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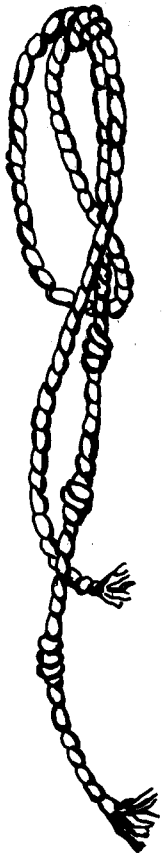
The CORD

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 the People
ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God
ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father
Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare
Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
LaudHor: Praises at all the Hours
OffPass: Office of the Passion
OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
RegB: Rule of 1223
RegNB: Rule of 1221
RegEr: Rule for Hermits
SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
Test: Testament of St. Francis
UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
[1]I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

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

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).
AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

Clare and Chrism

BISHOP JEROME HANUS, O.S.B.

Our attention, during this celebration of the Chrism Mass, is focused on two important aspects of our Catholic faith: the sacred oils of the liturgy and the service of priests. Throughout the entire history of the Church, Christians have gathered to receive these gifts and to thank God for them. We stand in that tradition of saints and sinners.

This year, 1994, is the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of those saints - Clare of Assisi. We all know that Saint Clare was a great woman of the Church, deeply devoted to Christ, famous for her dedication to evangelical poverty in the radical spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi.

But I think it is instructive to ask Saint Clare what she thought about the sacramental oils and about the priesthood. What would Clare say to us, if she had the chance to speak about the Chrism Mass?

First, in regard to the oils which we use in the sacraments: Saint Clare was baptized in the cathedral church of Assisi, in the same font where Francis had been baptized. Here she was marked with the oil of catechumens and anointed with the sacred chrism. Her mother insisted that she be named Clare as a prophetic gesture. Her life was to become a clear light (*clara luce*) whose rays would illumine the whole world. She was to be a lamp whose oil was always burning, waiting for the Coming of Christ.

A few years later, at her confirmation, she was again anointed with chrism and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Remembering her character as a youth, one biographer commented that "filled with the unction of grace, she dispensed abroad the sweet fragrance of virtue, as a vessel of sweet-smelling spices, even when closed, fills the air with its aroma" (Marianus Fiege, *Princess of Poverty,* Long Prairie, MN: The Neumann Press, 1991, p. 35).

The Most Reverend Jerome Hanus, OSB is bishop of the diocese of Saint Cloud, Minnesota. He delivered this homily at the Chrism Mass in the Cathedral of Saint Mary on March 24, 1994.

One of the great miracles of her life involved oil. The monastery's supply of this essential material was totally depleted. When informed of this, "Clare took the vessel used for oil, and with great humility, first washed it with her own hands, and then placed it outside (the monastery door. . . . Then) through the all-powerful intervention of God, and the prayers of St. Clare, the vessel was found filled with-oil" (p. 47) and the community's supply of oil was assured.

Finally, in her last illness, she longed to receive the sacramental anointing. By this time, she had become quite famous. Priests and bishops were competing for the honor to anoint her. But her close friend, Rinaldo dei Signori, performed the service. He was a cardinal! She received the viaticum from the Minister Provincial. Then even the Pope came to visit her on her deathbed. She marveled about how Christ came to her first in the sacraments and the in His Vicar (p. 73-74). What a consolation that was to her. But even in this solemn moment, when she noticed that Friar Juniper was present in the room, she asked him to do his act. He was the renowned Jester of the Lord, and he "filled Clare with new joy" (p. 75). All of these delightful details show us how much Clare treasured the sacred oils used by the Church in its liturgy.

The other focus of our celebration this evening is the priesthood. Looking at the life of Saint Clare, what attitude did she have toward the gift and vocation of the ordained priesthood?

Two incidents are revealing. At one period in her life, something was bothering the relation between the Franciscan priests and the Poor Clare sisters. We don't know the details. But the Pope (Gregory IX) decided to take action. He strictly forbade any ordained friar to visit the monastery of Clare and to preach there, without his explicit permission. At the same time he said that the lay brothers could continue visiting the sisters, in order to help them harvest their crops, take care of the livestock, and repair their buildings.

Saint Clare reacted, her biographer says, "with great bitterness" (p. 65). In her dismay, she immediately discharged all the lay brothers, complaining that the Pope had taken away those who furnished the community with the bread of the soul. She wondered whether the Pope thought that physical nourishment and material concerns were necessary, while the ministry of priests could be reduced, restricted, and nearly eliminated. If she couldn't get the Word of God proclaimed by the priest friars, she didn't want the manual labor offered by the lay friars.

Needless to say, the Pope backpeddled in a hurry. He didn't want to be blamed for the starvation (material or spiritual) of a convent of nuns! The biographer writes that he immediately revoked the prohibition and left the matter in the hands of the Franciscans" (p. 65). Smart man!

Clare knew that the spiritual life cannot be sustained or enhanced if people do not hear God's Word preached effectively. She valued highly the ministry of the ordained, whether they were teaching or celebrating the Eucharist or going forth on mission to convert the non-Christian peoples of the world. A church without priests was inconceivable to her.

A second incident from her life reveals even more powerfully and poignantly the appreciation Saint Clare had for the service that clergy provide in the Church - whether that be priestly ministry or preaching by deacons. It was a dream that Clare had one day. She was climbing the ladder of ascent into heaven. At the top of the ladder stood Francis who as we know was most likely a deacon. "When (Clare) reached St. Francis, the saint bared his breast and said to Lady Clare: Come, take and drink. . . . After she did so, what she tasted was so sweet and delightful she could in no way describe it" (*Process* 3, 29).

The image is powerful. Clergy are to nourish the faithful with the rich food which comes from God, the spiritual nourishment contained in God's truth and grace. Priests, deacons, and bishops are to mediate God's Word in such a way that it gives life and strength to the faithful. God's truth must become the fiber and warmth, the blood and energy of every believer.

The image which pictures the relationship between clergy and faithful is an unusual and challenging one. "To suck at the breast is everyone's primitive experience. In her vision, Clare relives, with Francis, that same primitive experience of total rapport and affectivity. . . . The relationship between mother and child is an intense relationship of exchange between one who gives and one who receives" (Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi,* Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993, p. 146).

The essential features of this relationship, Clare believed, should characterize the pastoral service of the ordained. Priests have a most sacred responsibility. They must satisfy the hunger of the new-born with spiritual milk (cf. 1 Peter 2:2) until the faithful grow into the fullness of the mature Christ. Their magisterial function, however, must be performed in a sensitive, caring, maternal fashion.

It is because they have such a vocation, that priests are anointed with sacred chrism at their ordination. Through the imposition of hands, through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, they are empowered to continue the mission of Christ. They are "sent to bring the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners" (*Lk* 4:18f).

We thank them for their dedicated, caring service. And with Saint Clare, through this liturgy, we thank God for the special gifts we have received - the holy oils of our sacraments, and the holy priests serving in this local Church.

Clare: Mirror of Humanism

MOTHER MARY FRANCIS, P.C.C.

Into that space and down that path which opened out of the high Middle Ages into the burgeoning Renaissance came two figures unlikely by worldly standards to become notable influences in the humanism just then beginning to gather its savants and its disciples into a new philosophy centered upon man. The young Assisian minstrel turned troubadour of God and the girl of aristocratic earthly plenteousness turned princess of poverty were to shine out first in Assisi and later throughout the world as entirely God-centered. Francis and Clare the saints of Assisi which became and remains world-famous simply because of their having lived there, might seem hardly to qualify as humanists. Yet, that is precisely what they were in the profoundest sense.

The newly-reawakened fascination with the ancient Greeks' accent on beauty, truth, and goodness burst like a meteor upon the society of St. Francis' and St. Clare's time. It burgeoned into a whole fresh galaxy of works of art, of music, of poetry. Men grew heady with the wine of their own achievements. And with continuing acceleration, men and women placed themselves at the center of creation. Thus falsely positioned, the glittering and intoxicating productions of mind and spirit which proliferated in the school of humanism cast their own shadow upon the very beauty they created, drew a web of unclarity over truth, and laid a threat to the goodness which can flourish only in God. All that was best in humanism as philosophy and attitude and life-principle became endangered, often enough fatally so, by wrong positioning. The greatness of man threatened to supplant the greatness of God. And the immediate result was the dwindling and drooping of mortal greatness after its re-rooting in un-Deific soil.

To St. Francis and St. Clare, it was given as a readily historically-recognizable reality to be outstanding Christian humanists. Whether as poet, his own

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Mother Mary Francis is no stranger to readers of The CORD. In addition to being Abbess of the Poor Clare Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalup in Roswell, New Mexico, Mother Mary Francis has been influential in establishing new monasteries throughout the United States and Europe. She is also a prolific writer on the spirituality of the Second Order.

eyes blind, singing a canticle to Brother Sun; whether as musician with his own kind of Stradivarius; whether as dramatist on Christmas Eve at Greccio, Francis sang, played, dramatized the centrality of God. And then, after him, came St. Clare. As today come after Clare the 18,000 strong who are called to be Clarian humanists. Centered on God, cloistered in God, they reach out to gather the whole world, as she did, into an easy embrace with arms of concern rendered universal by reason of their "clinging to the poor Christ" (2 *LAg*) as the center of their lives and the only meaning of all men's lives. Clinging to Christ, one necessarily embraces all mankind as meaning and destiny lie in Him alone.

Clare's God-centered humanism unfolds in every chapter of her brief *Rule*. Without ever abdicating her own authority, she consults her Sisters in all matters of consequence whether it be concerning the reception of new members, debts to be incurred, officials to be elected, or whatever. She presents unequivocal reminders to the Sisters that from a vow of obedience there follows a strict obligation to obey. You made a promise to the Lord, declares Clare. Observe its consequences. Then, from this clearly-articulated God-centered truth, she passes with ease to an equally lofty directive, humanistic in the deepest and realest sense: the abbess is to have "a close friendship" (*Rule*, X) with all the Sisters whom she is called and elected to serve as handmaid.

It is only in their God-centering that humanistic values can avail for growth and for happiness and be of any real human avail. Clare highly accents humanity, sometimes describing clearly its more inglorious expressions as when she deals with serious offenders against the form of religious Profession who remain adamant in the face of the abbess' admonitions (*Rule*, X), only to add almost airily that one ought not to worry about such things, as that would hinder love (*Rule*, X). This woman whose eighth centenary of birth we celebrate this year had a marvelously clear view of humanity's exalted possibilities and likely lapses because she was centered in Christ. One assuredly gets a better perspective on the human condition when one has put on the mind of Christ which is exactly what Clare did. Neither carried away by the exaltation of humanity nor disillusioned by the inadequacy of humanism as such, she became a clear mirror of true humanism, its possibilities made viable in Christ-centering, where its inadequacies are supplied by his saving grace and its failures redeemed in his Blood.

Thus, showing herself a clear mirror of true humanism, St. Clare was undeniably a high lyricist and a firm realist. She less speaks than sings as she invites her Sisters to that glorious climax of humanism which is to be lifted above one's own human possibilities.

> This is that height of most high poverty who has appointed you, my most dear Sisters, heiresses and queens of the kingdom of heaven. . . . Let her who leads you into the land of the living be your portion. Totally clinging to her, most beloved Sisters, desire for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother to have nothing else forever under heaven (*Rule*, VIII).

For Clare, it was, as with St. Francis, always a matter of all or nothing. There existed for them no middle road of compromise. Half-heartedness was not for them whose human hearts are revealed to us as most truly human because of being identified with Christ. "The Christ of Umbria!" said the folk of Assisi in describing St. Francis. "Footprint of the Mother of God" has become the description of St. Clare.

What is required of our human condition that it be exalted in Christ was less set down by Clare than sung out by her.

> With how much solicitude and with how much enthusiasm of mind and body ought we to keep the commandments of God and of our Father Francis, so that, with the Lord helping, we may give back to Him the talent multiplied! (*Testament of St. Clare*)

Clare's God-centered humanism unfolds in every chapter of her brief Rule.

One has to exercise care, she cautions, if one is to exceed one's own possibilities by the power of Christ. What He gave, Clare declares, must gather interest. What it all reduces to and ascends toward she sets down in a simple, all-demanding poetic reach beyond what secular humanism ambitions: "Always be lovers of God and of your souls and of all your Sisters. . ." (*Blessing of St. Clare*).

> Clare's poetic flights are always undergirded with her firm realism. For our humanity to be exalted, it must be aware of all that demeans it. In the way of life she gave to her Sisters, she makes clear demands and issues solemn warnings.
>
> The Sisters shall not claim anything as their own (*Rule*, VIII).
>
> If, the enemy goading her, any Sister shall have sinned mortally against the form of our profession . . . (*Rule*, IX).

Well aware of the enemy's goading, she lifts a warning finger of love:

> Let us be on our guard, then, that if we have set out along the way of the Lord, we in no way at all turn away from it at any time because of our own fault or negligence or ignorance (*Testament of St. Clare*).

Because St. Clare's thoughts indeed dwelt in heaven, she had by that very reason a much clearer understanding of the human situation.

> I direct and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that the Sisters beware of all pride, vain glory, envy, covetousness, care and solicitude about this world, detraction and complaining, dissension and division (*Rule*, X).

Showing herself a clear mirror of true humanism, St. Clare was undeniably a high lyricist and a firm realist. She less speaks than sings as she invites her Sisters to that glorious climax of humanism which is to be lifted above one's own human possibilities.

For Clare, well-practised in humanism and beyond many humanists, knew that unity remains vulnerable. She took precautions. She was unembarrassed by the nomenclature of fallen humanity's proclivities.

It is St. Clare, eight hundred years old and entirely new, who is offered to young persons of our century as indeed a mirror of true humanism which inevitably draws youthful hearts but is too often merely secular and, therefore, inadequate to their ideals. As it was with another great lyricist, Francis Thompson, so it is frequently enough for young people increasingly disenchanted with worldly values and false promises: a reaching out for "linked fantasies in whose blossomy twist / I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist."[1] And it will always be for today's youth, as it was for Thompson, a discovery that fantasies, even though telling of beauty, even though offering a certain allegory of truth, even while laying claim to being essential goodness, are inadequate: that the "blossomy twists" in which humanists delighted always prove "failing, — cords of all too weak account / for earth with heavy griefs so overplussed."[2]

It is the joy which emanates from the happy lifelong effort to allow Christ to lift humanity above itself into the fullness of his plan which attracts young

women today no less than in St. Clare's day to "lay down their shining hair" at the feet of Christ and follow a medieval saint as modern as today or even as tomorrow.

> This light burned only, sent no fissured atom Shivering down some miles of naked space. This light just flickered, faithful, till the final Sputter of yearning burst her drift of flesh.[3]

Man-centered humanism made a large mark in centuried history. But it gave us too often a blurred beauty, a less than fullness of truth, an uncertain goodness. The man-at-the-center driving philosophy of our century fails perhaps more notably in its offering a distortion of beauty, a confusion of truth, a self-seeking which is a caricature of real goodness with just enough philanthropy added to attempt a presentation of reality actually and painfully non-present. With Clare, it was not so.

> She was a small light burning. All the arc lamps
> Of noise are shattered, all the spotlights gone
> Away to weep in their unhappy ruins,
> But the Clare-candle whispers on and on.
>
> Where was the famous dictum, where the flashing
> Deed, the policy taken, history turned?
> Who would remember Clare wrapped in her silence,
> Once the bare feet were cold, the eyelids closed?
>
> Who will remember Clare, after the gentle
> Hands are still, the kept heart only stone?[4]

The readily-verifiable fact is that battalions of young women are remembering even unto our generation and this on every continent. Ours is again a strongly humanistic age too often understood as the positioning of men and women at the center of the world, the terrestrial world and the world of the person. It is an era notable for its attempt to exalt human possibilities as sufficient of themselves to achieve the fulfillment which actually lies in Christ alone.

Clare never hesitated to state clearly that the true fulfillment of one's humanity is not a matter of easy self-glorification and self-gratification but of struggle and suffering. "The path is difficult and the gate through which one passes and enters into life is narrow" (*Testament of St. Clare*). And yet, in the end, it is that narrow gate of which Jesus himself spoke (*Mt* 7:13) and that difficult path which He Himself took throughout his human life which opens on to true human fulfillment. One sees evidences of this clearly enough in our own day where amid the frequently frenetic pursuit of self-satisfaction which actually cannot long even superficially satisfy nor ever radically satisfy at all there is a growing fascination with the joy of those who have sought and found human fulfillment in Christ placed at the center of their lives.

Where an authentic Christ-centered humanism flourishes, though in human beings with notable signs of belonging to a fallen race, young girls of today will still find their way to the cloister as will also those asking prayers as they seek a meaning to life's perplexities and sufferings. This is the paradoxically humanistic cry of St. Clare's cloistered daughters today: "God is enough. God is enough, and everything else is not enough," their cloistered lives cry out to the world. And this because they find everything in Him.

Let me share with you some personal experiences. When we came to Roswell, New Mexico, in the United States of America, we made the foundation in this small Southwestern town for the spiritually intelligent reason given by the Archbishop that it was (at that time) "the least Catholic town in his historic but poor archdiocese." No one had ever heard of Roswell. "I wonder," mused the founding abbess, looking over her meager community of eight nuns, "if we'll ever grow to be twenty here." She answered her own speculative musing: "I guess not." But now there are thirty-five, and this after four foundations and one restoration. Over the vast expanses of the United States of America, St. Clare's enclosed life of prayer and happy penance reaches in a silent beckoning to girls from New York to California, from New Jersey to Idaho, from Michigan to Texas. The spiritual fascination of Clare's ever-youthful and vibrant ideal reaches into our universities and our business offices, into budding careers in nursing and teaching, into a beckoning literary world and onto the concert stage. They come to

---

It is St. Clare, eight hundred years old and entirely new, who is offered to young persons of our century as indeed a mirror of true humanism.

> And who shall witness bear the very tender
> Paradox, the irony of God:
> That the Clare-light has filled the earth and heavens
> Past flame and torch and glare and beam. . .
>
> Those thousands strong who say no word, and lightly
> Spurn the strange earth with their unslippered feet,
> Who fling their gleaming hair away like laughter
> And turn their faces toward a nameless spring.
>
> And sing! because one small light flickered, faithful.
> So the Clare-candle lights the weary world.[5]

That faithful flickering of the Clare-candle is newly set this centennial year in Africa, in Tahiti, in India; its persistent burning continued in more and more European lands. One of the newest is that in the Netherlands, sent forth from Roswell in 1990.

We felt singularly unprepared to go forth and abroad in 1990, our youngest foundation in the United States being only three and a half years old and ourselves feeling outstandingly disequipped to venture into a country indeed rich in Catholic tradition but with some of its Catholic membership presently suffering in striking measure a notable theological confusion and evidencing an increasingly-pervasive withdrawal from loyalty to the Supreme Pontiff and allegiance to the Church's magisterium. Nor did we know the language. Nor were we versed, much less steeped, in Holland's rich culture. These were some of the natural considerations that proposed as a verdict: impossible. Only there was the eye of God upon us. Only there was the voice of our Mother St. Clare in our hearts. So, forth and abroad we went, half a dozen strong, strong in dedication to the ideal of St. Clare if painfully aware of weakness in all areas other! We wondered, though we definitely did not worry, about how we would be received. Never could we have dreamed what the reception was to be.

"God is enough. God is enough, and everything else is not enough."

It required something of a managerial feat to get the six foundresses plus myself and the abbess of our young foundation in Belleville, Illinois, of the United States of America, plus our earthly effects organized and enplaned for the land from which, more than a century earlier, the Poor Clares had first come to plant the ideal of St. Clare in the New World. We were swept into the skies, and a great hush fell upon us. We were going to Holland, six of us to remain there. We were responding to the "*Venite*" of her whose voice still resonates in the hearts of her worldwide-flung daughters eight centuries after her first appearance on earth.

The hush on our hearts lifted into a chorus of gratitude as we deplaned and saw so many, many waving hands. A whole little company of "official welcomers" was there to greet us and drive us to the Poor Clare Monastery in Eindhoven where we were to remain for three days preparing for the dedication of our own little mini-monastery in Elshout. Never could we have dreamed what the special "Commission" set up to assist us, in company with our dear

Bishop, the mayor, other notables, and the townsfolk had prepared for us. Our arms were heaped with flowers as we left the monastery of Eindhoven to be driven to the outskirts of Elshout. Nothing at all had been divulged of what was to be. So, when we were invited to leave the little procession of cars, we were amazed to hear a band playing. And then the medieval pageantry began to unfold.

Round-eyed with wonder, we were taken to two horse-drawn carts, four of us enthroned in each. Everyone else walked. There were two bands playing. Guildsmen of the "*Onze Lieve Vrouwe Schuts*" (the Guild of Our Lady of Protection -- the title expresses Our Lady's guardianship) in their colorful uniforms marched beside us, before us, behind us. There was a children's corps holding raised batons and wearing pert plumed caps; they were to make a guard of honor for us as we entered the town hall holding the batons in a processional arch then each pair of batons smartly lifted as we passed through the archway. There were bridesmen leading the horses. And there was joy everywhere. The townspeople lined the streets, smiling and waving, some weeping. And, once in the town, there were welcomes and more welcomes from the Bishop, the Vicar, the Commission, the mayor, priests, religious, laity.

It was from Holland, I told the people, that our U.S.A. founding Mothers had come in 1877. Having been driven out of their native Germany by the *Kulturkampf*, the foundresses-for-America had been given sanctuary in Holland. Now, their Poor Clare daughters of a century and score of years later were coming in response to the call of Clare to repay Holland's favor and seek its hospitality again, this time in a new foundation. I told them that I was entrusting to them six measures of my most precious treasure, spiritual daughters. And I saw that they understood. The American ambassador to Holland had sent a letter of regret that he, too, could not have been with us on this day of dedication.

The band played for us again. The welcoming speeches continued. The smiles went on making their own arches of love over us. And then we were solemnly marched from the town hall to our own little monastery, *Clarissenklooster Maria Moeder van de Kerk*. But it was not yet done! On the lawns before our monastery, two of the guildsmen performed their historic ancient flourishing of the colors. Enthralled, bemused, we watched the two costumed men furl and unfurl the huge flags, leap over the flags, dance under the flags, thrust the flags "up in the heavens," bring the flags down to the earth (but never once touching the ground), while the drum roll went on and on, and the King and Queen of the Guild, costumed and crowned, stood with us to watch. Especially moving was the flower-lined entrance walk to our monastery with its boxes of vari-colored blooms set on high white pedestals. And at the front sidewalk and again at the entrance door were erected large, large flags: the

Dutch flag and the American flag. And in our hearts, the flag of St. Clare, once more unfurled. And that night, the midnight rising for Matins began in Elshout, we trust never to end.

When Mother Therese and I flew back to our youngest U.S.A. daughter house in Belleville, we were resuscitated from our exhaustion by the vision we saw. It was now 12:15 a.m. and two of the Sisters were waiting up to receive us. They had lighted up the chapel, so that we came toward that splendid "vision in the night." The golden-lit spread of windows revealed the cloister/chapel open grille before us. Throned upon that gold-green expanse was the near life-sized Crucifix, our Lord's arms spread wide in redemptive love and welcome for His weary pilgrims returned to this home from the new home abroad. We were swept into welcoming embraces. And then, for the other Belleville Sisters whom we would greet the next morning, there sounded the rising bell for the midnight Office. The rhythm of our Poor Clare life went on. It goes on. And now it goes on anew in Holland.

So there stand the donated giant-sized Dutch/English dictionaries next to the Bible, and our hearts go marveling back through the centuries to when a young Italian girl, Clare Offreduccio, went to build a dwelling place for God in an old building outside Assisi and then comes forward again to young Americans busy at building Him another dwelling place in Holland. I know that they, no less than St. Clare, have heard "that strange imperious call" in their hearts: "Leave your people and your father's house and go into the land that I will show you."

Mirror of humanism indeed is St. Clare, eight centuries old and every year her ideal newly-born on each of the cluster of continents. And this because she mirrors Christ. Her achievements for God and Holy Church are perpetuated in each century and on every continent because they spring out of the Heart of Christ. Her her rich humanism endures because it is centered and rooted in God. Humanists in the mode she was and in the expression she is, her eighteen thousand daughters gather around her in this eighth centennial year to

> Fling their gleaming hair away like laughter
> Turning their faces toward a nameless spring,
> To sing! because one small light flickered, faithful;
> And the Clare-candle lights the weary world![6]

Endnotes

[1] Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven" (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, Ltd.)

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., "Candle in Umbria," in *Where Caius Is* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1955), 72.

[4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.*

The Dossal of Saint Clare

PACELLI MILLANE, O.S.C.

The Power of Images

The Fourteenth Century was a time when religious images abounded in the churches: walls covered with frescoes, carved pulpits, free-standing sculpture, painted panels, huge vaulted frescoed ceilings over the main altar with a large crucifix suspended from the ceiling. Margaret Miles quotes a thirteenth text, John of Genoa's Catholicon, which had summarized three reasons for the use of images:

> First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the saints may be the more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.[1]

Images have the power to engage the emotions, and, thus, artistic representation is able to affect the will. At the very minimum, images instruct, but they are capable of drawing the beholder into ecstatic states of contemplation. Fourteenth Century worshippers were trained by the multiplication of images surrounding them to enter more deeply into the experience and to erase the distance between their own moment of existence and the event or figures of Scripture. They were encouraged to identify their own lives with past and future sacred events depicted in frescoes and to enter into the emotional intensity of religious paintings.

Images potentially can draw the worshipper into a participation in the qualities and way of life formulated by the image. Traditionally, religious affections have been formulated and trained by images. Religious training directed to the intellect through language does not engage the emotions as effectively. Through images Christians are moved to imitate and assimilate the strength, the courage, and the love they contemplate in religious art.

Contemplation lifts the person out of the familiar world and into the living presence of the spiritual world. This begins with a physical vision, and gradu-

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Sister Pacelli, a Poor Clare from Valleyfield, Quebec, has recently completed her masters degree in Franciscan Studies at the Franciscan Institute. Her writings bespeak both her devotion and study, her prayer and reflection, her long spiritual and intellectual journey with Clare.

ally becomes a more concentrated seeing that eventually overcomes the conceptual barrier that exists between the visible and the spiritual world. Both intellect and affections need to be engaged in worship. Religion needs images to accomplish its task of formation by attraction; without artistic images religion is qualitatively impoverished. Secular culture very effectively captures our attention through the daily use of images in advertising, especially through television. Television bombards the viewer with images. Unfortunately, we often we don't realize how much it informs and forms our imagination. We need be more selective about what we take into our consciousness through our sense of sight. We are more accustomed or aware of the power of the word, whether read or spoken, than of the image or symbol.

Margaret Miles offers some interesting reflections on the use of images. We can approach images for much more than simple information; she says

> The critical use of images involves understanding the particular message received from the painting; ultimately it means being able to articulate the relevance of this message to my present affective life.
>
> One must not move too rapidly, however, from the use of an image to the critical use of that image. Articulation of the message received from the image must come as the spontaneous result of living with the image. One must look at the same image again and again until it has attracted, has drawn to the surface, all the associations, memories, and longings that originally gave the image its sense of importance for me. Then the personal message of the image can be articulated. Only in this way will critical understanding of the image not dilute its original visual/affective power.[2]

Importance of Images in the Medieval Times

Our study of Clare and Francis need be aware of the power and role of image within their culture. As Wayne Simsic points out:

> We are familiar with verbal texts as the dominant force shaping imagination and belief, but in the early medieval period images were primary and defined a person's vision of self and the world. Images were readily available to the entire community through sculpture, stained glass, carved pulpits, painted panels, and frescoes.[3]

Simsic explains that the medieval worshipper did not passively look at images but "participated" in them. Illiterate people enjoyed a visual sophistication that came from seeing many frescoes which helped them to understand the symbols. They were able to translate them into their own lives. This simple viewing as an entry into the mystery differs in approach from that of the analytical mind. One of the very powerful moments in the life of St. Francis occurred as he gazed on the image of Jesus on the crucifix in the church of Saint Damian.

Historiated Dossals

Historiated dossals of the saints, which are from the period of the 13th and first half of the 14th century, have not been given a lot of attention. They were usually commissioned of anonymous local artists for churches in provincial towns around 1215-1350. These panels emerged at the same time as the monastic reforms of the early 13th century, but did not receive the same kind of attention as the mosaics, the fresco cycles, or the large painted Crucifixes.[4]

In a visual manner, the historiated dossal narrates the life of the saint. It was thus another mode of popularizing the life of the saint. These dossals were not conceived in the abstract but followed a recognized model to commemorate the vocation, sanctity, miracles and obsequies of the individual saint. There were specific categories of holiness. Men were listed as Patriarchs and Prophets; Apostles, Evangelists and Disciples; martyrs; Pontiffs, Confessors and Doctors; and Monks and Hermits. Women appeared only as Virgins and Widows.[5] The classification of a saint was fixed at the time of canonization.

The canonizations of both Francis and Clare took place two years after their deaths. The papacy authorized a legend to be written and encouraged the construction of large churches in their honor. We are fortunate to have the formal canonization process for Clare which offers documented evidence of her life as well as her holiness.[6] Historiated dossals also present the life of the saint.

A feature common to the dossals is that they present a full-length portrait of the saint surrounded with panels which depict the life of the saint. The number of panels differs, as do the scenes chosen from the saint's life. There are ten historiated dossals for St. Francis, which far outnumber those of other saints. The Bardi dossal of Francis has twenty panels, and the one at Pescia has only six. The dossal of Clare, which has eight panels, is most similar to another dossal of Francis that is attributed to the shop of Guido da Siena in the Pinacotecca Nazionale of Siena.[7] At times the sources for a particular dossal can be determined. For example, the dossal of St. Francis at Pescia by Bonaventure Berlinghieri follows Celano's *First Life*; the dossal in the Bardi Chapel at Santa Croce in Florence uses Celano's *Second Life* as its source. These dossals are dated 1235 and around 1250 respectively.[8] Unfortuanately, while these dossals of Francis have been studied, not as much attention has been given to the dossal of Clare.

Dossal of St. Clare

The historiated dossal of St. Clare is a painting on wood with the central figure of St. Clare surrounded by eight episodes taken from her life. It hangs high on the wall in the right transept of the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi. It

is easy to visit the Basilica and miss this lovely painting because of its placement. This dossal, according to Wood, was the first thirteenth century panel dedicated to a female monastic and the earliest surviving painting and narrative cycle devoted to St. Clare.[9] It has been attributed to several different painters,

sometimes to Cimabue and more recently to the Saint Clare Master, or the "Maestro di s. Chiara." Wood has dated this anonymous panel of Clare in the 1280's because of the slightly damaged inscription discovered during the restoration of the dossal: "*facte fuerunt iste sub anno dni 128- / indic xi tepore dni Martini papae quarti.*"[10] The inscription reads that it was done in the year of the Lord, 128-. The last numeral was lost, but it is thought to be 1283.

Fausta Casolini, who viewed the half-restored dossal in November of 1954, also dates the dossal from 1283. She describes the removal of an opaque film which sometime in the seventeenth century was stretched over the original painting.[11] This second painting, over the original dossal, presented a different image of Clare. Clare was depicted with an older and somewhat stern, tired facial expression. Her mantle was closed at the neck; her large, bare feet were showing; her hands did not have the long slender youthful fingers of the earlier dossal. The reproduction of this second painting can still be found in books. There is no indication of why the image of Clare was changed or by whom. Clearly, one needs to ask if the change was unintended, determined by the artist's talents, or a deliberate choice to present a different image of Saint Clare.

In 1954 the original countenance of Clare was restored in the central figure. Clare is shown again with a youthful face, standing very tall. The inscription is simply "Sancta Clarae." In this original version, Clare is robed in a simple gray tunic of the Order, gathered with a cincture, which falls gracefully to her feet with surplus length so as to cover them except for two toes. Her mantle is of pale olive green with a violet tone, very different from that worn today. It is similar to a large shawl that is double the length of the person. Her veil seems to create one unit with her poor mantle. Clare holds in her hand a gold and red cross similar to a processional cross. Her other hand points towards it.

It is interesting to note the use of color in the side panels. Clare is dressed in red in the first and second panel; Agnes is also dressed in red. The relative, who tries to take Clare from San Paolo, is dressed in red; whereas, Uncle Monaldo is not. The Pope, who is present for the burial ceremonies has red garments. The headwear of the Sisters at San Paolo is more sophisticated than that of Clare and her Sisters. Perhaps the poverty of the different groups was an important issue to be stressed?

All of the panels have an over-arching appearance of the city, and yet most of these scenes would have taken place outside of the city. Two angels hover above focused toward Clare. The side panels are the artist's reproduction from the Legend of St. Clare, the Process of Canonization, and/or another source.[12]

The narrative scenes begin with Clare's conversion in the lower left panel and continue up the left side of the dossal. Under four of the panels there are still discernible words or letters. From the incomplete words or phrases, Casolini suggests the following text:

> The first panel (The Bishop Presents the Blessed Palm to Clare): in order that the Palm might be given to herself, Clare is delaying to come forward . . . as he saw this . . . with . . . Palms . . . it was observed
>
> The second panel (Arrival of Clare at the Portiuncula):
> No words are discernible here except a possible **ecce.**
>
> The third panel (Clothing):
> . . . **because . . . Francis . . . he/she accompanies . . . and he shears . . . and . . . she is taught . . . to lofty law.**
>
> The fourth panel (Clare Clings to the Altar):
> No words are discernible.
>
> The fifth panel (Episode of St. Agnes in two moments)
> Only two words are discernible:
> **Clar** in the first line; **qua** in the second line.
>
> The sixth panel (The Miracle of the Multiplication of the Bread):
> **Clare . . . following the miracle . . . she herself feeds the Sisters from the middle of the bread . . . (cor Mon) . . . it gives way to**
>
> The seventh panel (The Procession of the Virgin):
> Only words discernible are **Sata Maria.**
>
> The eighth panel (The Pope Incenses the Dead Saint):
> **truly she was . . . to be venerated . . . because the pope does it . . .**[13]

Six of the panels focus on the rites of passage of Clare, four of these portray the movement or passage from secular life to religious life and two are expressive of her final passage from temporal life to eternal life. One panel focuses on the rite of passage of Agnes and Clare's intervention in the family struggle. And one panel focuses on a miracle of daily life when the Sisters did not have any bread.

These scenes from Clare's life include Francis. It is interesting to note that Clare is almost entirely excluded from any of the dossals or frescoes of Francis. In the panels of the dossal from the School of Giotto, Clare appears when the dead body of St. Francis is brought to San Damiano for Clare and her Sisters to touch and see. On the other hand, the artist of the Clare dossal does not hesitate to portray Francis in three of the panels with Clare. It is Francis, who cuts the hair of Agnes, while Agnes places her folded hands in those of Clare, while fixing her gaze in Clare's eyes in delight of blessed hope.[14] The role of both Francis and Clare seem to be important as Agnes commits her life to God; the dossal reflects Clare's insistence that it was Francis who was her inspiration and guide.

Image Versus Text

Some details of the scenes portrayed in the panels of the dossal differ from the corresponding textual accounts found in the various writings or sources. We can note some of the differences; however, there is not sufficient evidence at this moment of history to make clear inferences from these differences.

Scene I shows Clare standing before the Bishop with a group of young women immediately behind her as though Clare had gone forth to meet the Bishop. The Legend says that "while the others were going to receive their palms, Clare remained immobile in her place out of shyness, and the Bishop came to her and placed a palm in her hands."

Many questions have been raised regarding this event of the palms. Was the Bishop in accord with the plan of Clare? Did Clare already have the plan worked out, or was this Palm Sunday ceremony the moment of her decision? Clare does not leave any indication of how or when she made the decision other than to tell us that it was Francis who influenced her. Perhaps these are small differences, but due to the fact that there is so little information about Clare, they become important.

Scene II shows Clare with six women behind her as she comes to St. Mary of the Angels to meet Francis and the brothers. The Legend relates that "she embarked upon her long desert flight with a virtuous companion." Was the possible departure of Clare known to other women in her family or to friends? Were they in agreement with it? Surely the fact that Agnes would so soon thereafter follow Clare indicates their similar desires; and according to the *Legend of St. Clare*, Clare was praying for the conversion of Agnes.[15] Sister Cristiana, the thirteenth witness in the *Process of Canonization*, will say that she was in the house of Clare on the night of her departure. Possibly the scene portrays many companions accompanying Clare so as not to cause scandal since this young noble woman was breaking all the customs of her society in taking flight from her family home and even more radically in joining this group which was clearly beneath her social status.

It is interesting to note that in five of the eight panels Clare is portrayed with a halo representing her sanctity, and in the others she is not. Especially interesting is that it is missing in the San Paolo incident and before her investiture at St. Mary of the Angels.

The Dossal's Presentation of Clare's Conversion

The dossal does not present the entire life story of St. Clare; however it does image Clare's journey of conversion. Clare's conversion is truly bound

up with Francis, a message made clear from the historiated dossal in Santa Chiara as well as from the sources. But the images within the dossal move to suggest a process in Clare's conversion.

The first four scenes from the panels are about the time of Clare's conversion, and the fifth one is of the conversion of her sister, Agnes. Obviously Clare's conversion is not an internal struggle of turning from a life of sin or even from a mediocre life. The sources reveal that she was already living a holy life with deep concern for the poor. She had chosen not to marry and was already guiding some of the women who later followed her into San Damiano.

What was Clare's conversion? Even though Clare had gone to St. Mary of the Angels to be received by Francis and the brothers, she immediately goes to San Paolo. Why did she not flee to San Damiano immediately? Did she hope to become part of an established Order?

From the violence of her family, one can speculate that they were duly disturbed by this formal declaration of rejection of marriage. No doubt, the fact that she had crossed the established order of Assisi to associate herself with the movement of Francis even more inflamed the rage and anger. In doing this she was giving up all social status that had been hers as part of the nobility to which she belonged, although her family was not of high rank. It was their duty to uphold the honor of the family.

Clare's manner of conversion cannot easily be described because she was already holy; she does not evidence dramatic changes in her interior spiritual life. Further, few of her writings have come down to us; there are precious few expressions of her inner choices. Yet the dossal does present Clare's journey of conversion. The first four panels of the Clare dossal suggest a conversion process which involves four moments:

1. The initial decision to change the direction of her life is symbolized in the Palm Sunday ceremony.

2. The action of moving forth in a change of direction is symbolized by the flight to St. Mary of the Angels.

3. The actual verbalizing for oneself and others the new direction that is being taken is symbolized by Clare kneeling before Francis, who cuts her hair and gives her the robe of the penitent.

4. The inevitable struggle, either within or from without, that comes for anyone who makes such a deliberate choice of conversion is symbolized by the struggle with Clare's family at San Paolo.

The panel also presents an image of conversion in scene VII. The image of the death of Clare expresses the encounter between the created world as we know it and the eternal world. The portrayal of her two Sisters peering through the little window, watching as the entourage of Virgins comes to meet Clare, brings the two worlds together. Clare's magnificent red and gold robe, the crowns on the heads of the other virgins who are meeting her, all this implies a festive journey into fuller life and a complete separation from the temporal life. We are not asked to walk the ultimate journey of death at this moment of our lives, but conversion always involves a radical turning from what has been to something new.

Thus, the dossal offers us images of conversion. The first four panels image the process of conversion. The scene of Clare's death images the essence of conversion: Clare is called forth into new life. The dossal offers us images which potentially can lead us into conversion, images which can transform our imagination as we are called forth into new life.

Endnotes

[1] Margaret R. Miles. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 66.

[2] Miles, 137.

[3] Wayne Simsic, "The importance of the Images of Francis of Assisi for Worship." The CORD 39 (December 1989): 329.

[4] For more detailed study of historiated dossals see the article of Jeryldene Wood, "Perceptions of Holiness in Thirteenth-Century Italian Painting: Clare of Assisi," *Art History* 14 (September 1991): 301-327.

[5] Wood, 310.

[6] For the account of the Legend of St. Clare, see Regis Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988), 187-240. Other Legends of Clare, which are little known at this time, are the *Legenda Versificata* and *Tres Legendae Minores Sanctae Clarae Assisiensis (Saec. XIII)*, in *AFH* 7 (1914): 39-54.

[7] Wood, 324.

[8] Wood, 306. See also Vincent Moleta, *From St. Francis to Giotto: The Influence of St. Francis on Early Italian Art and Literature* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

[9] Wood, 301.

[10] Wood, 324, footnote 22.

[11] Fausta Casolini, "Le sorprese della restaurata tavola del 1283," (Roma, 17 novembre 1955): 31-35. Unfortunately, the specific publication was not identified within the article which was furnished by Sister Chiara Anastastia, O.S.C. of the Protomonastery in Assisi.

[12] Casolini suggests that perhaps there was another source which was the inspiration for this dossal or that there is another codex that is yet to be discovered (p. 34).

[13] Casolini, 34.

[14] Casolini, 35.

[15] Armstrong, 213.

St. Clare and Obedience: A Look at Chapter One of the *Rule*

MICHAEL J. HIGGINS, T.O.R.

I. The Place of Obedience in the Rule

> . . . that out of love of the God Who was placed poor in the crib, lived poor in the world, and remained naked on the cross . . . observe the holy poverty that we have promised God and our most blessed father St. Francis (Test C:45, 47).

There are several themes that come to mind when one studies the life and writings of St. Clare. Foremost among these are her all consuming Franciscan vision of vocation and its articulation in a life of prayer, poverty, and loving perseverance. Underlying all of these aspects of the saint is a love for God that was manifested in a open and obedient spirit. In order to more fully appreciate the richness of Clare's vision, and her embrace of poverty, it is important to understand how she lived and preached obedience.

The various levels of Clare's understanding of obedience can be clearly seen in her *Rule*, a type of verbal tapestry which displays the vibrancy of Clare's spirituality. As Clare diligently embroidered cloth with needle and thread, so in her *Rule* she verbally embroidered what she considered to be the essence of the Franciscan way of life.

On either side of the verbal embroidery of the *Rule,* Clare carefully stitched the borders with strong words of challenge to obedience (chapters I and XII). These form the background or foundation which holds together and supports chapter VI, the magnificent heart of the *Rule*. Even though the text was not divided into 12 chapters until after the time of Clare[1], this balance can be clearly seen in the number of verses which are stitched together in a tight pattern. As Margaret Carney points out, Clare placed the most important chapters in the physical center of her text.

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The material corresponding to the first five chapters account for two hundred and ninety-six lines of the text. The material corresponding to Chapters VI-VIII accounts for one hundred and sixty-four lines. The material corresponding to Chapters IX-XII accounts for two hundred and sixteen lines. There is, therefore, a remarkable proportionality of length and density of the text to the inner theological and spiritual logic it expresses.[2]

This observation of chapters VI-VIII as the heart of the *Rule* is born out with even a cursory examination of the substance of these chapters.

The Rule of St. Clare				
Chapter 1	**II-V**	**VI-VIII**	**IX-XI**	**XII**
Obedience to God, to the Church, to Francis, and to the successors of Francis and Clare	II New Members III Divine Office; Fasting; Sacraments IV Election of a new Abbess; Office of Discreets V Silence and the Grill	VI The Promises to St. Francis and the Embrace of Poverty VII Mode of Working VIII Poverty; Alms; the Sick	IX Discipline for Sin; Externs X Admonition and Correction XI Care of the Cloister	Connection and friendship with the Friar Minors; Cardinal Protector; Obedience to the Church.

Those elements that Clare saw as essential to her embrace of the Franciscan life (promises made to St. Francis, the embrace of poverty, the place of prayer in daily life and work, the fact that the sisters are to acquire nothing of their own, alms, and the treatment of the sick sisters) are present in chapters VI, VII, and VIII — the physical center or heart of the *Rule*. These are surrounded on either side by chapters that deal with daily life and discipline in the monastery.

The whole tapestry is held together by the first and last chapters, both of which deal with obedience or submission to God, to the example and teaching of St. Francis, and to the authority of the Church.

II. Chapter I and Obedience

It is with this tapestry of Clare before our eyes that we now turn to an investigation of Chapter I of the Rule and Clare's understanding of obedience.

Chapter one in Clare's Rule reads as follows[3]:

Latin	*English*
1. Forma vitae Ordinis Sororum Pauperum quam beatus Franciscus instituir, haec est:	The form of the life of the Order of the Poor Sisters that Blessed Francis established is this:
2. **Domini nostri Iesu Christi sanctum evangelium observare, vivendo in obedientia, sine proprio et in castitate.**	to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.
3. Clara, indigna ancilla Christi et plantula beatissimi patris Francisci, **promittit obedientiam et reverentiam domino papae** Innocentio **et successoribus eius canonice intrantibus et ecclesiae romanae.**	Clare, the unworthy servant of Christ and the little plant of the most blessed Francis, promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his canonically elected successors, and to the Roman Church.
4. Et sicut in principio conversionis suae una cum sororibus suis promisit obedientiam beato Francisco, ita eamdem promittit inviolabiliter servare successoribus suis.	And, just as at the beginning of her conversion, together with her sisters she promised obedience to the Blessed Francis, so now she promises his successors to observe the same obedience inviolably.
5. **Et aliae** sorores **teneantur** semper **successoribus** beati francisci et sorori clarae et aliis abbatissis canonice electis ei succendentibus **obedire**.	And the other sisters shall always be obliged to obey the successors of Blessed Francis and Sister Clare and the other canonically elected Abbesses who succeed her.

The focus of obedience for Clare, as shown in these five verses of Chapter I can be summed up in the following areas. Obedience, according to the saint, is to be given to:

1. God
2. The Church
3. St. Francis
4. The successors of St. Francis
5. Clare and future abbesses

It is important to note that, as pointed out above, these themes (apart from a direct reference to future abbesses) are echoed in Chapter XII, the other border of Clare's tapestry, and are also clearly present in her *Testament*.

1. Obedience to God

Throughout Clare's writings, in an attempt to describe her relationship with God, she refers to herself as "an unworthy servant of Jesus Christ" (*1 LAg:* 2), "most lowly and unworthy handmaid of Christ" (*3 LAg:* 2), "unworthy servant of Christ" (*4 LAg:* 2; *RCl:* I:3), "a lowly servant of Jesus Christ" (*LEr* 1), and "servant of Christ" (*TestC:* 37; *BCl:* 6). These titles highlight the Christocentric nature of Clare's spirituality and the fact that she saw herself as a maidservant of Christ - that is, as one who listens to and follows the dictates of Jesus, the master.

The obedience to Christ was, for Clare, the ultimate obedience. She understood this relationship, or disposition of heart and mind, to be the measure against which the whole of her life and vocation must conform. Whatever was in accord with this embrace of Christ as master and her own response to the prompting and inspiration of God was to be joyfully accepted. Anything that was not in accord with the divine will was to be resisted with tenacity.

The obedience to Christ was, for Clare, the ultimate obedience.

Examples of this are abundant in the life of Clare. In many respects she was very obstinate and headstrong. She did not easily conform to the expectations of the society of her day or to the expectations of her family. The dramatic scenes of the young girl slipping out of her house in the middle of the night to meet Francis at the Portiuncula, the selling of her inheritance, the confrontation with her uncle at San Paolo as she held on to the altar and claimed sanctuary, and her support and prayers when Agnes faced a similar confrontation, all confirm the tenacious nature of Clare's personality.

This steadfastness also continued in the realm of Clare's relationship with the Church. She refused for many years simply to accept the various rules that were given to her by different popes and finally wrote one herself. She fought for the privilege of poverty, the connection with the Friars Minor, and finally for the approval of a rule which would safeguard these essential elements of her Franciscan vocation. She even went so far as to threaten a hunger strike if the friars were allowed not to serve the sisters at San Damiano.

Present in all these examples of Clare's stubbornness is her deep conviction that she was following the will of God. This disposition of humble listening to God's will and an overpowering desire to follow it, regardless of the personal cost, is a constant and unifying element in all these events. Clare's conviction that God was leading her to embrace a specific way of life provided a horizon against which all her decisions were made. Thus it seems clear that Clare embraced poverty in order to imitate Christ, to serve him with the totality of all she was in response to her strong conviction that this was God's will for her.

2. Obedience to the Church

Even with Clare's confrontation with the Church hierarchy, she constantly wanted to live a life in submission to the Church and asked her sisters to do likewise. This exercise of obedience to the Church, according to Clare, was a challenge to persevere in vocation and establishes the framework within which the following of Christ is be lived. She states in Chapter XII:

> Let the sisters be strictly bound to always have that Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who has been designated by the Lord Pope for the Friars Minor, as Governor, Protector, and Corrector, that always submissive and subject at the feet of that holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic faith, we may observe the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and the Holy Gospel we have firmly promised (vv. 12-13).

Even while she fought for various ecclesiastical permissions for her way of life, most notably the privilege of poverty and the approval of her *Rule*, she wanted to a be part of, and obedient to, the pope and the Church. On one hand she recognized the importance of canonical approval to protect her vocation and those of her sisters. On the other, she recognized, as Francis had before her, that through its sacraments (most notably the Eucharist) the Church brought to the world the very presence of Christ.

Clare in no way wanted to live outside the authority of the pope, mediated through the Cardinal Protector. In this she displays her own deep conviction that God's will is mediated through the Church. It also shows her to be in accord with the consistent teaching and example of St. Francis.

Even though Clare's *Rule* shows a tremendous dependence on the writings and rules of St. Francis, she did keep significant aspects of the *Rule* of Hugolino and the *Rule* of Innocent IV. As Carney points out:

> While it is clear that the actual verbal dependence upon the *Rule of St. Benedict* in the text is minor in comparison with her complete dependence upon Francis' *Rule* texts, it is equally clear that Clare had used Benedictine - or more generically, monastic - customs and wisdom in the governance of her community.[4]

Among these customs include: the acceptance of older candidates (II:5 from *Reg.Ug.*); the place of perpetual fasting for the sisters and its dispensation of the young, sick, and extern sisters (III:8,10 from *Reg.Inn.*); the authority of the abbess (IV:8-9 from *Reg.Ug.*); communal discernment (IV:18 from *Reg.Inn.*); the place and discipline of the grill (V:9-15 with adaptation from *Reg.Inn.*); personal property and the abbess' duty to the sick (VIII:7-9, 12 from *Reg.Inn.*); the importance and discipline of the enclosure (IX:1-3, 5-7, 9 from *Reg.Ug.*); the requirements for the visitator and the place of outside workers in the enclosure (XII:2-3 from *Reg.Inn.*). Overall, it is apparent that Clare accepted the general form of religious life that was contained in the rules given to her by Hugolino and Innocent. She wove these threads of Church tradition and canonical structure into the overall tapestry of her vision of Franciscan life.

Thus, as she had done when she accepted the title of abbess from Francis and then changed it through her own special touch, Clare produced a creative synthesis of the traditional aspects of religious life for enclosed women through the spirit of her own Franciscan insights. In this process, it seems that Clare tried very hard to be obedient to the Church and what the pope expected of her. At the same time she persistently clung to the essentials her Franciscan vision. Clare states in her *Testament* before her final blessing:

> Let us be very careful, therefore, that, if we have set out on the path of the Lord, we do not at any time turn away from it through our own fault or negligence or ignorance, nor that we offend so great a Lord and His Virgin Mother, and our blessed father Francis, the Church Triumphant and even the Church Militant. For it is written: *"Those who turn away from your commands are cursed"* (*TestC*: 74-76).

Here again we can see the influence of St. Clare's commitment to the will of God, and her own definite ideas about how this commitment should be lived out.

The exercise of obedience to the Church, according to Clare, was a challenge to persevere in vocation and establishes the framework within which the following of Christ is be lived.

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3. Obedience to St. Francis

Clare refers to Francis as "our most blessed father" (*TestC:* 5, 24, 30, 36, 48, 50, 52, 58, 77, 79; *RCl* I:3, VI:1), "true lover and imitator" of Christ (*TestC:* 5), "servant [of God]" (*TestC:* 7), "our blessed father" (*TestC:* 7, 40, 42, 48, 75; *BCl.* 7), "holy" (*TestC:* 16, 32), "blessed" (*TestC:* 27, 58; *RCl* I:1, 4,5, VI:10, XII:7), "holy father" (*TestC:* 37), and "our holy father" (*TestC:* 38, 47), "our pillar of strength and, after God, our one consolation and support" (*TestC:* 38), "blessed father" (*RCl* VI:2). It's interesting to note that 20 times in 18 different verses in her *Testament* (or in 23% of the 79 verses) Clare refers to Francis as "father." This is by far her favorite title for the person whom she regards as the instigator and guide of her vocation and the model of gospel life for herself and her sisters. In calling Francis "father," Clare was invoking the idea that Francis was the founding force behind her vocation and that of her sisters. She was also alluding to the fact that they were heirs of the form of life that Francis had embraced and had handed on to the sisters.

Clare also refers to herself as "the little plant of the holy father (Francis)" (*TestC:* 37) and "little plant of the most blessed father" (*RCl* I:3, *BCl* 6). Again,

these titles highlight the saint's recognition that the direction for her vocation was intimately tied to the instigation and guiding force of St. Francis. She reminds her sisters in her *Testament*, "the Lord gave us our most blessed father Francis as a founder, planter, and helper in the service of Christ and in those things we have promised to God and to our blessed father..." (v. 48).

Obedience to the example and teaching of Francis was, apparently for Clare, tantamount to obedience to God. She saw in Francis a person who gave up everything, including his own will, to embrace the fullness of the gospel message. Following Francis meant for her and her sisters to follow him in the way of evangelical self denial and conformity to Christ.

In her *Rule*, which relies heavily on the text of Francis' rules, Clare is adamant in protecting the vision and way of life of St. Francis. While she incorporated sections from previous rules, as has been mentioned above, she in no way wanted to deviate from the form of life that had been given to her by Francis. Both in his writings and in his example of a radical conformity to the teachings and person of Christ, Francis became a special guide for Clare in her own embrace of God's call. Clare saw in Francis the fulfillment of what she deeply felt to be her own vocation. Thus, it was in obedience to Francis and his ideals that Clare lived and understood the Gospel form of life.

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4. Obedience to the Successors of St. Francis

It can be safely assumed that St. Clare saw something of supreme value in her way of life and the life of the sisters at San Damiano. This became for Clare, as it were, her inheritance. Before leaving her family home, she had sold her family inheritance and accepted a way of life that traded physical riches for spiritual riches. Now Clare wanted to pass this treasure on to the sisters with whom she shared life and to those who would embrace this way of life in the future.

> Time and time again we willingly bound ourselves to our Lady, most holy Poverty, that after my death, the sisters, those present and those to come, would never turn away from her (*TestC:* 39).

Her *Rule* and *Testament* show her preoccupation in safeguarding this valuable gift. It is clear that the discipline that would be the strongest safeguard for protecting and transmitting this precious inheritance was obedience: to God, to Francis and his successors, and to future abbesses.

In this regard it is significant to note that three times in the *Rule* Clare speaks of her connection with the Friars Minor in no uncertain terms. Chapter I states that the sisters "shall always be obliged to obey the successors of Blessed Francis..." (v. 5); Chapter VI, in words attributed to Francis and addressed to Clare and the sisters, reads, "I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers to always have that same loving care and solicitude for you as [I have] for them" (v. 4); finally, Chapter XII, accepting the promise of Francis, states "Let our Visitator be taken from the Order of the Friars Minor according to the will and command of our Cardinal...in support of our poverty, as we have always mercifully had from the aforesaid Order of Friars Minor, in light of the love of God and our blessed Francis" (vv. 1, 6-7). Clare clearly saw herself and her sisters as part of the total Franciscan family and insisted on preserving that familial connection. Since this was a canonically approved rule, Clare was also attempting to hold Francis' successors to his promise that they would always provide "loving care and solicitude" for the sisters.

As part of Clare's obedience to Francis, which continues with his successors, Clare also challenged the sisters to persevere in their commitments and never separate themselves from the *Rule* or their embrace of holy poverty. She states in her *Testament*

> But how blessed are those to whom it is has been given to walk that way and to persevere till the end. Let us be very careful, therefore, that, if we have set out on the path of the Lord, we do not at any time turn away from it through our own fault or negligence or ignorance (*TestC:* 73-74).

Her own perseverance led Clare to refuse the counsel and guidance of popes and, it can be assumed, those who tried to pressure her to accept a way of life that was not in accord with her promises to God and to Francis.[5] "So I commend and leave my sisters, both those present and those to come, to the successors of our blessed Father Francis and to the entire Order" (*TestC:* 50).

5. Obedience to Clare and to her own successors

Much of what has been said in the previous section can also be said about Clare's insistence on obedience to the abbess. Again, it was her way of protecting the wonderful gift of vocation and the promises made to God and Francis to live a poor life.

Obedience was understood to be a foundational feature of religious life. Clare states that after a period of probation, during which time the form of life is to be explained to a new sister, "let her be received into obedience, promising to observe perpetually our life and form of poverty" (*RCl* II:13). In this Clare follows Francis (cf. *Rnb* II:9; *Rb* II:11) and is in accord with the tradition of religious life - obedience was understood to be the necessary foundation for a life in community. It was also recognized as an essential disposition for the embrace of the form of life of the institute.

Having said this, it is also important to recognize that Clare approached the exercise of authority with an attitude of service and love. Clare's view of her own position was as a "useless servant of the enclosed Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano" (*1 LAg:* 2), "the useless and unworthy servant of the Poor Ladies" (*2 LAg:* 2), "servant of the Poor Ladies" (*3 LAg:* 2), "useless handmaid of His [Christ's] handmaids in the monastery of San Damiano" (*4 LAg:* 2), "handmaid of the Poor Sisters - although unworthy" (*TestC:* 37), "mother and servant" (*TestC:* 79), and "a sister and mother...although unworthy" (*BCl* 6). These titles demonstrate Clare's concern to maintain a stance of humble service in her relationship with her sisters. Although she does not repeat this self description in the *Rule* the way she describes the role of abbess certainly is in harmony with a servant mentality for the abbess. It is with this concept of authority that Clare challenges those sisters who would follow her as abbess. They were to have no special privileges in the monastery, instead they were required to live the same kind of life that the other sisters lived "especially in whatever pertains to the church, the dormitory, refectory, infirmary, and clothing" (*RCl* IV:13). The abbess was thus to lead more by example and holy life than by authoritarian rule.

> She should strive as well to preside over the others more by her virtues and holy behavior than by her office, so that, moved by her example, the sisters may obey her more out of love than out of fear (*RCl* IV:9).[6]

The sisters in turn were required to obey the abbess because, as a result of their embrace of holy poverty, they have given up their own wills (*RCl* X:2; *TestC*: 67; *RegB* X:2). (In this Clare follows Francis' teaching that one's own will was an appropriation of what rightly belongs of God and a self exaltation that leads to sin [cf. *Adm* 2].) The sisters are therefore "firmly bound to obey their Abbess in all the things they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not against their soul and our profession" (RCl X:3; cf. also *RegB* X:3). The binding force of these promises was such that even if one of the sisters were to leave the monastery, for whatever reason, she was still bound to live a life of poverty.

> If the sisters spoken of ever leave and go elsewhere, let them be bound, after my death, wherever they may be, to observe that same form of poverty that we have promised God and our most blessed father Francis (*TestC:* 52).

The abbess in her turn is challenged to remember that she is a servant to the sisters. "For this is the way it should be: the Abbess should be the servant of all the sisters" (*RCl* X:5). Her main role, it seems, is to maintain the life of poverty that Clare sees as essential to the life at San Damiano and to encourage the other sisters to do the same. As she states in her Testament, "so, too, the others who will succeed me in office should be always bound to observe holy poverty with the help of God and have it observed by the other sisters" (*TestC*: 41).

III. Summary

Clare was obedient in her life and insisted on the same kind of obedience from her followers. Essentially Clare's understanding and embrace of obedience can be divided into the following sections (listed in order of importance):

I. Obedience to God through an embrace of the example of Christ and in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

II. Obedience to Francis; most especially through a vibrant response to his example and an embrace of his teachings.

III. Obedience to the Church; to the pope, his successors and to the successors of Francis, and to her own successors.

Ultimately Clare's obedience was to the will of God and to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This divine will was, according to Clare, most clearly expressed in the life of Christ, who emptied himself and embraced poverty in obedience to his Father's will. Francis, in his life, embraced the fullness of this divine example and through his life and teachings showed others how to do the same. This became the framework against which Clare measured her life and the life of her community. Whatever was in conformity to the will of God, as expressed in the life of Christ and the example of Francis, was to be embraced with joy of heart and great tenacity. Anything that was not in accord with this will was to be resisted with as much tenacity. Finally, the form of life can only be preserved by obedience to the Church and to the successors of Francis and Clare. By this ongoing obedience, St. Clare was establishing a way in which the tremendous gift of her form of life, her vocation, would be preserved and enjoyed by the sisters she lived with and those she knew would be sent by God.

Ultimately Clare's obedience was to the will of God and to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Given Clare's desire to protect the gift of her way of life for future generations, it seems a real tragedy that the *Rule*, as she wrote it, was used only for a short period of time. In 1263 Pope Urban IV approved a new *Rule* for the second order, here officially entitled "Poor Clares," which allowed community ownership of property, perpetual revenues, and a special vow of enclosure.[7]

Endnotes

[1] The introduction of *Chiara d'Assisi: Scritti* by Marie-France Becker, et.al. (Vicenzia: Edizioni LIEF, 1986) states that, "The division in twelve chapters is nevertheless very old and was created as a compliment to the *Regula bullata* of the Friars Minor. As with the Rule of the Friars Minor, this division corresponds more to a preoccupation for symbolism (twelve Apostles, twelve tribes of Israel) than to the content of the text or to a division according to clear topics. The division of the *Rule* in twelve chapters is not original..." (p. 26).

Also Margaret Carney in her book, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life* (Quincy, Illinois: Franciscan Press, 1993) points out that "Modern texts divide the *Rule* into twelve chapters, although this division did not exist in the original Bull. This structure was added later in an obvious attempt to make the text conform in appearance to that of the *Later Rule* (*RegB*). But this chapter arrangement results in an artificial grouping of elements and can mislead the reader into perceiving relationship where none originally existed" (p. 82-83).

[2] *Ibid.*, p.92. Carney also states that: "Knowing Clare's constant application to her spinning and needle-work, it is not difficult to imagine that the labor of redacting the Rule was not a separate and unrelated exercise, but the application in language of her skill in spinning and embroidering" (p. 93).

[3] The Latin text is taken from *Chiara d'Assisi: Scritti* by Marie-France Becker, et.al. (Vicenzia: Edizioni LIEF, 1986) pp. 134, 136. The text in **bold letters** shows Clare's dependence on the writings of St. Francis. It must be noted that this chapter is based in great part on Chapter I of the *Regula bullata*. The English text is taken from *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, Introduction, translation and notes by Regis Armstrong (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 62.

[4] Carney, 74-75. Carney points out as well that Clare's attempts to apply "Franciscan norms to a stable community living in a fixed dwelling" were, unfortunately, all but ignored by the Friar Minors in their own evolving experiences of fixed community life.

[5] Clare goes so far as to exhort Agnes of Prague to never abandon her way of life and that the counsel of Bro. Elias should be closely followed so that she "may walk more securely in the way of the commands of the Lord..." (*2 LAg:* 15). And further, in what may be a reference to *Cum relicta saeculi*, a Bull from Gregory IX which allowed Agnes to accept revenues and possessions, Clare adds "If anyone would tell you something else or suggest something that would hinder your perfection or seem contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, do not follow his counsel" (*2 LAg:* 17).

[6] This is repeated in the *Testament*. "I also beg that [sister] who will be in an office of the sisters to strive to exceed the others more by her virtues and holy life than by her office, so that, stimulated by her example, they obey her not so much because of her office as because of love. Let her also be discerning and attentive to her sisters as a good mother is to her daughters..." (*TestC:* 61-63).

[7] Cf. William Short, *The Franciscans*, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Press, 1989), 24.

The Depths of the Mirror

Clare, within your heart
A flame-star blazed
this inner sun rose gold
from out a night
of suffering in union with your spouse
who out of love for us
was struck and scourged
and died amidst the anguish of the cross.

Transpierced with Him
Your union was complete.
His fire leapt, suffused
consumed your being
until you were a living torch
of praise.

Sister Marion-Celeste, P.C.C.