusted to Cardinal Rainaldo, who writes in the same Prologue: "Therefore, inclined to your holy desires, we confirm forever by the authority of the Lord Pope and by our own authority...the form of life and manner of holy unity and most high poverty, which your blessed Father St. Francis, by word and writing, delivered into your keeping for your observance. It is this: 1. In the name of the Lord begins the Form of Life of the Poor Sisters."

We are concerned with the words: "live a life in common in unity of spirit" and in "holy unity." In context, both these expressions, which in both cases precede most high poverty, refer to the same reality and seem

^{*} Throughout this translation I shall retain the word Prologue, which most of the Italian and Spanish writers employ for the Bull of Pope Innocent IV.

The CORD welcomes the opportunity to make available to the english-speaking world this fine article by the eminent Capuchin scholar. We thank Sister Jane Frances, P.C.C. of the Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Roswell, New Mexico) for permission to use her fine translation from the Italian. The article originally entitled "La Vita in Santa Unita secondo San Francesco e Santa Chiara" appeared in FORMA SORORUM 17 (1980) 186-195; 18 (1981) 113-121. We have chosen not to print the numerous footnotes which appear in the original.

to be identical, that is: the life of holy unity, lived in common in unity of spirit.

So the form of life consists particularly in two parts, that is, in the life of holy unity and in the life of highest poverty. The words used by the Pope and by the Cardinal almost suggest that Clare used the same or similar words in her petition. It seems further that this form of life was granted in word and in writing by Francis himself, at least in substance. This is a thought which corresponds exactly with the thought of Clare and is often repeated by her.

Much has been written about the life of poverty, especially as contained in the **Privilege of Poverty**. However, I find that studies on the life of holy unity are less precise and less clear, even though there is no lack, among the writers, of clear indications of the fact and importance of the life of holy unity. Recently Fr. Iriarte and Fr. Garrido especially dwell on it.

The aim of this study is to search in the writings of Clare and Francis, in the biographical sources and other works, for the best indicators of the exact role of this life in holy unity as a form of "community life" or life of Franciscan fraternity.

I. THE WRITINGS OF ST. CLARE

Let us begin with the **Testament**, since it was written prior to the **Rule**. After recalling the conversion of the first Poor Sisters, in paragraph no. 5, she speaks of the form of life given by Francis, and, "this above all, that we should for all time persevere in holy poverty." And, concluding this point, she proceeds thus: "I direct and urge on in the Lord Jesus Christ all my Sisters, those who are present and those who are to come, that they always strive to imitate the way of holy simplicity, humility and poverty and likewise the integrity of a holy way of living (ac etiam honestatem sanctae conversationis) in the same way that we were taught by our Blessed Father Francis from the beginning of our conversion to Christ: not by our merits, but solely by the mercy and grace of our Benefactor, that Father of mercies, may they always remain in the fragrance of good renown as much for those who are far off as for those who are near." (par.9).

So, besides the way of holy simplicity, humility and poverty, they are also to imitate the integrity of that holy way of living which Francis taught them from the beginning of their conversion. In paragraph 2 of the Testament, Clare refers to the words spoken by Francis in French, while repairing the little Church of San Damiano: "Come and help me in this work... Because later on ladies will come to dwell here, by whose renowned and holy way of living our heavenly Father will be glorified throughout all his holy Church" (quarum famosa et sancta conversatione...).

Francis foresees, therefore, that the famous and holy manner of living of the Poor Ladies will glorify the Church. But what is this holy manner of living? Clare continues (in paragraph 9): "And loving one another with the love of Christ, may you show outwardly by your actions the love which you have within you, so that roused by this example, the Sisters may always grow in the love of God and in charity for one another."

It seems, therefore, that this holy way of living consists, at least in part, in the love of God and in mutual charity, inspired by the love of Christ in one's heart. However, the word "unity" is still lacking in the context.

In paragraph 10, Clare continues, and she explains in what this "mutual" charity actually consists, first on the part of the Mother and then on the part of the Sisters: "I also beg the one who will be in the service of the Sisters that she strive to lead the way for the others more by her virtues and holy way of acting (sanctis moribus) than by her office (officio), so that, roused by her example, the Sisters may obey her not so much because of her office but more out of love. Let her be discerning and foresightful toward her Sisters, as a good Mother toward her daughters; and let her strive to provide for them according to the need of each one out of those things which the Lord will give (dabit)."

There seems to be a clear pointing to Francis here: Audite, Poverelle: "With great love I beg you to use discretely the alms which the Lord will give you."

Clare continues: "Let her also be kind and courteous, available to all (benigna et communis) that they can confidently make known their needs and trustingly have recourse to her at any hour as will seem to them profitable to do, both for themselves as for their Sisters."

On the part of the abbess, therefore, "maternal" love, according to the Rule, is foresightful, courteous and available to all.

And on the part of the Sisters: "The Sisters, who are subject to authority, should keep in mind that they have put aside their own wills for the Lord. Thus I will that they should obey their Mother as they have promised the Lord of their own free will, so that their Mother, seeing the charity, humility and unity which they have toward one another, may carry more lightly the whole burden of the office she bears and that which is vexing and bitter be turned into sweetness because of their holy living."

So, in this context is seen the internal relationship which exists between the integrity of a holy way of life and the charity, humility and unity which reign among the Sisters and which beget sweetness for the Mother (paragraphs 9 and 10). Indeed, the holy manner of living is the mutual charity, humility and unity among the Sisters, inspired by the exemplary maternal love of the Abbess and, after all is the fruit of the love of Christ in us. By this holy manner of living in charity, humility and unity, the Mother carries the burden of office with sweetness.

As we shall see later, the Audite, Poverelle, which Francis gave to the Sisters after the Canticle of Brother Sun, had precisely the purpose of rousing this holy manner of living in unanimous, humble and obedient charity, without property.

In this manner, the Testament becomes a key to a better understanding of the holy unity spoken of in the Prologue of the Rule and in the Rule itself.

Chapter IV of the Rule speaks of the election of the Abbess in complete concord and for the common good. The expressions "common good" and "common consent" recur frequently in the Rule. In the same Chapter she says that the Abbess should "hold fast" to the "common life" in all things (communitatem), and, as explained by Fr. Olgiati, this is meant in the sense of a full fraternal equality without privileges. This fraternal equality is immediately applied to the weekly Chapter of the monastery, in which all, including the Abbess, confess their common and public faults, and all together, even the youngest ones, discuss whatever concerns the welfare and good of the monastery.

Then a typical text follows: "Toward preserving the unity of mutual love and peace (unitatem mutuae dilectionis et pacis), all the officials of the monastery should be elected by the common consent of the Sisters (paragraph 13). Therefore, the purpose of this "common" consent, as well as that of the participation of "all" the Sisters, of which Clare also speaks elsewhere, is the unity of mutual charity and of peace. And for the same purpose — the common consent of all the Sisters — "at least eight Sisters shall be elected from among the more discerning, of whom the Abbess is always bound to take counsel about those things which our form of life requires" (paragraph 13).

It seems very clear therefore, that the unity of mutual charity and peace is the inspiring principle of all that concerns our life and it is best served by consent. In this light, the words of the Prologue of the Rule take on a greater importance. To approve the form of life "according to which you should live in common in unity of spirit;" "we confirm forever the form of life and the manner of holy unity and most high poverty." Indeed, the way of holy unity in common consent, or unity of spirit, should inspire the whole of life, as also that of most high poverty. It is striking how many times Clare exhorts all the Sisters always to observe the vow of most high poverty in common consent. This repeated insistence, even to having the

Clare could not underscore more forcefully the manner of holy unity, that is, of mutual charity, than by defining it along with St. Paul as the bond of perfection . . .

Church approve the **Privilege of Poverty** that is absolute, proves in an express manner how Clare feared that the Sisters might not remain "united" among themselves on this vital point. Surely it is not without purpose that the Prologue first speaks of holy unity and then of highest poverty.

The central place given to unity and mutual charity appears, however, even more forceful in Chapter X of the Rule. In it Clare inserts word for word from the Regula Bullata of Francis, a passage that is singular in this regard: "I direct and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that the Sisters beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, covetousness, care and solicitude about this world, detraction and complaining, dissension and division. Rather let them always be solicitous to preserve intact among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection."

Clare could not underscore more forcefully the manner of holy unity, that is, of mutual charity, than by defining it along with St. Paul as the bond of perfection; therefore as the essential purpose, and central to the form of life and to poverty itself.

The principle enemy of this holy unity in charity is discord and division, the fruit of pride, vainglory, envy, etc. — as always, the spirit of the flesh, the beloved "I." Then Clare continues: "And those who do not know how to read should not be eager to learn. Rather, they should study closely that which they ought above all to desire: to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy way of working, to pray to him always with a pure heart...and to love those who persecute us."

The Spirit of God inspires perfect unity with God and with neighbor and also with our enemies and persecutors. The Prologue says it well that the Sisters should live a life in common in unity of spirit and according to the way of holy unity, "the holy operation" of the Spirit of the Lord desirable above every other thing.

It does not seem out of place to note here that Clare twice uses the typical wording of Francis when she intends to communicate formally a deep Gospel mystery, and that it is the expression "moneo et exhortor"

of the Regula Bullata. Clare repeats it in Chapter X of her Rule in her great fundamental exhortation on the unity of charity and on the Spirit of the Lord. She also uses it in the Testament, speaking of the poverty and holy way of life in charity, humility and unity, thus inculcating in the Sisters the two essential parts of the form of life.

In conclusion: **Poor Sisters** are Sisters living in fraternal unity and in poverty. Nomen est omen!

For completeness, I should mention that the Rule of Ugolino (1218-1219) mentions the obligation of the Sisters to make known to the Visitator whatever concerns the observances of the religious life and the unity of mutual charity (paragraph 13), a very precise indication that, in the form of life and in the manner of living the unity of mutual charity had an important role.

Paragraph 14 of this Rule or form of life concludes by imposing "uniform" observances upon all, so that the Sisters who are separated by the distances between their places, are united and joined in the bond of charity by the identity of the life and the conformity of customs (quatenus per locorum distantiam separatas, vitae identitas et morum conformitas caritatis vinculo uniat et coniungat). Both of these expressions make one think of St. Clare's own Rule.

II. THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS

In the Prologue of the Rule of St. Clare, the life "in common in unity of spirit" and "holy way of life" become "the form of life which your blessed Father St. Francis by word and by writing delivered into your keeping for observance...". We shall see now if and how these thoughts are found in the writings of the Saint.

a) Audite, Poverelle (Listen, Little Poor Ones)

Of Francis' three writings for the Poor Sisters, the one which, in an express manner, brings us closest to the life of holy unity is, without doubt, the Audite, Poverelle. Father Boccali, to whom we are indebted for the study of this writing, compares the text with the one concerning it in the Legend of Perugia, and thinks that the author of the passage regarding it gives the impression of having been present at the occurrence which is narrated, or having himself been the bearer of the poetic vernacular text. In fact, there are too many parallels in the two texts that cannot be explained except by a direct knowledge of the happenings and of the text.

It would be a matter, therefore, of an eye witness account. To better understand his evidence, let us first cite the text of **Audite**, **Poverelle** that concerns us: "Listen, little poor ones, called by the Lord, who have been

gathered from many parts and provinces: always live in the truth, that you may die in obedience."

And now the words of the Legend of Perugia, 85; "In these he briefly told them that then and always they should live in charity (caritate esse unanimes) and in close harmony (et ad invicem conversari), because, following his example and words, when he yet had but few brothers, they were consecrated (converse) to Christ. Their conversion and their life (conversatio) give glory to the Order of friars, whose little plant they are and to the whole Church."

The first thing that impresses one in this text is not so much its direct affinity to the contents of **Audite**, **Poverelle**, but rather its affinity to the **Testament of St. Clare**, of which we spoke above.

In paragraphs 2, 9 and 10 the **Testament** speaks of: a. the conversion and holy way of life of the Sisters, "famous" in the whole Church (paragraph 2); b. this conversion and holy way of life becomes "renown" as much for those who are far off as for those who are near (paragraph 9); c. this holy way of life consists in mutual charity (paragraph 9), in humility and reciprocal unity (paragraph 10). Therefore, Clare, in her **Testament** also speaks of the **Audite**, **Poverelle**. The conclusion seems logical.

The Mirror of Perfection has a similar text: "deberent vivere et humiliter conversari et esse unanimes in caritate."

The Legend of Perugia continues the poor and austere life of the Sisters and of St. Francis' compassion for them. The passage makes one think of the Testament of St. Clare, paragraph 4. And then he writes: "In these words he reminded them that the Lord had gathered them together from various parts, so that the might live in holy charity, poverty and obedience and always live in this profession until death." The Latin text says: "sicut Dominus ex multis partibus in unum congregavit ipsas ad sanctam caritatem...".

The first part of the sentence really makes one think of the Audite, poverelle. The second is more free, like a personal synthesis, that makes one think again of the Testament of St. Clare, paragraphs 9 and 10. In each case, the Testament and the Legend of Perugia are very valuable eye witnesses to give us a clear understanding of the deep meaning of the Audite, poverelle.

Let us return to the Audite, poverelle, word for word, comparing it with the words of the Legend of Perugia: "Always live in the truth that you may die in obedience."

Father Boccali writes, concerning the word "veritas" (truth): "The expression vivere in veritate (to live in the truth) shows traces of the Bible; it is the foundation of the real life in charity, which is Christ-God." Indeed, understanding the Johannine climate in the writings of St. Francis, the typically Johannine word "veritas" recalls, for example, Jn. 17, a text well-known to Francis and, in his two Letters to the Faithful, translated as "unitas" (unity), that is, sanctified "in unum." In John's context it has the sense of affection or love, with which the Father loves the Son and the Son the Father, in which love or affection (or truth) all of us share: sanctified in the truth or in unity.

The Audite, poverelle speaks about obedience, as does the Testament of St. Clare. It also speaks of poverty, but indirectly, inasmuch as Francis exhorts the Sisters in the Audite to be discreet and to provide from the alms, in the same sense that Clare speaks in the Testament cited above. But the longest and most deeply-felt part of the writing to the Sisters insists upon mutual charity and patience during the illness of the infirm. The Legend of Perugia also speaks of it, saying that Francis insisted above all (maxime) on this compassionate service.

As far as I know, no student of St. Clare has until now indicated in a direct and express manner, the inner relationship between the **Testament** and the **Audite**, **poverelle** on the one hand, and the **Legend of Perugia** on the other hand. For this reason it seemed opportune to speak of it in detail.

b) The Form of Life and the Last Will

The "form of life" (1212-1213) for St. Clare and the Poor Sisters is the first preserved writing of Francis. In that part of it which Clare puts in her Rule, Francis speaks of the intimate trinitarian life in which the Sisters share in familiar communion. The insertion of only this passage in the Rule, in its "trinitarian" conciseness, denotes that, in Clare's thinking, this mystery is considered the heart of the entire form of life. Why, otherwise, would she have reproduced only this passage?

The same consideration avails, moveover, for the Last Will, likewise preserved in the Rule of St. Clare. In this last document he insists on fidelity to the evangelical life in poverty, and to the following of Christ and his Mother.

The conclusion seems compelling, therefore, that in these two writings we must find the fundamental aspects of the "whole" Form of Life, both that given by Francis at the beginning, and that written by Clare at the end of her life. In Clare's thinking they are basically identical.

The veracity of our conclusion depends on the very content of the documents. The Last Will, written in the final days of Francis' life, the

last writing to the Poor Sisters and the last of his writings to be preserved, confirms the following of Christ and of his Mother in a life of poverty to the end, according to the Gospel. And he then continues: "and I beg you, my ladies, and I counsel you, that you always live in this holy life and poverty. And take good care never to distance yourselves from it in any way through the teaching or advice of anyone."

The ardent concern for perseverance in highest poverty, against any opposition from without or within, was always deeply shared by Francis and Clare, evidence that these dangers were serious and imminent, as, indeed, is known. And Clare continued until her death the struggle to overcome this vital danger, begging for the formal pontifical approval of the form of life contained in her Rule.

In his Last Will, however, he speaks not only of poverty, but also, in a more general way, of the life of Christ and of his Mother. To follow this life and poverty in the Gospel was, therefore, the principal goal of Francis and the Poor Sisters. Concretely and basically, in what does this life of Christ and Mary according to the Gospel consist, this life which Francis and Clare with their brothers and sisters intend to follow?

Let us look for the answer to the question in the early Form of Life to which the Last Will refers us. The text of the Form of Life reads: "since through divine inspiration, you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the most high sovereign King, the heavenly Father, and you have espoused yourselves to the Holy Spirit by choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel..." * According to Francis and Clare, everything begins with the "divine inspiration;" fundamental throughout their writings there is a call "in the Holy Spirit."

After that, the principal focus is on the choice made to live the perfection of the Gospel. The deep sense of this perfection is, as the Last Will states, the life of Christ and Mary in poverty; in other words, to live Christ and his Mother.

This life of Christ and his Mother, since chosen in perfection, involves in actual fact and in depth, being made "in the Holy Spirit;" that is to say, according to the literal context, "through divine inspiration," daughters and handmaids of the Father and spouses of the Holy Spirit. Observe Francis' words which underscore the actual initiative of the Sisters: "you are made," "you are given in marriage," "choosing."

^{*} The original text says: "Quia divina inspiratione fecistis vos... et Spiritui Sancti vos desponsastis eligendo vivere secundum perfectionem sancti Evangelii..." The sense seems to be truly this, namely, the choice of the perfect life according to the Gospel under divine inspiration, implies becoming daughters...spouses.

This choice to live Christ and Mary in the Gospel discloses an intimate and dynamic life union and communion with Christ and with his Mother in trinitarian profundity, in the sense of a continuation of the life of Christ and of his Mother, sharing and communicating their trinitarian life in the Church. Indeed, in the Holy Spirit the Sisters become daughters and handmaids like Mary most holy; and like her, spouses of the Holy Spirit, living Christ and making him live in them and in others, mothers like Mary.

Sister Chiara Augusta Lainati has written in detail on this theme of intimate union and communion of life in a trinitarian sense, in the following of Christ and his Mother in the Gospel. She was not thinking directly, however, of the holy unity in communion of spirit of which we spoke above. Her thinking is, moreover, equally valuable and convincing since she starts from another point of view and arrives at an analogous conclusion.

In that section of her work, The Spouse of the Holy Spirit, she gives a profound explanation of the subject, supported by other writings of Clare and Francis and other sources such as the Process of Canonization. Speaking of the Form of Life she writes: "This passage, the only one which can be said with absolute certainty to have been given to Clare by Francis at the beginning of her religious life, seems to me to be of exceptional importance. It contained the spiritual direction, the theological-spiritual foundation of the Second Order as Francis had thought of it and desired it, with clear, includible reference to the Annunciation Gospel of Luke 1:26-37.... For that Gospel-centered man, Francis, Clare is the daughter and maid-servant of the most high heavenly Father, and spouse of the Holy Spirit, in order to incarnate Christ by following the Gospel (Rule, Ch. VI.3): like Mary, the 'virgin made Church'... It is the first time (1212-1213) that the writings of Francis resort to the terms servant, Most High, Spirit of the Lord: key words in the Franciscan heritage. And they occur in Francis' writings with reference to the Gospel of the Annunciation, which is a context of espousals in the Holy Spirit in order to bring forth Christ in the Church. Through this parallelism with Mary, Clare is the 'spouse of the Holy Spirit' for Francis."

On my part I can add, explicating Sister Lainati's writing, that this "Marian-spousal" life, in the trinitarian context, that is, as an intimate communion in the trinitarian life as children, spouses, brothers-sisters and mothers of Christ, is also the fundamental and common Gospel vocation of the Friars Minor, the penitents in the world and, therefore, of all "Franciscans," without difference in this regard.

To better understand this intimate union of the one Gospel vocation, lived in different complementary forms, we must continue our research into the writings of Francis and elsewhere. But at this point we can conclude that the life of Christ and his Mother in Gospel poverty, in the thought of Francis and of Clare, implies in a precise manner the trinitarian life in intimate union with the Father (sons-daughters), as spouses of the Holy Spirit and mothers of the Son. And this is based on the Form of Life and the Last Will.

c) Other writings of St. Francis

From the Form of Life to the Poor Sisters (included in Clare's Rule of 1253), it appears that Francis, together with Clare, saw his vocation as profoundly trinitarian from the beginning of his evangelical conversion.

This fact is also confirmed in the first Letter to the Faithful or penitents, whose composition probably dates back to the years 1213-1215 and, therefore, close to the Form of Life itself. This letter begins, and in this it is unique among medieval documents on penitence, with the precept of the love of God and of one's neighbor as oneself. The Spirit of the Lord which rests on these penitents in the world makes them children of the Father and spouses of the Holy Spirit; brothers and mothers of Christ: an intimate trinitarian communion, even more explicit and elaborated than in the Form of Life.

Francis seems to be deeply struck by this intimate trinitarian union in which we all participate: "We are spouses, we are brothers, we are mothers;" he sings warm praises of our brother and son Jesus, the good Shepherd, who gives his life for us and prays for us at the Last Supper: "O Holy Father," and he makes clear the trinitarian union by using the words "spouse" and "son," which we do not find in the quoted texts, whether synoptic or Johanine.

In the end, he gives a personal synthesis of the priestly prayer of Jn. 17, in which he changes the Johannine word "truth" to "unity," in this manner: "I pray for them, not for the world: bless them and sanctify them! And for them I sanctify myself so that they may be sanctified in **unity**, as we are."

This sanctification in unity refers to those in the world who will believe in the words proclaimed by the penitents.

It should be noted that Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John, in different forms, occurs four times in the writings of Francis, namely, in the two Letters to the Faithful and in the Regula non Bullata, an obvious proof that Francis wanted to underscore the essential content for his brothers and for the penitents, that is: filial, fraternal and apostolic unity, based on the unity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit and communicated to all of us in Christ our brother.

In these Johannine texts there are recurring thoughts such as: "that they should be one as we are," "that they should be perfect in unity," "that the love with which you have loved me be in them and I in them," "for their sake I consecrate myself so that they should be consecrated in the truth, consecrated in unity, like us."

The idea of intimate trinitarian union is, therefore, forcefully present in these Johannine texts; but it lacks the expression or the word "unity" or "holy unity" which is present in the Prologue of the Rule of St. Clare, in the Rule itself and in the Testament.

Moreover, it is widely known that the Gospel life lived by Francis and Clare was profoundly trinitarian. The persons of Christ and Mary themselves, whose footsteps both desired to follow in poverty and humility, are always seen and lived in a trinitarian context and this fact appears, in part, in the above-mentioned texts, but it can be proved throughout the writings of both Francis and Clare: less forcefully in those of Clare; more clearly expressed in those of Francis. Our Lord Jesus Christ is always described as Son of the Father (God-Man) in the Holy Spirit, and Mary always shares in the trinitarian life as daughter-handmaid, as spouse and Mother.

However, in the writings of Francis the expression and the word "unity" occurs always and only in direct relation with the Most Holy Trinity. The closest text to the Prologue of the Rule of St. Clare occurs in the Letter to the Chapter of the Friars, which begins "In the name of the Most High Trinity and Holy Unity Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Amen." This Unity of the Holy Spirit is placed here also as an example and incentive of the unity in the life of fraternity. In the same letter Francis insists, for example, on a single Mass celebrated by all the priests together "for the love of charity," because Christ, One and everywhere "indivisible," acts in the Eucharist with the Father and Holy Spirit. He then also insists, with regard to the Divine Office, on the concord of voice and mind, and on the "harmony" of the mind with God. And, at the end of the same letter, he adds a prayer in which he proposes the unity of our will with the will of God without, however, using the word "unity" so that we can, in the Holy Spirit, follow the footsteps of the Son and thus reach God, who lives and reigns in perfect Trinity and simple Unity.

Francis shows his fervor in celebrating and having celebrated the Unity and Trinity of God elsewhere in his writings. In his Exhortation to the Praise of God, one of his first writings, we read: "Blessed be the holy Trinity and undivided Unity."

In the Regula non Bullata, Chapter 17, which makes one think of the early years of the Order, Francis speaks of the Spirit of the Lord which

works interior holiness in us with its diverse virtues, and above all, with divine fear, divine wisdom and divine love of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: therefore, intimate union with the most Holy Trinity. In the same Rule he invites all the friars everywhere to exhort all people to penitence with the words: "Fear and honor, praise and bless, thank and adore the omnipotent Lord God in Trinity and in Unity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, creator of all things. Do penance...."

Most of Chapter 23 is a solemn hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father in the Son with the Holy Spirit, for only in the Son, with the Holy Spirit, can we give sufficient thanks. And to this trinitarian praise to the One and Triune God, he invites all humanity of all times, **per modum unius**, in the today of eternity.

In the Office of the Passion, of which the Praises at Every Hour form a part, the antiphon to Our Lady is trinitarian, as are various other prayers. This praise thus becomes a "unitarian" and a "trinitarian" liturgy, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the immolated, exalted Lamb, together with all humanity in heaven, on earth and in all creation. Francis knew how "to gather" all the universality of creation into unity around Christ who unites all in Himself as Son of the Father in the communion of the Saints for the praise, honor, glory and benediction of the Blessed Father in the Holy Spirit.

This mystery, total in unity and salvific in universality, synthesis of the history of salvation, found in Francis a particular devotee, a devotee of the Holy Trinity and of holy Unity. This "universalism" was profoundly and critically expounded in Leonard Lehmann's thesis and, in part, also in Nguyen-Van-Khanh's.

In conclusion: regarding the writings of Francis in which the trinitarian and unitarian aspect is very forceful, although the word "unity" or "holy unity" would be applied literally only to the Most Holy Trinity, it seems probable to me — in order not to say too much — that the trinitarian life described in the Form of Life in an express manner by both Francis and Clare, is really and profoundly seen and lived as a deep inspiration of their life in fraternal holy unity.

III. IN THE BIOGRAPHIES

In the biographies, especially in Celano's, there are several very precise texts which expressly exalt the unity of mutual charity among the poor sisters and the friars minor in the early fraternity.

Regarding the Poor Sisters Celano writes: "Among the Sisters there predominates above all else the virtue of a continual and mutual charity that unites their wills so deeply that even in a fraternity of forty or fifty

persons, as are in that place (San Damiano) there is an identity of willing and non-willing that molds a single spirit out of many" (1 Celano 19).

Only later does Celano speak of humility, of chastity and of poverty. He speaks first of all of charity, which predominates among them "above all else," in perfect unity of spirit. The practice of holy unity of mutual charity in unity of spirit!

"Regarding the early fraternity of minors founded," he writes, "on humility," he gives this testimony: "And truly, on this foundation they built, splendidly, the edifice of charity. And as living stones, gathered, so to speak, from every part of the world, they grew into a temple of the Holy Spirit. How ardent their fraternal love was... a real explosion of their spiritual affection, the only love which, above any other, is the source of true fraternal charity... Having despised all earthly things and free of any selfish love, from the moment they turned all their heart's affection into the bosom of the community, they tried with all diligence to give even themselves to meet all the needs of their brothers" (1 Celano 38-39).

Only later does he speak of obedience, of poverty, and of the other virtues; and he concludes: "Jealousy, malice, rancour, quarreling, suspicion, bitterness found no place among them; only great harmony, constant serenity, the action of grace and of praise filled them" (1 Celano 41).

Celano was struck by their fraternal unity, as appears more clearly elsewhere: "They were so filled with holy simplicity, innocence, purity of heart as to be unaware of all duplicity. Of such oneness (una) was their faith that unity of spirit (unus spiritus), harmony of purpose and customs, charity itself... agreement of thought (una voluntas, una caritas, animorum cohaerentia semper, morum concordia)" (1 Cel. 46).

Moreover, Celano himself suggests that we should not marvel: "because (Francis) said that one and the same Spirit brought forth the brothers and the poor ladies from this wicked world" (2 Celano 204). Truly a single Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Elsewhere the biographer furnishes the explanation of this fraternal unity by speaking of its opposite in the case of civil war between cities: "They were alienated from the One and Most High God; it was inevitable that unity could not remain among them" (2 Celano 37).

An allusion from outside the Order does not seem out of place, and the first that we know of is by Jacques de Vitry in 1216. Speaking of the friars minor and of the sisters minor, he characterizes them thus: "They live according to the form of the primitive Church, of which is written: 'the multitude of the believers were of one heart and one mind.'" These words seem almost to confirm those of Clare when she writes that their

holy way of living would become a cause of "fame" throughout the whole Church. Jacques also speaks of their good reputation in this context.

Lastly, in Celano it seems a special concern of Francis, from the beginning of the Order, to protect the unity of the brothers among themselves. In fact, seeing that "his children grew in numbers and grace everywhere, and were spreading even to the ends of the earth and their shoots were rich and marvelous and heavy with fruit, he began more and more frequently to reflect, and to be concerned that the young plant should grow and be preserved in the bond of unity. He saw, even then, that many, like wolves, raged against the little flock — old men hardened in wickedness (cfr. Dan. 13:52) — urged on to cause injury merely by their novelty. He foresaw that among his sons themselves difficulties could arise and injury be done to peace and unity" (2 Celano 23).

The expression "holy peace and unity" makes one think spontaneously of Clare's words in the Rule (Ch. IV) where she speaks of the necessity of preserving the unity of mutual charity and of peace to which he alludes above. It should be noted that Francis and Clare were united in their preoccupation to preserve fraternal unity against whatsoever danger from within and without.

According to Celano, Francis was thinking of the future rebels impelled by the senses and the spirit of the flesh "ready for quarrels and prone to scandal" (2 Celano 23).

Once in a dream, Francis felt like a mother hen incapable of gathering the many chicks which sought shelter under his wings, to protect them "from the disturbance of men and the attacks of evil tongues." He therefore decided to apply to Holy Mother, the Roman Church, as protector of the full Gospel liberty against the attacks inspired by the Evil One.

The text in which he mentions the real reasons for his appeal to the Holy See deserves to be cited literally. "Even she (the Church), who is holy, will emulate the glory of our poverty and will not allow the disorder of pride to eclipse the great value of our humility. She will preserve unharmed the bonds of charity and peace among us, striking rigorously and severely whoever causes discord. In her presence, the holy observance of evangelical purity will flower and she will not permit the good fragrance of life to fade for even an instant" (2 Celano 24).

Celano reports these words as the words of Francis himself, adding at the end: "This was the true and only intention of the Saint in commending himself; and these were the holy proofs of the foreknowledge of the man of God concerning the necessity of entrusting the future to the Church."

We are struck that St. Clare shared this same preoccupation of Francis, seeking without surcease throughout her life the papal approval of her Form of Life, whose essential characteristics are "holy unity" and "most high poverty," as expressly confirmed by Pope Innocent IV and Cardinal Rainaldo in the Prologue of the Rule or Form of Life. And Celano tells us that from the beginning, Francis had exactly the same two reasons or motives for having recourse to the Pope; the true and sole intention of the Saint was to protect the glory of poverty-humility and the bond of holy charity and peace against the dissidents. Truly a holy unity of spirit and intent between Francis and Clare from the beginning! Both had a profound understanding that the pure Gospel, lived in a holy unity of charity and in highest poverty, had the vital need of the defense of Holy Mother Church against every human weakness. The many-centuried history of the Franciscan Order has abundantly proven this human weakness. May the history of the Order be a teacher of life!

Celano also mentions several cases of friars who disrupt the unity of the Order (2 Celano 32-33), causing discord and division among the friars.

Among the causes of this discord, Francis feared in a special way "malicious tongues," gossip and detraction... and Celano gives a very stern description of it on Francis' part: "Finally, like every soul full of charity, Francis, too, detested whoever was odious to God. But among all other wicked persons, he abhorred with real horror, all detractors, and he said that they had poison under their tongue, with which they injured their neighbor... One day he heard that a friar had denigrated the good name of another, and turning to his Vicar, Brother Peter of Catania, uttered these terrible words: Grave dangers confront the Order if these detractors are not corrected. Immediately the sweet odor of many will change to a disgusting stench, if the mouths of fetid ones be not closed. Courage, get moving, examine diligently, and if you find innocent a friar who has been accused, punish the accuser with a severe and exemplary chastisement!..."

I will, he continued, that you take care with all possible diligence, you and all the ministers, that this pernicious malady does not spread further.

It was for this reason that the friars of that time rejected this vice particularly and made a pact among themselves to avoid carefully all that could injure or offend the honor of others. Indeed, what is the detractor if not the gall of men, the yeast of evil, the disgrace of the world? What is the man of double tongue if not the scandal of the Order, the poison of the religious cloister, the destruction of unity" (2 Celano 182)?

In this context it is even easier, perhaps, to understand St. Clare's words in her Rule, added to Francis' Regula Bullata after "detraction and

murmuring," namely, "from discord and division." "Let them be solicitous to preserve intact among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection" (Ch.X).

Celano also discloses to us the deep-rooted reason for Francis' solicitude for unity among his friars: "It was his constant desire and vigilant solicitude to maintain the bond of unity among his sons in such a way that those who were drawn by the same Spirit and generated by the same Father, would live in harmony in the bosom of one single Mother. He wished them to be founded on greater ones and lesser ones, so that the learned ones would be bound to the simple ones with fraternal affection and the religious, even those among them who were at a distance, would feel united by the cement of love (2 Celano 191)."

In Celano's context, this unity seems to be the fruit or inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, the Minister General of the Order, who without distinction of persons rests equally on the learned and the simple (cfr. 2 Celano 193). It should not be forgotten here that the Saint, before dying, constituted Mary, Mother of Jesus our Brother, Lord of Majesty, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, as Advocate of the Order: "Under her wings he placed his sons, whom he was about to leave, so that they might find warmth and protection there until the end" (2 Celano 198).

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study we give a first general conclusion which is: the words of the Prologue to the Rule of St. Clare have a vital and central importance. In fact, the Form of Life of the poor Sisters is composed of two principal parts: the life in holy unity and the life in most high poverty. This life in holy unity is echoed in the very Rule of Clare and in her Testament.

The same is revealed in the writings of Francis to the poor Sisters (the Form of Life, the Last Will and the Audite, poverelle). There seems to be a close tie between the Testament of Clare and the Legend of Perugia compared with the Audite, poverelle, whose deep meaning is clearly seen.

From the writings of Francis, even besides those to the poor Sisters, there emerges a depth expressly "trinitarian," which forms the basis of the life in fraternal holy unity. In the biographies, particularly those of Celano, one discovers the primary importance given from the beginning to the life in fraternal unity against every danger of division. Gossip is pointed out as a special danger in this regard. Because of this danger of division, Francis and Clare have recourse to Holy Mother Church, to protect and save forever the life of holy unity and highest poverty.

To specify still more concretely:

- a) The trinitarian life, shared by the poor Sisters (and by the friars and penitents), as daughters and handmaids of the Father, spouses of the Holy Spirit and mothers of Christ, in union with Mary most holy, seems to be the fundamental inspiration of the Form of Life of the poor Sisters.
- b) To this "vital" base is infused the holy unity of mutual charity, the bond of evangelical perfection, fruit-gift of trinitarian unity in which we share with the Spirit of the Lord.
- c) The right place of holy unity in the Form of Life is found, therefore, after the trinitarian life and before the life of most holy poverty, as indicated in the Prologue of the Rule of Clare. Because filial-fraternal-maternal unity, founded on the most Holy Trinity is lived among us in the Church-Mother (Mary), it is realized in persons disappropriated of self-love, who live with "nothing of their own," in poverty-humility, following the footsteps of Christ poor-humble and crucified, and of his Mother.

Not having anything of our own (love) we can always live better in communitarian unity of spirit and of charity, totally liberated and free for the Love which is God, Father and Son in the Holy Spirit.

"In the name of the most high Trinity and of the holy Unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." \Box

* * *

Francis and Clare

Meditation on a picture

They met one another and stayed devoted to one another throughout their lives: Francis and Clare. Was it a spiritual friendship?

They each hold in their right hand God's gift of Himself: the Bible and Eucharistic Body of Christ — both signs of the love of God. Francis found in the Bible the definitive direction for his life. He held the Bible not only in his hand, but in his heart as well. In this way he became a living Gospel. He became an image of the Lord for us. We too can receive and accept the Word of God as Francis did.

Clare carries to the centre of the picture what was the centre of her life. In that sign of bread, surrounded by the symbol of love, the colour red, she meets the friend she loved, for whom she lived and suffered. She directs the viewer to Him: "It is He for whom I live." For whom do we live?

Many signs, some important, others less so, stand beside the path along which we journey through life. Does Clare point the way for us? While Clare offers us in the monstrance the sign of the Eucharist, Francis, with his raised left hand presents to us the sign of the wounds of Christ. The red colour of his wounded hand shows us what the crucified Lord in His love has suffered for us.

The outstretched hand of the Saint looks like a monstrance which presents the events of Calvary. And is the gesture of this hand not at the same time also an expression and sign of care and reverence for the Lord present in the Holy Eucharist? Several times Francis urges such reverence in his writings even from us today.

This is a wonderful encounter: monstrance and wounded hand; the Last Supper and Calvary; signs of the sacrificial meal and the sacrifice of the cross.

Which hand offers me more for my meditation and reflection: the right hand of St. Clare or the left hand of St. Francis? It is the same Lord who speaks to me in these signs: the High Priest of Holy Thursday and the High Priest of Good Friday.

What the hands wish to express is the symbolic language of the heart, the expression of the whole person: not only his hand but the whole body of Francis shows his reverence for the Eucharistic Lord; all the wounds of Christ in his body speak of his loving union with the crucified Lord. In the same way Clare's hand not only points to the Lord, but it expresses her total dedication to Him whom she loves so much. Francis and Clare show us Jesus Christ each one in their own way, and in that way they become themselves signs on our common way to the Lord.

We see them wearing the Franciscan habit — almost the same for each — the sign of their Franciscan life. With common ideals, they walked their own separate ways; but the friar minor and the poor sister knew one another united in the Lord, who was for each of them, all and everything. This closeness should be a sign of the orders today as well.

While in the different parts of the picture we are struck by the colour red — the Bible, the monstrance, and Francis' wounds — the brightest red is found in their halos. What does this mean? In heaven they no longer see God's love in signs and symbols as they did in this world. In eternal life with the Lord they experience Him in a direct way, radiant and bring-

ing them joy. Francis tried to describe God in his Praises with the following words:

"You are holy, Lord...
You are strong, You are great.
You are the most high...
You are good, all good,
the highest good...
You are inner peace; you are joy.
You are our hope and joy...
You are all our riches.
You are beauty, You are meekness.
You are our charity.
You are all our sweetness.
You are our eternal life:
Great and wonderful Lord,
God almighty, Merciful Savior."

Lord, I must admit: to live for you is beyond everything. Francis and Clare give us the example. \Box

This splendid meditation on a painting of Francis and Clare comes as a brochure of three panels in white double-sided kromekote printed on a glossy index-type of stock. The painting, in color, occupies the middle panel while the meditation appears on the two side panels as well as on the rear. Measuring approximately 4" by 6" it is obtainable from:

Correspondence Course on Franciscan Missionary Charism National Office P.O. Box 14355, Nairobi, KENYA

The cost is \$.25 plus postage.



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